

**Redemption Road**

March 22, 2026

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord's power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord's spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry.

<sup>3</sup> He asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?" I said, "Lord God, only you know."

<sup>4</sup> He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord's word!" <sup>5</sup> The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. <sup>6</sup> I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord."

<sup>7</sup> I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone.

<sup>8</sup> When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live." <sup>10</sup> I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company.

<sup>11</sup> He said to me, "Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.' <sup>12</sup> So now, prophesy and say to them, The Lord God proclaims: I'm opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel's fertile land.

<sup>13</sup> You will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. <sup>14</sup> I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the Lord. I've spoken, and I will do it. This is what the Lord says."

### John 11:17-27, 39

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. <sup>19</sup> Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. <sup>22</sup> Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you." <sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"


<sup>27</sup> She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world..." <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Remove the stone."



Chapter 4 of *Stretched* opens with some wonderful insights on parenting. Writer Christopher Richmann notes that one of the trickiest things about parenting is knowing how to respond when your child does something wrong that hurts someone else. Maybe it is when they are little and they take a toy from another child or hit another child because they are not getting their way. Maybe it is when they fight with a sibling or when they say something hurtful to Mom or Dad. Or maybe it is when they break curfew and then try to cover it up when questioned.

Most good parents know that the “I’m sorry” needs to factor into the consequences or reckoning. And most parents expect “I’m sorry” to do double duty. On one level, this expression of remorse is part of what Richmann calls “our social glue.” These two words, when spoken sincerely, can begin the repairing of a damaged relationship and can begin to restore harmony in families, classrooms, workplaces...

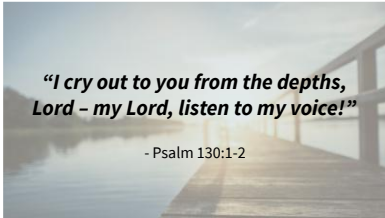
But on another level, as we’ve all learned, it can be hard to know whether your child is sorry for the pain or hurt they caused or if they are sorry that they got caught. As parents, we want our children to feel sorry for doing the wrong thing, for hurting someone, for being selfish. Feeling this sorrow speaks to the kind of person the child is becoming. The feeling of sorrow for one’s bad behavior, Richmann states, suggests a “well-tuned morality gauge.” He adds, “People with this moral equipment genuinely want to avoid causing harm to others.” When we apply this to our walk of faith, believers strive to avoid causing harm to others *AND* to avoid damaging their relationship with the Lord our God.



**“People with this moral equipment genuinely want to avoid causing harm to others.”**

- Stretched, page 87

As we briefly turn to Psalm 130, we see how this is often easier said than done. The psalmist finds himself or herself in a place of separation from God. In verses 1 and 2 we read, *“I cry out to you from the depths, Lord – my Lord, listen to my voice!”* While we do not know what harm or sin has caused this separation, we’ve all known times when our choices have left us asking for God to hear our plea, to bring the mercy that the psalmist longs for. Moving to verse 5, the psalmist expresses faith in God’s promise of forgiveness, saying, *“My whole being hopes, and I wait for God’s promise.”* In the last two verses, there is a shift – away from the personal into the corporate or communal.



***“I cry out to you from the depths,  
Lord – my Lord, listen to my voice!”***

- Psalm 130:1-2

In the closing verses, the psalmist encourages Israel to also wait with hope “*because great redemption is with our God!*” God is the one who will redeem Israel from its sin. God’s transforming love alone has the power to redeem and restore Israel to right relationship with God. So the psalmist invites the whole nation to wait with hope, to wait for a transforming grace, to wait for a redeeming love that can heal all brokenness and sinfulness. Today, these words can offer us hope amidst the brokenness and sinfulness of our world today. For the psalmist, as it likely feels for most of us, there is a desire to walk this redemption road. Because of this, the waiting is an active waiting, a waiting that leans into the possibilities of what God can do.



