

WD February 19, 2024

“Breathe In the Fresh Spirit”

Most of us are familiar with Carbon monoxide. Carbon Monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. This is why many cities are mandating the use of Carbon Monoxide Detectors that work like smoke detectors to warn occupants of the danger.

CO is lethal if exposed to it too long. At low concentrations CO causes fatigue in healthy people and chest pain in people with heart disease. At higher concentrations, it begins to mess with everything in your head-- impaired vision and coordination; headaches; dizziness; impaired vision, confusion; nausea and flu-like symptoms that all clear up after leaving home. Most noticeable though is the reduction brain function and resulting from dead or dying brain cells.

It is fatal at very high concentrations. What happens is the oxygen is literally cut off from your body. The formation of carboxyhemoglobin develops in the blood, which inhibits oxygen intake – you fall asleep and never wake up.

This is essentially what happened to Israel. Ezekiel is a book written to the Israelites when they were exiled in Babylon. Jerusalem is a distant memory. In Chapter 37 we are told that Ezekiel saw a vision of a vast valley of dead bones—bones that were bleached dry, picked clean by predators broken and in piles—essentially appearing beyond hope. Ezekiel was placed in the midst these bones and led around this valley to understand the lifelessness that surrounded him. Ezekiel 37:11 tells us that this is house of Israel, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone.” Gone because the nation carried into exile and the Temple lay in ruins. But the message of Ezekiel is that even these bones are not beyond hope. No one is beyond the reach of God’s grace.

Why is the picture so horrifying? We probably already know. Because Israel ignored the Spirit-Filled Word of God. First, they stopped reading it and they stopped following it. The house of Israel began to fill with an odorless, invisible poison of false ideas, of idols, a corrupted Temple, evil kings and politicians, and a forgotten Lord. The prophets tried warning them, but the house of Israel ignored them, murdered them, and refused to believe they were in any danger. The House of Israel were God’s people, they should have known better—they knew about evil and they were taught about holiness but their minds were confused and corrupted by their sin so they couldn’t think straight. They were told to repent and turn away; to breathe in the fresh air of God’s Word but didn’t. And in the end the nation died.

We have a great lesson in Israel. This lesson is repeated in Romans 8. Sin is real; it has saturated our lives, and it is deadly. The ONLY solution is transformative Gospel of Jesus. The Spirit-Filled Word of God, which brings life to the soul and brings life to a person that has been reduced to a pile of dry bones.

Many years back when the Pirates of the Caribbean hit the screens we were introduced to Jack Sparrow and the crew of the Black Pearl. As the story goes the crew of the Black Pearl had a curse on it. During the day the crew looked like normal “scallywags”, dirty, smelly pirates. But when the moonlight shined on them the audience got to see them as they really were; cursed and dead.

In a similar way when the light of Christ hits each one of us there will be no hiding. We will be seen as we really are. Blame will not change it. Excuses will not undo it. We will stand before the Lord and we will be exposed for who we really are. Lent itself is meant to do just that, to confess who we really are and step into the light; to expose the skeletons in our closet before God. Lent is a time to breathe in the fresh air of the Spirit of God so that our very bones may live.

Can these bones live? Yes! Confess this reality--we are dead in our sins. Sin is real. And God is just. The cross of Jesus was demanded by God for our forgiveness. Someone had to die—Jesus was it. His death is followed by resurrection. And in Romans 8:11 we see how it comes to us. “And 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.”

Do you want hope? Do you want real change? You’ve got it in Jesus. During the last Superbowl a lot of controversy started over the Ad titled “He Gets Us.” Jamie Bambrick a pastor in Northern Ireland, posted a video to social media the following Tuesday entitled “He Saves Us.” The pastor said that the “He Gets Us”

commercial may have been “perhaps well-intentioned” but ultimately “failed to convey anything of the gospel to the hundreds of millions who saw it.”

The Washingtonstand.com reports that; Instead of AI generated people the “He Saves Us” video features real people and real stories; those like Kat Von D, a celebrity tattoo artist who abandoned witchcraft last year to become baptized a Christian, accompanied by the words, “former witch.” Next up is Josh Timonen, who worked on the book “The God Delusion” with prominent atheist apologist Richard Dawkins before converting to Christianity. The ad cycles through a whole host of real-life individuals who left behind their sinful pasts to embrace Christianity: other titles include “former jihadist,” “former KKK member,” “former drug addict,” “former gang leader,” “former drag queen & prostitute,” “former abortionist,” “former transgender,” “former pornstar,” “former new age guru,” and “former lesbian activist,” always with the word “former” highlighted in yellow.

Bambrick’s video (see link below)ⁱ says, “Jesus doesn’t just get us. He saves us. He transforms us. He cleanses us. He restores us. He forgives us. He heals us. He delivers us. He redeems us. He loves us.” It ends with the words, “Such were some of you,” a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:11, which reads, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”ⁱⁱ

I agree that the “Jesus Saves Us” commercial is a much better message and more consistent with Ezekiel and Romans. Can these bones live? Jesus has a much preferred answer of, ‘yes.’ Ezekiel prophesied to the bones and they came together ultimately complete bodies but it wasn’t until the Spirit entered them that they came to life. When the Word is spoken: bones come together again, sinews and muscle take shape, hearts begin to beat and lungs are filled with life-giving air. When the Holy Spirit comes from the four winds, resurrections happen, Dead things live again, and life takes meaning. Drug addicts change. KKK members are redeemed. We are better people, not just better Christians. Life happens right away and not just later. The Gospel is always transfiguring, always shaping us with Gospel precision.

Before we can ever hope to change the culture, we ourselves must be changed. The Word of God needs to mean something to us if it is going to mean something to those we love. Before we can be any kind of witness, we must be real; real means genuinely alive in Christ.

So, breathe it in. The Word of God is oxygen in a room of CO gas. The air around us is seemingly innocent, odorless, and clear, but it is filled with poisons. Oxygen is the first step provided when one needs extra care in a hospital. So it is in faith. Fresh air is needed to clear our minds and preserve our lives, it refreshes the heart and strengthens body and soul. In these pages you find this air. In its pages is the same Holy Spirit that breathed life into Adam, that raised the Valley of Dry bones, that comes upon us in Baptism, and brings living faith to the hearer. This Lenten season I pray that we breathe in the Word deeply and live. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30

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ⁱⁱ <https://washingtonstand.com/news/he-saves-us-pastor-offers-alternative-to-controversial-super-bowl-ad>