

# God Breathes New Life in You!

Ezekiel 37:1-14

## **SOME THINGS *SHOULD NOT BE DONE***

Years ago there was a popular singer named Jim Croce. One of his hit songs had these lyrics: “You don’t stand on Superman’s cape. You don’t spit into the wind. ... And you don’t mess around with Jim.” He was saying that there are some things that would not be smart for you to do. You *CAN* do them. But you *SHOULDN’T* do them if you know what’s good for you.

Sometimes we get confused about what things we *SHOULDN’T* do, and what things we *CAN’T* do.

In the movie “*The Wizard of Oz*,” Dorothy didn’t believe she could defeat the Wicked Witch of the West. She thought she was done-for for sure. But when her friend the Scarecrow who was set on fire by the Wicked Witch, without thinking she grabbed a bucket of water sitting near by. She threw the water on the Scarecrow to put out the fire, accidentally splashed the Wicked Witch, and ended up melting her. She didn’t think she could ever defeat the witch. But she was wrong. Ding-dong the witch is dead.

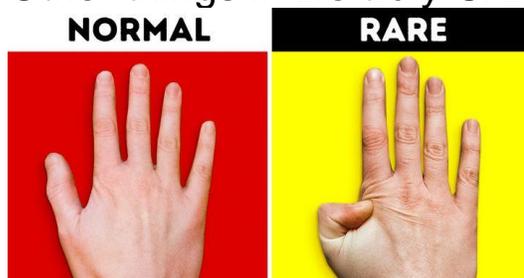
And who can forget the scene from Star Wars? Darth Vader tells his son, Luke Skywalker, to give up. “Resistance is futile.” But Luke didn’t believe it. He fought on. Even though the odds were against him, he saved the Federation. Resistance wasn’t futile. He could save the day!

Adults sometimes spend years in therapy because they’ve been told for many years that they can’t. They’ve been told that they are too dumb, too lazy, too ugly, and they came to believe it. They learned helplessness. They gave up on pursuing their dreams because they internalized the belief that they can’t.

Other people mean well. They try to help folks who are downtrodden. But by doing everything for those people in need, they teach them that they are incapable of improving their lives. The people who are helped instead learn helplessness – that they can’t.

## **SOMETHINGS EXPERIENCE TELLS US *CANNOT BE DONE***

Other things in life truly CANNOT be done.



For example, most people cannot cross their thumb like the picture on the right. A few people CAN. Go ahead. Try it. Most of us, no matter how hard we try, we'll never be able to do that.

Even if you are one of the few people who can cross their thumb in front of their hand, none of us – NO ONE – can

**Please everyone.**

**Get yesterday back.**

**Control what someone else thinks.**

**Change where you came from.** These things just cannot be done.

And every experience we've ever had would lead us to a pretty rock solid conclusion that no one can **Live forever**. Death waits for everyone, and it's a one way street -- nobody comes back. From the first shovel full of fresh graveyard dirt, to the one-sided conversations with a tombstone for years to come, it's a fool's errand to try to talk down death. It just doesn't work!

This brings us to the prophet Ezekiel in our Old Testament lesson for today. God had called his prophet to do some strange things in the past, but we meet him today with an order from God to do something that is over the top strange: ***"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones...bones that were very dry."*** Strange, don't you think? The Lord brings his prophet to a valley strewn with bones. What Ezekiel saw before him was death – unvarnished, unmistakable, irreversible death. These weren't fresh corpses recently fallen in battle. No, these were sun bleached brittle old bones.

Standing ankle deep in a valley of dry, white bones, he is asked, ***“Son of man, can these bones live?”*** And of course, the answer should be, “Not a chance. No way!”

God was using this scene of dry bones to make a point. God was sending a message through Ezekiel standing in the middle of all that irreversible death.

You see, Ezekiel lived in a time when God had told the People of Israel what damage their sin would do, and they ignored every last warning from God. They wanted to live how they wanted to live without God telling them what to do. So they threw themselves into lust, and greed, and the pursuit of every immoral pleasure they could imagine. God responded to all their on-going turning from Him by being true to His Word, as He always is.

Their constant sin brought on unspeakable horrors. Jerusalem was overtaken and overrun. Family members were slaughtered before their very eyes. Their houses were torn down and burned. They were taken from their farms and their source of food to live, into captivity. Put in chains. Force marched 600 miles. And now, sitting in exile in Babylon, they heard the worst news of all – the temple had been destroyed. So, there they sat – with absolutely no hope. Abandoned and alone. Country destroyed. No hope of ever going back to the homeland.