This leaning into the possibilities of what God can do is at the core of our texts from Ezekiel 37 and John 11. As we prepare to delve into the hope, promises, and faithfulness of God, let us begin with a word of prayer...

*God of grace, into the dry bones of our hearts – breathe your words of life. Into the deep places of our sorrow – speak your words of hope. Into what is dead in us – breathe your life. Into our trembling, fearful hands – place the new life that you offer – a life pulsing with grace. Lord, like Lazarus in the tomb, our hearts are still and waiting for your call to new life. Speak to us now. Today, call us out of death, out of old lives, and into the light of your grace and your presence, and into the loving companionship of Christ. It is with this hope that I ask you, O God, to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.*

As we turn to Ezekiel 37, we begin with a little context. Like a good parent, God longed for Israel to repent of their idolatry and to return to living in a right relationship with God. But there was no sorrow in their collective hearts. The sin continued and exile followed. Israel's time in Babylon has been a long time at this point. Some are beginning to feel sorrow for their collective sins. In chapters 33-36, the prophet Ezekiel began to speak words of hope, words of promise, words of redemption and restoration. Those with ears to hear are wondering, can God do such a thing? Is it possible for Israel to return to the Promised Land after 70 years in exile? Can God work a near-miracle in God's people, creating this new heart that Ezekiel speaks of? Chapter 37 is God's answer to these questions.

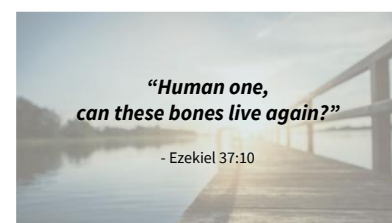
As Ezekiel paints a vision for a future with hope, it is hard for God's people to hear. The exiles living in Babylon feel dead and buried. The valley full of dry bones is God's response to the despair and hopelessness that the Israelites feel. But for the people to live into this new possibility, to begin the process of redemption, there are some necessary steps to be taken. Like we expect with our children when they have hurt or harmed someone, God's people needed to make this right. The process must begin where it begins with us and our sin. The people of God needed to feel sorrow for their past sinful actions. They then needed to confess their sins to the Lord, and then to follow this with acts of repentance.

At that time, the sacrificial system that had guided this process in Jerusalem in the past was not available in exile. So, repentance must become something that was lived out. It was not simply a singular moment of sorrow and apology but was the start of living in a new way. Repentance demands a change in us, a turning away from something sinful and a turning towards God and holy living. This gives God something to work with.

This becomes the foundation for not only having, as Richmann put it, a “well-tuned morality gauge,” but also for having a heart aligned with God’s will and way. This alignment is what would allow Israel to return to the Promised Land as a people committed to living as God called and intended them to live all along. If this feels like a big step for a nation that is a long way from God, like a big change, well, it is. That is why God brings Ezekiel this extraordinary vision and word of hope found in Ezekiel 37.

In verse 1 we see that God brings Ezekiel in a vision to a valley full of bones. As Ezekiel looks around, he realizes that there are a great number of bones and that they are very dry. This multitude of bones has been on the valley floor for a long time – perhaps 70 years. The Lord then asks Ezekiel, *“Human one, can these bones live again?”*

Ezekiel turns the question back to God. He dares not, on his own, to hope. Even though he has been speaking of hope and mercy and redemption to the people of God, bringing life to this vast valley full of bones must feel impossible to the prophet.



As the story unfolds in verses 4 to 10, Ezekiel speaks as God commands. Bones come together, and then sinew, flesh, and skin cover the bones. The breath of life is then summoned from the four winds and *“They came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company.”* Ezekiel had invited that which brings life and transforms and reconciles – the Spirit of God – into these lifeless bodies. As Ezekiel looks at this vast company, God explains, *“Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.’”* It is now Ezekiel who must be asking the questions in his heart: Can God do such a thing?

