

The Spirit gives life

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[0 : 00] As I begin, let me ask, do you ever feel lifeless and dead? Such a lack of energy that you say, I've just got nothing.

! Do you ever feel hopeless, without hope? I'm not sure things will ever get better.

Do you ever feel powerless? I just haven't got it in me to change. When we come to the end of our own strength and ability, and we come to realise how lifeless and hopeless and powerless we in fact are, this is what we need to hear and know.

God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit who comes today to lifeless, powerless, hopeless people like you and me, and is able to work powerfully in us, to give us life with our God, now and forever.

And we've got just 25 minutes this morning on the person and work of God the Holy Spirit. I want to begin in Ezekiel chapter 37, open in front of us.

[2 : 01] It's 550 years or so before the coming of Jesus. That's the time when it takes place. And the people of Israel, the people of God at the time, have been defeated and exiled from their promised land.

They're in deep, deep trouble. And the Lord has something to say to them through his prophet Ezekiel. I'm in 37 verse 1, it's Ezekiel speaking. Follow it through with me.

The hand of the Lord was on 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.

As Ezekiel looks out over this scene of death in the valley, he doesn't see warm bodies whose hearts have stopped beating just.

Chance to resuscitate them maybe. He doesn't see rotting corpses. Rather, the vultures have stripped the dead bare. He sees bones. Dead bones left out in the open is a revolting sight almost.

[3 : 07] It's a horror. And dead bones signifies life and what signifies death under God's curse.

You'd imagine Ezekiel, seeing the valley of bones, would turn and run away as quickly as possible.

But the Lord won't let him. Verse 2. He led me back and forth among them or over them. I found a new running route up into Land Beach Wood and some trees were cut down at some point.

And there's twigs and sticks of wood strewn all across the path up there. And when I jog along, they crunch and snap under my feet. And here's Ezekiel led back and forth among the bones.

And I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. So a whole army's worth, as far as the eye can see, and dry, bone dry, bleached in the sun and brittle.

That is, there is not a flicker of life. There is no hope, just death. And what's the point of this? Look down at verse 11.

[4 : 16] Then he said to me, son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, our bones are dried up and our hope is gone.

We are cut off. See, the bones are God's people. And they're saying together, we're just dead.

We've got nothing. And a few chapters back in 33 verse 10, they'd said, our offences and our sins weigh us down.

We're wasting away because of them. How can we live? And God had said in reply, I want you to live. Would you repent and turn round and turn back to me and you'll have life? Come on. But now by chapter 37, I think they've come to realise we can't.

Don't have the power to change, to turn back to our God. No longer we're wasting away. Now, verse 11, our bones are dried up and our hope is gone.

We are cut off. They've got no energy, no power, no ability to live for God. They're unclean and dry. And dead.

[5 : 26] So here we are in the valley of dry bones. 37 verse 3 is strange. The Lord asked me, son of man, can these bones live? Why did God ask that?

Maybe because he wants Ezekiel to really realise and know and say it with his own lips. Of course they can't live. What the people of Israel knew, what Ezekiel sees, we are meant to get to grips with about ourselves.

That is that like the people of Israel, we by ourselves are without hope. Our offences and our sins weigh us down.

We do not have the power in ourselves to change, make things better, deal with our hearts, know our God. Paul will say in the New Testament, Ephesians 2 verse 1, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

In relation to God, knowing him and enjoying life with him, we are by ourselves bones, very dry bones and dead.

[6 : 44] The question is, do we see that? Do we know that about ourselves? I remember the first time someone said to me, Chris, would you take the Ten Commandments seriously?

Would you spend 24 hours and see if you can't live them out? The Ten Commandments given by God through Moses. The Ten Do Nots saying, love God and treasure him and love your neighbour and do good and live out the character of Jesus in your lives and your workplace and your homes. And I realised I can't. I just can't do it. My default, my heart, incapable of constant, Lord-loving, people-loving love, dead.

Maybe this morning you know that, I don't know what you say to other people, but you know that you're sort of on the edge of becoming a Christian. You're moving towards God in some way, so you feel.

You know that the Bible says, turn to God. Would you turn from your old way of life and put your trust in him? But you say to yourself, I don't think I can.

[8 : 02] I'm not sure I've got it in me to have Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I feel kind of dead. The answer is you are.

And we'll see later how the gospel, the good news, changes our heart. But even as a Christian believer today, verse 11 still chimes with us to some degree, doesn't it?

And maybe you feel pretty sapped of life and power anyway because of two years of COVID and lockdown and your life situation and what's going on. And maybe along with that and on top of that, your life as a Christian seems energy-less.

I keep on wanting to try to deal with my besetting sins, but I keep falling and failing. I keep hurting people close to me. I know that church fellowship is super important, but my heart's not in it.

How will I ever change? And verse 11 expresses this pretty well. My bones are dried up. Spiritual energy gone, sapped of the strength to try to be different.

[9 : 15] Despair, I feel a bit dead and dry to God. In Ezekiel 37, verse 3, the Lord asked me, son of man, can these bones live?

I said, sovereign Lord, you alone know. And he does know. So check out now what happens. Verse 4.