The way they said it back then was this: “Our bones are dried up.” Bones dried up. It’s a pretty good picture of hopelessness if you think about it. Any possibility of life coming from dried up old bones? Any possibility of their lives being reborn with another chance? It looked way past that now! Experience told them, it CANNOT be done! It’s a fool’s errand to try to talk down death.

Have you ever felt that way? What’s the use?! Have you ever felt like those people long ago? When you look at your life and you come to the conclusion that nothing is as it should be? Maybe it’s your health that’s changed from prime to problem. Maybe it’s your chosen career that you thought would be more of a path to success and less of a brick wall.

Ever felt like there's no hope of changing things for the better when it's your family that's so messed up, that you're ashamed even to talk about it? Maybe your hope is gone, when the only happiness that remains in your marriage is what's captured in those pictures on the wall.

Ever felt that your loneliness is crippling that you don't feel like you've got a friend in the world? Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever looked at your life and come to the conclusion that nothing is as it should be?

Have you ever felt that way when you look at your relationship with God? My bones are dried up, when I look in the mirror and I find myself wishing that last night was just a bad dream.

My hope is gone, because I did it again – you know, the sin I promised I'd never come close to.

I'm cut off, because maybe, just maybe, this time I've out-sinned God's grace. After all, what would he ever want with me, this dead, dry bag of bones?

None of us deserves any kindness from God at all. None of us can earn any favors from Him – and certainly not forgiveness for all the sins of our past, or the hope of spending forever in heaven. The wages of sin is death. Our spirits are so dried up that we deserve death – forever death in hell. There's not a hope or a prayer of turning our stories around. Unless ...

### **SOMETHINGS CANNOT BE DONE ... Unless ...**

Your life story and mine is the story of death. The story of hopelessness. Can death be turned to life? Not a chance on our own. But that's not God's way of doing things...

Ezekiel was standing in the middle of this vivid picture of a hopeless situation. Dead bones everywhere. God asked him, ***"Son of man, can these bones live?"*** Of course the obvious answer is "No Way!" But Zeek didn't say that. Instead he responded, ***"O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."*** That's like saying, "No way I can change this hopeless mess! But God, You can do whatever You want. God, I've got no claims on You. I don't deserve anything from You. So, do with me as You wish."

## **WHEN IT'S HOPELESS TO TRY, ...**

What happens next to Ezekiel is where the story gets even weirder. God said to him: ***“Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!...I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin.’”***

Now, that’s strange, don’t you think? The Lord calls on his prophet to preach, ***Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!*** but there wasn’t an ear among them! That seemed like another absolutely hopeless cause. What’s the use?

Have you ever felt like your life -- and even your faith -- are about as useless as speaking to a valley full of dead bones? Well, good thing you’ve got a God who only creates from nothing!

## **NEVER GIVE UP ON GOD’S POWER AND LOVE!**

What happens next to Ezekiel is this very strange and amazing miracle. Ezekiel said, ***So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.***

Maybe you remember hearing the old song: ***“The foot bone’s connected to the ankle bone, ankle bone’s connected to the shin bone, the shin bone’s connected to the knee bone”*** – all the way up the line! What a miracle – from bones to bodies, beautiful and fully formed. But there was no breath in them. They were lifeless. They looked the part, but apart from God and the gift of his Holy Spirit working through his Word, they would remain lifeless.

That’s what happens when we search for solutions in ourselves instead of Scripture. Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, we’re cut off – but if I just apply the right principles, if I just take the right steps, if I only commit harder than I’ve ever committed before, then things will start looking up. But that only leaves you looking the part, but still lifeless. You’ll be left looking polished and put together on the outside, but dead on the inside.

There’s Only One person who can bring life from death. And that person is not you. That person is God. He will. He wants to!

***“This is what the Sovereign LORD says; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.”*** And what happened? Breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet. After sending his prophet Ezekiel to warn of doom, gloom, and destruction, the Lord proclaims a new message – a message of life. He would restore his people, and bring them back to their homeland. The life-giving Spirit of God came through the Word of God and created life where there was only death.

God asked Ezekiel, ***“Can these bones live?”*** As you today look at your own heart, you might be asking the same question. There’s no way this can happen on your own. But with God all things are possible. Doing the impossible – like creating life out of death is God’s specialty – that’s the nature of His grace and the incredible power of His promise to you!

