

“THE AMAZING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”
Ezekiel 37:1-14, Mark 5:21-24, 35-43, Acts 9:32-42
September 21-22, 2024

Death is not an easy thing to handle. Yet we are surrounded by death every day - we hear it on the news, we see it in the papers, it's an active part of video games, we see it on television all too regularly, and we read about it in the obituaries. We've all had loved ones close to us die and we are thrust into the deep grief and anguish that surrounds it. It's tough to handle, and often we see it as a final end result for all life here on the earth.

Today, I shared the first few verses of Ezekiel 37 with you. It is the image of a valley of dry bones, the ultimate end-result of death. These were VERY DRY bones, having been there a long time after an army battle. Thousands may have been in that valley, having died in conflict with an enemy, but their bodies were never dealt with. The bodies just wasted away after the birds and animals gorged themselves with their flesh. All that was left was the skeletons, the very dry bones of a life that once lived.

Think of the families of each one of those persons who had lived within those bodies. The anguish they must have felt at the death of the one they loved. The sorrow over the death of their loved one must have been great. The anger at those who had done the killing may have been all encompassing. So many emotions and so much hurt may have been left in the ones who loved them!

But God sends Ezekiel the prophet into this valley with this question, “*Son of man, can these bones live?*” (Ezekiel 37:3). Could these bones possibly have life given back to them? Is it possible for any dry bone to be restored to its living nature? Scientists today would love to have the ability to bring an animal or a human back to life from just a dry bone in order to identify what creature it came from, or what person in history it was. But can very dry bones live?

Ezekiel gives the only answer, “*Sovereign Lord, You alone know*” (37:3). You see, in our minds the answer is “NO.” We think death is final, yet, God showed Ezekiel that nothing is impossible with Him. Though each of our days are numbered, and we will all have to face death at some point, life can continue beyond this body. God has the power to do miraculous things, and we see that as He recreates the bodies of each warrior that had fallen in battle. Bone returns to bone; tendons connect them once more; flesh is built upon those skeletal remains with skin finally holding everything together. And life entered those bodies as breath entered their new lungs. God had brought about something new to something that was once dead. New life had come from something that was once long lost.

Jesus also demonstrated that life-giving lesson in our Gospel lesson for today, Mark 5. One of the synagogue leaders’ daughter was very sick, even unto death. Jairus knew that there was only One person who could give his 12-year-old daughter any hope of living again. So he sought out Jesus, the Son of God, and Jesus agreed to go to his house. But then servants come from Jairus’ house with bad news - the little girl had died.

A precious life had been snatched away. A young woman’s life had been taken from this world way before its time. All the dreams that Jairus and his wife had for their little girl were stolen from them. All that this girl could become was now gone, left with only empty hopes and dreams. Their lives were shattered in sorrow! I can only imagine Jairus’ response to the news, possibly crumbling into the dirt, lost in sorrow.

But Jesus is there! Whenever Jesus is present with us, there is always hope, even beyond our understanding. Jesus is the One who restores life to us. Each time we give death back to Him, He reestablishes life in us, and we find that the very dry bones can indeed live again. A committal liturgy states it like this: In the midst of life, there is death; from whom can

we seek help? And the proper response comes from Scripture, “*Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 124:8). Jesus told Jairus, “*Do not be afraid; only believe*” (Mark 5:36).

So in faith, Jairus took Jesus to his home and Jesus addressed the crowd that had gathered. “*He went in and said to them, ‘Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’ But they laughed at Him*” (Mark 5:39-40). The people knew that death was final. They knew that when death happened there was nothing else that was to be done but to mourn and cry. The idea that this little girl was just asleep was contrary to their understanding of life, so they ridiculed Him by laughing at Him. What was HE going to do about death? Who was HE to offer any other alternative?

That’s a common thought in our world today. Most people disregard Jesus as one who can offer hope. They think they know all about life, and they never give Jesus a chance. They mock any offer of letting Jesus help. They refute any claim of anything different happening to their situation, and they lose any hope of renewed life. So death does become final, and there is much mourning and crying that takes place

And as we know, death is everywhere! In the midst of life, death is right there in our face. And it involves the death of anything that we experience. The death of loved ones around us. The death of a job. The death of a career. The death of a dream. The death of a physical ability. The death of a relationship. The death of a marriage. The death of a pet. The death of the hope for life. The death of part of our health, or the death of the use of some part or all of our body. The death and destruction of prized possessions. The death of peace in your heart. The death of future plans. The death of organizations. The death of rights and privileges. The death of trust. The death of security. The death of opportunities for activities. And the list goes on

and on. Death is all around us. And we can see the effects of those deaths in the lives of people living right around us.

You see, when we experience death, our hearts are broken and we are left in the pit of despair, grieving for what will never come or will never happen. Our lives are forever affected by that loss, and we are never the same again. And as long as we hold on to the hurt and the pain that death brings to us, we turn into very dry bones, and there is no more life in us. We are left empty, bitter, and there is no more joy in our hearts. We become confrontational, antagonistic, accusatory, and any life that was there, is sucked out of us, and we become dead, too. Sadly, there are a lot of dead people wandering this earth today. And God asks us, “*Can these bones live?*” Without Jesus, the answer is “No.” But with Jesus the answer is very different.

Peter found the same thing happening as he traveled among the believers in Judea. Listen to the situations Peter found. This is Acts 9:32-43. (READ Acts 9:32-43)

Aeneas had been “*paralyzed and bedridden for eight years*” (9:33). Everything in his life had changed due to his physical condition. He had to deal with the death of so many things in his life. Lack of mobility, loss of income for his family, loss of relationships, the loss of favorite activities, the loss of almost every ability. Every day he had to face those deaths, and after a while, he gave in to the situation, that it was never going to change, that he would have to live with all those deaths for the rest of his life. There was nothing left for him, except to wait for the final death of his life, or so he thought.