Then the Lord said to Ezekiel, prophesy to these bones and say to them, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Which is crazy talk, as though bones can listen. Verse 5. This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you and you will come to life.

Breath. By the way, the word is breath, wind, spirit. I will make breath, wind, spirit enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin.

[10 : 22] I'll put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Can you imagine that? The bones. A word from the Lord.

He makes breath enter you and you live. Verse 7. So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound.

You're meant to hear it. And the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. That's bones reconstituted into corpses.

But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man, and say to it, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Come, breath, wind, spirit from the four winds and breathe into these slain that they may live.

And so I prophesied as he commanded me. And breath entered them. And they came to life and stood up on their feet. A vast army. Dry bones.

[11 : 24] Spiritually dead. Not a flicker of hope. Ezekiel speaks a word from God. And then sinew, flesh, skin, breath breathed into them.

And now there are living, breathing blood coursing through their veins. Alive. Vast. Army. You see, the Lord recreates people who are dead.

He gives dead people life. And this is how he does it. A word of promise from his lips. And life-giving breath, wind, spirit coming into them.

And verses 11 to 14 now apply the action in the valley to Israel and to real people like us. Then he said to me, son of man, these bones are the people of Israel.

They say, our bones are dried up and our hope is gone. We're cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them.

[12 : 28] I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my spirit in you and you will live.

And I'll settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and I have done it, declares the Lord. That's the promise. Complete restoration from death to life.

Without hope, no energy, no power, no ability to live for God and know God. They're unclean and dry and dead. And an unconditional promise from God to his dry boned people.

I'll open your graves. I'll bring you up and back. I will put my spirit in you and you will live and know your God. That is restoration for lifeless, hopeless, powerless people.

And it is the Lord who does it. It has to be. His word of promise, his spirit in you. The Holy Spirit who gives life.

[13 : 43] It's what he does. It's Ezekiel 37. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. It's dramatic. It's a promise. Okay, now this morning, second half.

With this super vivid valley of dry bones action in our minds, come forward to the New Testament. And I want us to see how this promise of the life-giving Holy Spirit within finds its fulfillment through Jesus.

And through him, real life and hope and power to all who belong to him today. There's a load of verses I'm going to put on the screen.

You can follow through in your Bibles if you want, but the verses will come up here. Firstly, this spirit who gives life, let's talk firstly about new life with God. New life with God.

Said earlier that by ourselves in this fallen world, we are spiritually dead. We seek, some of us, we like to find out, we're exploring, we're thinking about our life philosophy, our worldview.

[14 : 52] But we are spiritually dead. Can't deal with our own offenses and sins. We don't have the power in us to turn back to God.

Our bones are dried up. How can I, how can anyone in your family, how can anyone in Orchard Park turn and enter God's kingdom, believe in Jesus? The answer is, you must be born again. You've got to be born again. In John chapter 3, Tyler just read, famously, Jesus talks with a man called Nicodemus.

Here's a little bit of it. John 3, verse 3. Jesus said to this man, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

Or born from above. How can someone be born when they're old? Nicodemus asked. Surely they can't enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. They can't.

[15 : 52] Jesus answered, Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they're born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit.

You should not be surprised at me saying you must be born again. People like us who are naturally spiritually dead, we need to be given new birth.

We need God to work in us, to regenerate us, we say. To cleanse us from our sins and give us a new nature and a new life turned towards God.

That has to happen for us to enter God's kingdom. And when you're dead, you can't do it yourself. It's the spirit.

God the Holy Spirit who gives birth to spirit, those who have new life with God. This spirit given new birth, it takes place as we hear gospel words of promise spoken to us by Jesus, God the Son.

[17:04] In John chapter 5 verse 24, Jesus says, Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged.

But has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

Do you hear here the valley of dry bones change from death to life for someone like you or me? You hear the voice of the Son of God addressing you, commanding you, inviting you to come to him.

And you live. Jesus says a touch later in John 6, 63, The spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing.

The words I have spoken to you, they are full of the spirit and life. New life with God. I think what the Bible teaches here is so wonderful.

[18:14] If you're not yet a Christian believer and you feel kind of dead to God, like you haven't got it in you to turn to him, you're right.

You must be born again. God the Holy Spirit must work in you. And the thing is, the Holy Spirit is very powerful.

He can give you new birth and a new heart and turn you towards your God. What must you do? Give yourself to listening to the words of Jesus Christ in here.

Because the gospel, the words, his words of promise are full of the spirit. If you're serious about knowing God, cry out to him, please help me. And see if God the Holy Spirit won't grab hold of you and breathe new life into you and turn you to God the Son and take you from death to eternal life.

God the Holy Spirit gives new life. By the way, a different angle. If you're a Christian and you wonder, how on earth will this person in my family, how on earth will my neighbours ever turn to Jesus Christ?

[19:33] Do you ever ask that? Because you're not a great neighbour and you're not a great dad. You're not a great advert for following Jesus. And they seem such a long way from God.

This is our confidence. God the Holy Spirit made me a spiritually dead man alive. It's his work.

