



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

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### **The Spirit Brings Life!**

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

**~ Brent Russell ~**

- I was at a prayer meeting this week
- I have been meeting with some youth workers from the presbytery for about 5 years now
- We meet once a month to talk, share and pray together about our churches and in particular our youth ministries
- We share our hopes and our failures
- We encourage and inspire each other
- And we reflect together on our role in Jesus ministry
- As we were sharing with each other this week, someone asked this powerful question:

**If God decided not to come to worship,  
 would Sunday be any different this week?**

- Think about that for a moment or two...
- Let me ask a second question:  

**If God was not in your life would you be any different?**
- These are not meant to be silly questions
- I am being absolutely serious with them
- There are times when things may look alive
- They may feel alive
- But they are dead
- Churches, Nations and even people

- Ezekiel was a **significant prophet** who lived about 2600 years ago
- he was part of the Jewish **exile into Babylon in 597ad**
- And he was one of the great prophets of Israel a man **to whom God spoke in powerful ways**
  
- In this particular vision Ezekiel finds himself at the head of a large **dry valley**
- A canyon with **sand and dust** as far as the eye can see
- **Dry cracked earth** covers the floor of this valley
- And as far as he can see there are in every directions the **dry sun bleached bones of a great army**
- The bones of people who have died and the flesh has shrivelled and been blown away
  
- I can see the scene in my mind.
- Except in my mind Ezekiel looks a little like **Clint Eastwood** and is dressed like a cowboy
  
- **As God tells Ezekiel to prophesy - life begins to be breathed into the bones**
- **And they stand – a vast army**
- **The greatest gift that God gives to us is life**
- I **love science** and am often astounded by what exactly they are now able to do
- Scientists can do so many things
- They can invent new **chemicals**
- They can even make new **elements**
- They create **astounding machines**
- They have **technologies** that can do the most profound things
- They can **genetically modify** organisms
- They can even **clone animals**
- **But scientists have not even come close to creating life**
  
- **The ability to give life is something that rests with God alone**
- **We will never be able to create life out of nothing – it is something that has always and will always be reserved for God**

- In Genesis it is God who breathes life into **Adam**
- All over God's creation it is He who controls the **miracle of birth**
- **Psalm 139** tells us that it is God who is there as a child is knit together in the tummy of a mother
  
- **And in our own spirituality the gift of God is life**
- **It is God and God alone who has the power to bring life where there is death**
- **We cannot give spiritual life to someone else**
- **It is the Spirit Himself who is the giver of life**
  
- In this vision that Ezekiel has, it is once again God himself who brings life to a place of death and destruction
- **In vs 11 God tells Ezekiel that this vision is for Israel**
- **And as the people of God, the vision has application for us, the church and for us as individuals**
  
- God gives life through a **process**
- He does not snap His fingers and there is life
- But there is a clear **progression of life-giving**
  
- In Genesis when God creates humanity in Eden – he does so by first making this **body out of earth** – out of the clay
- A **potter** making this human being in His own image
- **And then God breathes life into this body and so creates the first human**
- In **acts chapter 2** Jesus creates the church
- It has not been an instantaneous event, but a process
- He first **trains up this group of disciples** to create this body of believers over three years
- **but only after his ascension does he breathe his life so giving birth to the church**
- When Jesus creates a **Christian**
- He first brings a process of drawing us closer to Himself – **sanctification** it's called
- Starts this work in our lives, a progression of us leaving some things behind us and being drawn into His presence
- And then at some point as we **respond fully to him, he breathes life into us and a new creation is formed**

- **2 Co 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
- **There is a sequence of life-giving as God breathes life into the bones of Ezekiel's vision**
- I imagine that this must have looked like a **science fiction movie**
- As Ezekiel prophesies the words that God has given to Him there is a rattling the sound of hollow bone against bone as these skeletons reorganise themselves
- The **bones of the legs** coming together
- All the **vertebrae** forming the spines
- Then as he prophesies further; tendons, muscles and organs begin to appear as if by magic
- And then finally the covering of skin
- **And what lies before him are bodies – bodies after bodies but no life yet**
- And then as he prophesies to the winds, the breath of God enters into these bodies and they stand at attention
- **A vast army ready fight battles for God**
- **I can just imagine this as almost as one hundreds of soldiers stand up and together and in unison stamp their feet to attention**
- This is how God gives life – one step at a time
- **Sometimes it looks as if people in the church have not moved completely through this sequence of steps**
- I remember catching **tadpoles** as a child
- And if you kept them for sometime they would eventually become **frogs**
- One step at a time – they would first begin to grow legs
- then they would slowly change shape and then finally their tails would disappear and you were left with a frog
- **There are however places where it seems quite obvious that some have not made the full metamorphosis from one form to another**
- There are people who are kind of **stuck between these two points**
- **Not dead – not alive**
- **Spiritual zombies if you like**
- **Having some imitation of life but not yet fully living**
- **Imitating life but having no spirit**
- I believe that the **church today is fighting a losing battle at points**
- Let me be clear here: the battle against evil has been fought and won **2000 years ago**

- As prophesied in Genesis 3 Jesus has crushed the evil one on the cross
- And so we have a victory over evil
  