We will never comprehend how the Word of God can give life, but God does! How many marriages have found new life by communicating to each other the forgiveness God has freely given them?

How many Christians face cancer, disease, or surgery – sure, they have a natural fear - but they also face down this death-inducing disease with confident determination trusting that God means it when he says ***“I will never leave you! I will never forsake you!”***

Not even death itself can shake you when you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

### **JESUS RUINS FUNERALS**

Have you ever noticed how, in the Bible, Jesus RUINS every funeral He attended?! That’s right! Just read through the 4 books of the Bible called Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and these eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life show Him RUINING every funeral He attends!

Jesus visits Jairus who is grieving the death of his little girl. What an awful thing for a parent to go through – burying their child. It was too late for that little girl...but then, Jesus showed up. “Little girl, Get up!” Jesus said. And the impossible happened – the dead girl came back to life!

Then one day Jesus and His band of followers stop for a funeral procession coming out of the town of Nain. A widow was walking behind the casket as they carried her son down the road toward the grave yard. Then Jesus, in complete disrespect for the solemnity of a funeral procession, stepped into the middle of the street. Blocked the road. Stopped the procession. Walked up to the casket. Put His hand on it, and with one sentence changed everything. “Young man, I say to you, get up!” And the impossible happened – the dead man came back to life.

Then Jesus came after his friend Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb four days. No hope of life there. It’s like a Valley of dry bones. Jesus promised the dead man’s sister, Martha, that He IS the Resurrection and the Life. Then, against all reason, Jesus ordered that the tomb be opened. But it’s going to stink, they said. Did Jesus let the stench of death have the last word? No! Author of Life called, “Lazarus, come out!” And the impossible happened – the dead man walks out of his tomb alive.

### **JESUS RUINS FUNERALS, AND EVERY HOPELESS SITUATION!**

Still today, God creates hope out of hopelessness and life out of death, through His Word by His Holy Spirit.

The valley of dry bones teaches us that there is no person too hard for God to save! The dry bones show us there is no place too hard for God to find you. And no problem is so hopeless and lifeless that Jesus can’t revive you!

There are so many people lost in despair and hopelessness, buried under the dry bones because they are in the business of *assuming* what God cannot do instead of believing what God **can do**. The Holy Spirit gifts us with a faith that depends totally upon God and begins to expect something great from God – because our God is **POWERFUL** and **LOVING!** He is the *God of the impossible*.

### **GOD BREATHES NEW LIFE!**

This is the message of Pentecost. Into a world enslaved to sin and death, Jesus brings life from death. Into a planet-earth-sized valley of dry bones, the Lord of the Church speaks His gospel promise even today.

When you are in a hopeless valley of dry bones, remember that Jesus, who was crucified, died, and buried, God has raised to life.

This Jesus has paid for your sin and defeated your death – giving you the sure hope of life forever in heaven and a reason to exist right now. Talk about a life-giving message!

The same live-giving Holy Spirit of God that accompanied Ezekiel is living and active today. He will always be there for you through every day of your life.

The Holy Spirit creates life out of death at an unimpressive font – with eighteen words and three splashes of water. And what happens?

The Holy Spirit works – connecting you to Christ's death and resurrection. Because He lives, you live.

Today, Confirmands as you receive Holy Communion for the first time, the Holy Spirit still creates life where there was only death through a wafer of bread and a sip of wine, as Jesus gives you His body and blood given and shed for you.

The Spirit gives life. What a powerful Pentecost promise! What a great promise to you on your Confirmation Day! Wherever you go in life, when all hope is lost, the power and love of God the Holy Spirit is there.

Confirmands, You'll face tough times ahead and you'll need this life-giving powerful Holy Spirit. He comes through His Word – the Bible, read, spoken, listened to, discussed in a youth group, applied to your life. He gives you life and hope through Communion. So don't cut this lifeline.

If you haven't yet, someday you'll be tempted to think like the Israelites of Ezekiel's time. Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone. When that day comes, remember Our hope isn't gone – instead our hope is a person, once dead and alive again, for you. Cut off? No Way! Listen to your Savior's promise that nothing can snatch you from His arms. This Pentecost Sunday, this Confirmation Sunday, and every day until Jesus returns, rejoice that the Holy Spirit gives life, and that He's given it even to you!

Amen.