Tabitha experienced physical death in her body, and those around her had to face the fact that everything that she had done in their community had also died with her. She had contributed so much to the lives of those around her, but it was now drying up because of her death. Dreams, hopes, abilities, relationships, support, and any future was now gone. Or so they

thought.

And it goes right along with us today. Whenever death happens, we are affected in a huge way, and we think, “Well, that’s the end of that.” Often times we give up, and our lives are forever changed in the process. After all, what can be done about death?

Today in your bulletin there is a blank sheet of paper. I invite you to take a few moments to begin writing down some of the deaths in your life. Is it the loss of a loved one? Is it a hope or a dream that will never come true? Is it an ability that will never be achieved? Is it an expectation that has fallen flat? Is it something that you cherished? Is it something you expected? What is it that death has stolen from you? Write it down on that piece of paper. What are the deaths that have happened in your life that have affected you deeply? What are those things that have caused you grief and sadness? Please, everyone write them down. Allow yourselves a moment to see how deeply death has affected your life, and how much you have suffered because of the deaths in your life.

(Give time for folks to write down their deaths.)

Now, having identified at least some of the deaths that have happened in your life, I invite you to come and put those deaths in the casket here in the front. After all, it’s what we do with any death, we lay them before the Lord and say “Good Bye” to them. We lay them to rest in the arms of Jesus.

(People come forward to lay their deaths in the casket.)

Father, I pray that You would recognize each person here today, that You would understand the depth of the hurt and the many cases of death in each life - the hurts that were involved, the anguish those deaths caused, the hopelessness those deaths created. God, as we close the lid of this casket (close the lid), I pray that these deaths would now be put to death, that

the hurts and pain and sorrow associated with each one of them would be released back to You, and that in their place, You would give peace, the peace that only You can give to those You love. Give each person here today, each one who is receiving this message, give them the hope that even in death, You can bring about something new, more wonderful than anything that we could have ever hoped for. We give You these deaths today, so that You may give us the fresh life beyond them as You turn them into something brand new. We pray this all in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior and Lord. AMEN.

But that's not the end of the story. Look at what happens next in our Scripture lessons. Beyond the death, **God Gives Life!** After every death, when the people turned to the Lord for His help, new life was given. Through prayer, God recognizes the desperation of every situation. And hearing each prayer, He answers them with the renewing of Holy Spirit. Oh, it may be wildly different than what we might expect. It might be completely different than what we hope for. But it is always the best, because God desires our best. It may be a day at a time giving those deaths to the Lord, but He will bring renewal each time so that we may have joy and peace.

But each person that was given new life was not the same as they were before. NO, the injuries had become healed, the scars had been wiped away, the sickness was rebuffed, the physical ailment repaired, and breath of life was given once again. These were brand new people, restored by God's grace! God had taken their death away and had replaced it with HIS LIFE. They may have been recognizable to their loved ones, but they were not the same; they had been restored, renewed, remade in the likeness of God in Jesus Christ.

And so it is with each one of us. Jesus Christ died for all our sins, so that through Him we would not have to face the reality of eternal death. Jesus died our death so that we could have life IN HIM. Jesus died so that we would not have to suffer the everlasting sting of death,

but find new life, here and beyond this earthly existence.

So we can say “Good Bye” to the job that we lost. In Jesus its death has created a new opportunity for us to find something even better as God would guide us to. In Jesus that relationship that died is replaced with the joy of building into another. In Jesus the physical ailment that has plagued us for so long enables us to find new abilities that we never knew we had. In Jesus the dream that was laid to rest opens up the opportunity for God to bless you with something beyond your imagination. In Jesus the hope that was lost is replaced with assurance and strength as you allow the Holy Spirit to lift you up. In Jesus the death of possessions and property provides us with a chance to start all over again to make new memories. In Jesus the peace in your heart is restored to release you from hatred and anger so that you can love even greater than you did before. In Jesus new trust is provided with others that commit themselves to you like a brother or sister in Christ. In Jesus security is restored and confidence replaces fear and anguish when we know that He is always with us. In Jesus that organization that died is replaced with an even stronger and more powerful one that is even more rewarding than the last. In Jesus new opportunities replace the old ones with greater potential than before.

When we give God our deaths through Jesus Christ, by the amazing work of the Holy Spirit He takes them, remakes them, and provides greater life to us as we trust in Him! On our own we can do nothing to face death, but in Christ Jesus, we find the fulfillment of His promise of “*the old things passing away and behold the new things come*” (2 Cor. 5:17). When we release the deaths in our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, He surprises us with so much more and our once dry bones begin to live again. Our life may experience many deaths, but those deaths produce life when we allow God to do His amazing work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us.

So don't dwell on the deaths in your life any more. Find God's peace and life beyond the deaths as you give them back to Him. Then, as death has no more grip on your life, you can rejoice in Him. Let's pray...

Father, Your love for us is beyond our understanding, and we thank You for being our God. As we face the deaths in our lives, we ask Your Holy Spirit to come and bring us Your peace, so that we can experience Your amazing work in our lives. Heal us, renew us, encourage us, remake us we pray. Open our eyes to the new life You have for us as we trust in Jesus to be our Savior and Redeemer. Enable us to live for You from this day on, as Your precious children, and as Your servants. We ask all of this in Jesus' Great and Powerful Name. AMEN.