And he sure as anything can give new birth to my family and my neighbour. He can do it. First, the Holy Spirit gives new life with God.

I'm going to keep moving swiftly. Second, the Holy Spirit sustains ongoing life now with God as our Father and our Friend.

So say you are a Christian and say we're a church because we are. And by ourselves, I don't know what we think of one another. We are some of the time pretty hopeless and powerless.

[20:32] Do you not think? But what the Bible says is we're not by ourselves. We don't believe in Jesus and then, right, off you go by yourself.

See if you can make your church and your life work. Because God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. The Spirit who calls out Abba Father.

Christian believers actually have God the Holy Spirit in us. And it changes everything. Here's a wedge of questions for this morning.

How can you know in your heart today that God loves you? God has demonstrated his love in history through Jesus. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's love has been poured out into our heart through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us. The events of history on the cross, God the Holy Spirit takes and pushes into your heart so that you can sit here today and you can say, I know he loves me.

[21:42] He loves me. I know it. Question, how can you be sure that you will make it through to heaven? You've started the Christian life. Ephesians 1 verse 13.

When you believed, you were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who's a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. With God the Holy Spirit in you, for he is, you know God as Father.

God's love has been poured into your heart. You've been sealed and reserved for heaven and heaven is absolutely guaranteed for you. For God has got you.

Lots of questions. Question, how can we as a church stick together and help one another? We who are a diverse bunch of people who see one another from time to time. How can we do that?

Not by our own power. That's for sure. 1 Corinthians 12 verse 13. We were all baptised by one spirit so as to form one body.

[22 : 50] It is God the Holy Spirit, you know, who unites us together in Jesus. It's God the Holy Spirit who gifts each one of us. 1 Corinthians 12, 4 and 7.

There are different kinds of gifts but the same spirit distributes them. To each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good. If you're a Christian you have a given, a spirit given gift to serve the people around you.

We're not a club just trying our best to keep our membership up and our subscriptions. The Holy Spirit in each of us gives us gifts to help one another grow in our life with God.

Question, how can we hear God's voice today? 2 Timothy 3.16 2 Timothy 3.16 How can you and I deal with our besetting sins?

Or when we know church fellowship is super important but our heart's not in it, how will we ever change? Many of us feel so dry, so powerless to become more like Jesus.

[24 : 28] Galatians 5.22 The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

You are not on your own as you seek to change. God the Holy Spirit by his power can do this in us. It's his work to change us, his fruit in our lives. Which he can do and he will do. Last question. How can you and I summon up the bravery to make Christ known in our world?

So that he's not just up here in our heads. But actually we're able to say Jesus Christ is our Lord and we love him. Acts 4 verse 31 After the believers prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 5.22 With another 15 minutes, another 15 or 20 verses from the New Testament. What I want to say this morning is it is God the Holy Spirit sent by the Father who joins us to Jesus Christ, God the Son, and gives us life now.

[25 : 56] Not just the start of the Christian life, but all the way through. He assures us and unites us and gifts us and reveals God to us and purifies us and empowers us.

God the Holy Spirit sustaining our life with God now. And lastly this morning, it is through the Holy Spirit that you and I will receive resurrection life with God.

Having begun new life with God, having been sustained through life, through the Holy Spirit finally.

As Paul says in Romans 8 verse 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

So you ask, if I've made it through my life and the Holy Spirit has kept me and I die, will my dry bones live after I've died?

And the answer is they will. Because of the Spirit of the living God who lives in us. Remember Ezekiel 37?

[27 : 19] On the final day the Son of God will speak a final word and he will open our graves and he will bring us up and out. And with bones and tendons and flesh and flooded with the Holy Spirit, we will take our place in the new creation with the vast army of people who live and know that he is the Lord.

25 packed minutes this morning on God the Holy Spirit. We've just touched on, we've just scanned something of the person and work of God the Holy Spirit.

Let me just return very briefly and ask the question at the beginning. Do you feel lifeless? Do you sometimes feel powerless? Do you feel hopeless?

Are you tempted to try to grab hold of life in your own strength? You will fail. Have you got to the point in your life where you feel like dry bones, lifeless, hopeless, powerless by yourself?

Have you ever got to that point? Are you at that point? There's nothing wrong with realising that. That is good to know that you're dry bones.

[28 : 45] And when you do, know that it is God the Holy Spirit, wonderfully and powerfully, who sent by the Father gives life to the people of God.

The life of God in us now, the life of God in us that will see us all the way through to eternity. We don't depend on ourselves. We don't depend on ourselves. Not by might, not by power, says the Lord, but by my spirit.

And so we should talk about this together practically. How will we be a people who depend on the Holy Spirit for everything in our lives?

Let me lead us in a prayer together. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. the spirit gives life the flesh counts for nothing says Jesus the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life we bow

before you our father this morning and we pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen us with power through your spirit in our inner being so that christ may dwell in our hearts through faith work in us powerfully we pray revive us give us life move us to follow your commands and decrees empower us to speak boldly of you may we depend on you our father and may you work in us by your spirit what is pleasing to you in our lives we ask for we depend on you in jesus name amen