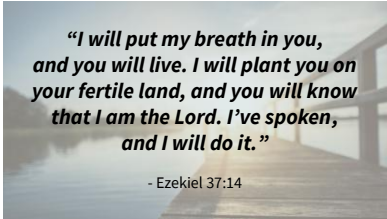


Is it possible for Israel to return to the Promised Land after 70 years in exile? Can God work a near-miracle in God's people, creating this new heart that Ezekiel has been speaking of?

Earlier I spoke of the feelings that many of us feel because of the brokenness and sinfulness of our world today. As the people of God, we long to see God redeem and restore our world, our nation, and our communities. We wonder as Ezekiel did, can this broken and unjust world become new again, becoming what God intended our world to be? I believe that we as individuals and that we as the church need to play an active role in the healing and redemption of our world. To that end, we need to identify behaviors and practices that bring life to that which feels dead and redemption to that which feels lost and broken. We need to be people who work alongside God to make things new and just and right. We need to walk alongside our God who seeks to mend what is broken and to lift up that which is downtrodden. We need to walk with the broken and the hurting to help them find the restoration and redemption that a relationship with the Lord our God offers.

God offers reassurance to Ezekiel, and to us today, commanding him to prophesy to Israel these words: *"I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will*

*know that I am the Lord. I've spoken, and I will do it."* It is not up to Ezekiel to say just the right words. It is God who will transform and reconcile the people back to God, creating a new heart in them. The process will not be easy. This is not a promise that things will suddenly be OK. It's an acknowledgment that things already are awful — Israel's faith is like a valley full of dry bones. It is a promise that out of that, God can make something new. This promise gives God's people hope. As we turn briefly to this week's Epistle reading from Romans 8, Paul offers a word of hope that we find when we allow the Spirit to guide our will and way.

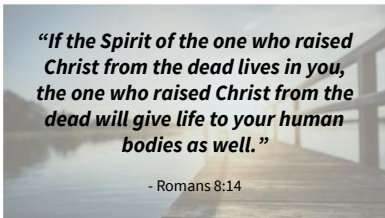


*"I will put my breath in you,  
and you will live. I will plant you on  
your fertile land, and you will know  
that I am the Lord. I've spoken,  
and I will do it."*

- Ezekiel 37:14

While Paul is speaking to those in the church in Rome, he certainly could've been speaking to the people of Ezekiel's day or even to us today. In verse 6, we are reminded that an attitude of selfishness leads to death and that an attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life. Paul summarizes why selfishness leads to death in verse 8: *"People who are self-centered aren't able to please God."* When all we think about is ourselves, our focus becomes our pleasures, our gratification, our wants. There is no room for God or for others.

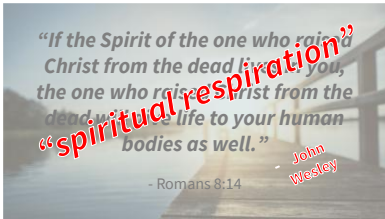
Paul contrasts this inwardly focused choice with the choice to live in *"the Spirit of Christ."* Living in the Spirit, we connect with the life that flows through us from God. This life flowing through us brings us a oneness with God and with all created in God's image. This oneness reinforces our belonging to God and to those in the family of God. It is the same spirit that breathed life into the dead bodies on the valley floor. It is the same spirit that would redeem and restore Israel, guiding them back home. Paul connects to the promise and hope of new life now and one day eternally in Christ in verse 11. Here we read, *"If the Spirit of the one who raised Christ from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies as well."* Living in the Spirit, God will redeem us to life.



*"If the Spirit of the one who raised Christ from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies as well."*

- Romans 8:14

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, also spoke of how the Spirit brings new life to the followers of Christ. Wesley believed that this rebirth occurred within the process of justification or being made right with God. Wesley understood justification as an on-going process, one frequented often by those living as humans in this world. He believed that the Holy Spirit offered believers what he called *"spiritual respiration,"* bringing new life, guiding us back in to right relationship with God, over and over, whenever needed.



