

Does God Still Come to Us Now? – Part I (Life) / “Presence”

Matt 1:23 (ESV) ... “they shall call his name Immanuel” – which means, God with us. God promised to come be with us. And when Jesus, God’s Son, was born – God did come and was with us. This is amazing, but it begs a question ...

Does God still come to us now?

Does God still come - and intervene in our world?

- Does God still come to *give life* to countries where there is seemingly endless violence, oppression, & death?
- Does God still come to *be life & hope* - in the hopelessness of poverty & racial divide in our country? **What do you believe?**

Does God still come - and intervene in our lives?

- Does God still come to *be joyFULL life* – when the laughter and crazy moments of fun – seem so far away?
- Does God still come to *give life* – when our bodies are broken, when we need healing? **What do you believe?**

Does God still come to intervene in our souls?

- Does God still come to love and breathe life into souls - the same ones that mock him and run from him?
- Does God still come to restore souls – that are so full of brokenness we don’t believe they or- **we will ever be whole?**

Does God still come? Does God still come to us now – to be with us and give us life?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ begins to answer this question. And, it begins on the evening of the day Jesus rose from the grave. Read with me here from the book of John, chapter 20 beginning in vs 19.

John 20:19-22 (ESV) 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

For the first time since His death – Jesus appears before all the disciples (*minus Thomas – we will get to him next week*). They are locked in a room, full of fear and questions because Jesus has been murdered. (*What happened? Will they be next? Is all lost?*). Into the room comes Jesus – bringing comfort, peace – but more – a promise that He would be with them forever. That He was literally – God with us – Immanuel. That His coming to be with us – was not just a one-time deal, for God would leave **His Presence** – His Spirit. **The Holy Spirit** of God would be with us now and forever. This is our sure hope, why we can trust that God still comes to us now. (repeat \/)

Because of Jesus – we trust that God is with us now - through the Spirit that breaths life.

*Sometimes how two people in love meet is a amazingly romantic story. Fran and my story is not that romantic but it is a crazy story. I was in an apartment with my frat bros sitting on a L couch when the phone rang on the opposite end. Each guy talked for a moment and passed the phone down the line ... to me. There was a girl on the phone - looking for a coach for one of their sororities flag football teams and all my bros had turned her down. They did not know her or anyone on the team. I was last on the couch. When the phone got to me – she was slowly and softly – weeping because no one wanted to be with her or her team. **What an awful feeling!** Not really wanting to - I agreed to one practice. My wife was on that team – and as the TV show by the same name says, that’s “How I Met Your Mother”. Not romantic – but a crazy story. I think how that girl felt on the phone – is how many of us feel about the idea of God coming to be with us now. We want him to – we just think – he doesn’t want to. Some of us have called – to no avail. Some of us have cried – and it seems he is nowhere. And for some – you feel like God may come on occasion but it is more out of pity – not love. The true story of Christmas is crazy and full of love. And in this upper room we get to see in a powerful and amazing way that God is with us – now. Two questions will need to be answered ...*

01. What Is Going on as Jesus Breathes on His Followers? 02. What Does This Mean for Us Now?

To answer these questions, we have to go back to the beginning of the story. We said at the beginning of this Advent series– to understand and be moved by the wonder, power, and beauty of Christmas you must hear the story of His birth within the whole story of the Bible. Let’s go back to the beginning of the story ...

01. What Is Going on as Jesus Breathes on His Followers?

• God Breathes Life at the Beginning

Genesis 2:5-7 (ESV) 5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground – 7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

God formed the body of man – with dust. This body is temporary – it goes back into the dust.

But our soul – that is different ... **By God's own breath** – Adam received His soul – his life from God. Our soul, the perfect image of God – *comes from God's very breath – from God himself.* But then man – by our rebellion, our sin toward God – broke the perfect image of God – our soul. *That which was created to know the joy & love of God's presence, now only knows separation from God & death.* **Judgment**

But God made a promise right after Adam sinned that He would fix all that was broken by our sin. **His promise:** 1) He would give lasting forgiveness and acceptance that would bring us back to Him and 2) He would restore all the brokenness of our soul to how it was meant to be, how we were supposed to be.

