

PENTECOST: THE BREATH CAME INTO THEM!!!

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Acts 2:1-4

When I was thinking of an introduction for this sermon. I was going to use something like this: Just imagine living in a foreign country that is not your home. You were forced to live there, because a foreign army attacked your nation and totally destroyed the capital city that you loved so much. As part of a policy that did not want rebellion and revolt to follow occupation; the foreign nation sends the crème de la crème of the nation into exile. This situation would have left one feeling very depressed and overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness. You probably could not see a future for yourself, and were wondering: Where is God in all of this uncertainty!

As I was thinking about this, I suddenly realized that you did not need to imagine the situation, because we are currently living in a very similar situation. The Covid 19 Coronavirus has invaded the whole world, and has exiled us all to our homes. We feel that our freedom has been violated and that everything we have loved has been destroyed by the uncertainty of the disease. Not only that, there are a number of people who have lost their jobs, or their businesses or sources of income. World economies, including the South African economy may be facing some very tough times ahead. They are talking about a world depression that will affect the whole world, if businesses and people are not allowed to operate as they did in the past. All of these sentiments leave one feeling very depressed and hopeless, wondering: where is God in all of this uncertainty?

Indeed, the Israelites that found themselves in Exile in Assyria cried out in Ezekiel 37:11, ***“11 Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’”*** Nonetheless, God the Father did not abandon His nation under foreign occupation and Exile forever, because at the right time He returned them to their nation, and He breathed new life into them. It reads in Ezekiel 37:9 to 10, ***“9 Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’ 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”***

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14) came to him after God had directed him to prophesy the rebirth of Israel in chapter 36. God announced, through the prophet, that Israel will be restored to her land in blessing under the leadership of “David, My servant [who] shall be king over them” (Ezekiel 37:24), clearly a reference to the future under Jesus Christ the Messiah, descendant of David (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7; Luke 1:31–33). As the author of the website [Got Questions](#) states: “However, this promise seemed impossible in light of Israel's present condition. She was “dead” as a nation, deprived of her land, her king, and her temple. She had been divided and dispersed for so long that unification and restoration seemed impossible. So, God gave Ezekiel the vision of the dry bones as sign.”

This vision dates to the period of Israel's history known as the Babylonian Exile. In 597 BC, the armies of Babylon forced the capitulation of the rebellious city Jerusalem and deported the Judean king and many Judean leaders to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-16). Ten years later, in 587/6 BC, after Jerusalem had rebelled again, the Babylonians razed Jerusalem and its temple and deported a second wave of Judean leaders. Among the first wave of the deported was the young Ezekiel, whom God later called in Babylon to the office of prophet. For those deportees forced to live in Babylon, the future seemed a black hole into which the people were destined to disappear. A century-and-a-half previously, many citizens of Judah's sister kingdom Israel had been similarly deported, had lost their identity, and had faded into the mists of history--the so-called lost tribes of Israel. The exile was more than just a crisis of physical suffering and communal identity. It also necessitated a crisis of faith. The key symbols of Judean faith--Jerusalem, its temple, its people, and the Davidic monarchy--had been destroyed (Psalms 89 and 137). As Rolf Jacobson points out: “According to the theological rationality of the ancient world, many exiled Judeans assumed that their deity had been defeated by a

stronger deity from Babylon (Ps 42:3, 10; 79:10; 115:2). The people wondered if the Lord was truly Lord and truly faithful."

Then, in the vision, sinew, flesh, and skin cover the bones, but there is no breath in them (v. 8). So, Ezekiel prophesies to the breath, "Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (v. 9). And "the breath came into them, and they lived" (v. 10). As already noted, in Ezekiel's explanation of the vision, he summarizes the point: "I will put my spirit with you, and you shall live" (v. 14). The prophet's insistent use of repetition drums the point of the message into our heads: God's spirit is the key. With God's spirit, anything is possible. Without it, existence is just flesh and blood. But with God's spirit, there is life--and what Jesus called fullness of life. And there is no place on earth, no point in time, and no in sin or situation, that can keep God's Spirit away from God's people.

I do not believe that with God in our life that there is such a thing as coincidence, but that everything is a God-incidence! We are in the midst of the Pentecost season, and by my calculation it puts us right in the middle of Lockdown. This week we began with Level 3 of Lockdown, this new level does not mean that we have complete freedom, but it does allow a number of people to return to work and a number of other activities. However, due to Covid infections and deaths – this level could change to a higher level in the wink of an eye. I believe that God has allowed us to celebrate the Pentecost, in the middle of Lockdown, because He is telling us that no world pandemic, or Lockdown, or depression, or anything else in all this world will keep His presence and Spirit away from His children!

Finally, it is my firm believe that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is reviving His Church, as I am speaking to you today. No calamity, no depression, no disease and no human intervention can withhold the presence and power of God from your life. Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour said to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:23-24, "**23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.**" My brothers and sisters, I believe that we are standing at that very hour! To experience revival and victory over the despondency of the current situation, we need to worship God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in spirit and in truth.

Firstly, in Ezekiel 37:7 it is written, "**7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.**" During this Covid 19 Coronavirus pandemic there are so many people with so many different opinions and facts about the virus. Indeed, after listening to all that these so-called experts have to say, I almost feel like running away and want to live on the moon. Nonetheless, the opinion that truly matters in this whole pandemic is the Word of God. When Ezekiel prophesied to the bones, it was not his opinion or that of others he prophesied, but he was prophesying the Word of God. Therefore, I would encourage you to spend time in the Word of God, so that He may speak life into you! His Word is filled with encouragement, hope and a future. Yes, there are times that we need to listen to the advice of the "experts", but let us remember that God wants to speak life and hope; not death and destruction. Yes, take all the necessary precautions and protection; but remember that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the Alpha and the Omega!

Secondly, in Ezekiel 37:9-10, "**9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.**" You and I can only live by the breath of God. Adam began life when God breathed (rauch, the breath of God) into Him, and in the valley of the dry bones, it was only after the rauch, the breath of God that the bones with sinew, muscle and skin came back to life. The Church, the Bride of Christ, was born when the rauch, the breath of God, was breathed out over them on the Day of Pentecost. Therefore, today, in the midst of the Covid 19 Coronavirus pandemic God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit wants to breathe life into us. He wants His rauch, the breath of God, to bring us life and hope in the midst of confusion,

fear and despair. Consequently, open your hearts to Him today, so that you may experience His presence, power and life!

Therefore, in conclusion, I would like to close with these words from Jennifer Henry: "For the prophet Ezekiel, there is something about our God that brings life and possibility, even in the bleakest and most despairing time. There is something in the heart of our God that offers impossible hope. ..."

The message is clear: transformation is God's signature. No matter how bleak, how hard, how impossible, new life—justice, peace, dignity—can break through. ..." Consequently, my brothers and sister, let us not lose hope; but, let us trust in the unfailing love of God, that he showers upon us by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit!!!

AMEN.

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