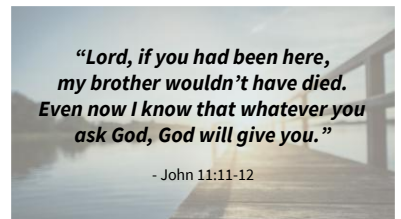
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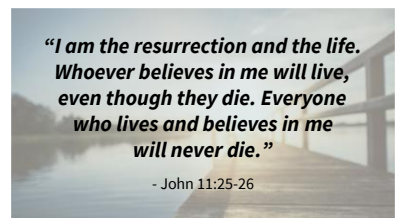
- John Wesley

Please turn with me to John 11, where Jesus himself offers new life to Lazarus and to others gathered there that day at the tomb. At the start of chapter 11, Lazarus is gravely ill. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, send for Jesus, believing that he has power over sickness and death, saying, *“Lord, the one whom you love is ill.”* They're saying, Jesus, your good friend is sick. And their unspoken words say, Jesus, you can do something about it. But Jesus delays. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. It hasn't been nearly as long as the bones lay in the valley of Ezekiel's vision, but it has been plenty long for Martha, as we'll soon see in verse 39.

As Martha hears that Jesus is nearing Bethany, she goes out to meet Jesus, leaving other mourners at home. Meeting Jesus, Martha expresses her faith in him as healer and more. In verses 21 and 22 we read, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.”* Yes, Jesus, you could have saved him. You could have healed him. But then there is hope – hope unshakeable – in the second verse. Martha believes that Jesus has a power that reaches even beyond healing and wellness. Martha is inching towards considering something otherwise impossible.



Jesus speaks into the possible when he tells Martha that her brother will rise again. She assumes he is talking about the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead that will occur for all of the faithful on the day of final judgment. To help her understand how new life is possible here and now, Jesus says to her, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”* After this Mary joins the scene. Jesus sees her and weeps with her.



Perhaps Jesus weeps because he sees the bigger picture. As it seemed hard for Ezekiel to imagine God binding dry, faithless bones becoming a multitude representing the living kingdom of God, perhaps Jesus understands how hard it is to bring living faith to those who do not believe in him as Savior. So, maybe this is why Jesus wept.

To illustrate these words about resurrection and new life, we skip forward to where Jesus comes face to face with the stone covering the entrance to Lazarus' tomb. Speaking to all



gathered there, Jesus said, "*Remove the stone.*" It is then that Martha is concerned with the smell. It has been four days. Jesus is not concerned. Jesus is leaning into the possibility of new life and is inviting Martha, Mary, and all of those present – and even us – to

lean in as well. With these words Jesus invites us all to lean into the possibility of new life, of transformation, of grace and forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is inviting us to see the possibility that God can lead and guide all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior to walk the road to redemption.

The question for us to consider is simple: What stone is blocking us? What is keeping people from hearing the invitation to a new life in Christ? What is in the way of building community, of loving



our neighbor, of serving the hurting, forgotten, ignored, and scapegoated who are the face of Christ for us? What are the stones that must be removed so that Jesus can call life out of death? And, more personally, what stone is blocking us from experiencing God's transforming love, God's heart-changing grace, God's healing of all that is broken in our lives and relationships? What stone do we need to roll away?



My friends, we are called to be the signs that God is at work in the world and to live as the evidence that redemption is possible. We are called to be life-givers in the best sense of the word. We are called to travel the redemption road – both as followers of Christ and as his hands and feet seeking redemption for the brokenness, sinfulness, pain, and suffering of our world. May it be so for us all. Alleluia and amen.

### **Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What stone is blocking you from growing closer to Christ? What stone is preventing you from helping others grow closer to Christ? How can you roll it away?
- 2) *Pray*. Do you know anyone who carries sorrow for sin and cannot seem to move past it? How might you or someone speak God’s forgiveness to that person? Seek guidance in times of prayer this week.
- 3) *Study*. Read John 11:28-38 and 40-46... the “rest of the story.” What does Jesus’ different response to the same question tell us about our Lord? What impact does Lazarus coming out have on those there that day? What impact does it have on you?