- **But in the battle against powers and principalities in this day and age the church is losing the fight in far to many places**
- **There is a state of such deep compromise that we are losing the battle against evil right now**
  - **Truth**
  - **Honesty**
  - **Integrity**
  - **Virtue**
  - **Morality**
- **Are things that are not always found in the church**
- There are places where we are losing the battle against sin
- Against evil
  
- **And reason may be that we are stuck in a position where we are in some sort of undefined state**
- **A place somewhere between a mass of dry bones and this living army**
- And truth is that if we are stuck in this place between life and death we will be dead
- We may for all intents and purposes look alive but we may be dead
- As Ezekiel's eye wanders across these acres of bodies as the flesh is put onto them they must have to him looked alive
- Bodies with organs, tendons, muscles and skin
- And yet they are an illusion of real life
- **The difference between the dead bodies in vs 8 and the living army in vs 10 at one level is slight**
- They all muscles, tendons, skin
- They all have arms and legs and heads
  
- **But the army in vs 10 are alive they move, they stand to attention they are ready to wage war against the enemies of God**
- An army that is alive is **obedient to it's King**
- It **ready to move** on His command
- **It ready to wage battle at any place and at any time**
  
- **In Cape Town there is a coffee shop we frequent once in a while**
- And it is a very odd kind of place with the strangest of decorations
- But the weirdest is the bathroom

- You step into the bathroom and there are two mannequins that look so lifelike that for a moment you think you have walked in on some people in the bathroom
- In fact even after you have realized that these are just mannequins, there is a eerie feeling of being watched
- **Things may appear alive even though they are dead**
- And so let me suggest two things that we need to practically DO here

### *Introspection*

- The first step is to look at our own lives
- **Where are we on this journey between life and death?**
- If we look at our lives are we indeed alive?
- So let me return to the question I asked at the beginning of the sermon
- **If Jesus was no longer part of your life, would it make a difference?**
- **If taking Jesus out of your life would make no impact at all then you need to see one of your ministers soon please**
- Because it then means that something is wrong
- If in areas of your life like
  - Finances
  - Relationships
  - Prayer times
  - Integrity and honesty
  - Sexuality
- **If some of these areas of your life have no breath of God in them**
- **If you are not allowing Him to bring life here then there is something wrong – it is called death**
- **This message from God is for the people of God**
- To remind them that God and **God alone will breathe life into them**
- At this point Israel are in exile in Babylon – modern day Iraq
- They are far from home, away from their place of worship
- And yet God promises that He will restore and he will bring life
- **He promises that He will raise a great army to be His army**
- **Are you part of the army? – Is there the power of God, the breath of God in your life**

- **Or does your life resemble an illusion – looking alive but in fact devoid of the power of God, Looking alive but having no spirit**
- **The promise of God is relevant to each of us today**
- **Vs 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live...**
- **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you tells James in chapter 4**

### *Prophecy*

- Ezekiel filled with power of God prophesies to the bones in His vision
- **But also prophesies to Israel as he shares this vision with them**
- **And so the church needs to remain prophetic if we are to be strong in the spirit of God**
- This army – God's people have had life breathed into them
- They are living
- They are **obedient** and ready to listen to His **command** and to act upon his instruction
- They will **wage war** against evil
- **They will be God's people and will do His work**
- **We need to be an army for Jesus**
- **The church is facing a battle against evil like we have never faced before and the call is to be an army of God who will fight and stand up against it's influence**
- Not a **valley of dead bones** who will offer no resistance at all
- And not a **mortuary** of bodies that look as if they are alive but have no power
- Not a church that **whimpers and runs away** when faced with evil because it has no power
- Or a church that **remains silent protecting what little territory they have left**
- **But a church that is ready to fight on God's team**
- **Ready to stand up for truth, to point out immorality**
- **Ready to help people understand the power of God**
- God says I will put my Spirit in you and you will live and I will settle you in your own land
- **This is a promise of victory if we will live by His spirit**

## Conclusion

- In vs 9 these bones obviously belong to those who where once living but have now not just died
- But those who have been slain - murdered by an enemy
- Israel's words are " Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off"
- We can destroy life – physical and spiritual in ourselves and others
- The evil one too is able to destroy life if we allow him to drag us off
- But it is God alone who is able to give life
- It is He that is able to breathe life into His people
- If the prophets among us would stand up and speak God's word life would be breathed back into people who are just a shell
- If we are obedient to God and we speak His words, and his truth he will restore those that have been torn away from the life of Jesus by evil
- Those that are dead in sin need more than anything to hear God's word prophetically and lovingly given to them
- The world though it may not believe so needs to hear and experience God's word if they are to ever find life
  
- Israel themselves are at a point where more desperately than ever they need to hear from God
  
- And the message from God is this
- "There is Hope" - I will put my Spirit in you and you will live
  
- **God will use the church if we remain true to Him and true to His calling**
- **God will use the church to speak the truth**
- **And through this truth, through His living Word**
- **God will restore the dead in spirit and turn them into a great and powerful army**
- **The message of God to world and to His people is there is Hope**
- **I will restore, I will rebuild I will breathe my life into the dead**