- **God's Breath Life In the Waiting for His Promise**

After man's rebellion, God began to build a people that would know him, by which He could send a Rescuer, and a Restorer – his Son Jesus. During this time of waiting – the world grew dark with men's sin and rebellion – but God still intervened in this world through His Spirit which gave life. Even in the darkest moments – God came to be with His people and breath life into them. *One of those moments is thru a man named Ezekiel.*

Ezekiel was God's mouthpiece for a rebellious nation. The nation of Judah has rebelled against God. How? They have worshipped false gods by sacrificing babies on their altars and by whoring out their daughters and sons. Because of this, God has handed them over to the Babylonian Empire to discipline his people so they would repent and turn to Him. In their rebellion, they didn't see this as a loving rebuke. Rather, they believed God had abandoned them, that God was no longer with them. Sound familiar? So God sends Ezekiel to them to call them to repentance. On one occasion, God takes Ezekiel out to a valley to see this amazing truth that God is with His people. He has not left them and even more – He is ready to bring them to life from the death of their rebellion.

So He shows Ezekiel a huge valley of dry bones. It represented the sum of how the people of Israel felt suffering in their sin: dry, dead and useless. God asks Ezekiel a question – can these bones live. Ezekiel says – you know God. Then God told Ezekiel to tell the bones to come to life by the word of God. Ezekiel did as God commanded and there was rattling sound as bones and ligaments came together, and then flesh covered them.

But there was no breath in them. Then God told Ezekiel to say ...

Ezekiel 37:9-10, 14 (ESV) 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live." 9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Bones don't come to life – unless God breathes on them.

In response to this prophecy - the people believed! No! Rather, they cried out – "our bones are dried up – our hope is lost. You have left us." Sound familiar! The doubt, the questions, the pain. Hear God's loving promise! 14 I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live," ... (About 600 years later ...)

- **The Promise Comes –by God's Breath to Give Life**

Matthew 1:20 (ESV) ... "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

After generations of waiting, the promise came by the breath of God's Spirit again. Hear this same account through Mary's eyes. When she is doubting how she will become pregnant – God answers her.

Luke 1:35 (ESV) And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

God came to Mary. The Holy Spirit of God came and covered Mary with His presence and birthed **LIFE** in her. That LIFE was not just a physical life – but was literally God – who gives **life**. And Jesus would come to us to keep God's promise of rescue and restoration – **to give us LIFE.**

- **The Recue and Restoration of All Things – by God's Breath**

John 20:22 (ESV) And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. In the beginning of all things, God breathed life into Adam by His Spirit. This is how God has always given life – his life – HIS PRESENCE – to us – through His Spirit!

Jesus comes and fulfills God's promise. By his life, death, and resurrection, He did everything necessary for God to rescue us from our rebellion and sin - to completely forgive and accept us. *He became our rebellion, our sin, our rejection of God & took our punishment. By faith in his work, we get God's complete forgiveness and*

acceptance. But that was the first part of the promise. The 2nd is the restoration of our soul. Both of these works of God – would take His ongoing presence with us – in us – in order to renew our soul and restore our soul to the what it was meant to be – supposed to be. **So – Jesus, breathed the Holy Spirit of God into us – to be with us.**

02. What Does This Mean for Us Now?

- **The Holy Spirit is God's promise – He will always be with us.**

John 20:19 (ESV) 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them ...

God still comes to be with us and will stay with us in the most impossible times. Nothing can keep him away – lock doors. Others can't keep him away – and we can't keep him away. He will be with us.

What made or caused Jesus to come to the disciples and give the Spirit to them? *Their goodness, pity ...*

Titus 3:4-8 (ESV) 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8The saying is trustworthy

The Holy Spirit of God is not some mystical force or an "it" that comes to us by our effort, our faithfulness, our goodness, or our service to God. The Spirit is God and He comes to us now.

- (5) We are rescued by God's goodness and kindness. *Not our goodness and kindness.*

- (6) The Holy Spirit is poured out on us to regenerate & renew us - *because of Jesus' work to rescue - not ours.*

- (8) *God says: **TRUST THIS** (rest, set your soul on this: lean your whole wait on like a chair, elevator)*

It is only by the faithfulness and work of Christ – that God comes to be with us always.

*It is not our work or our faithfulness that brings God to us. Repent of this belief. Stop trusting in badness to repel or your goodness to attract. **Turn to Jesus who has walked thru walls to be with you & is here now.***

Because of Jesus – we trust that God is with us now - through the Spirit that breaths life.

- * **The Holy Spirit is God's promise – He will rescue and restore all things to how they were meant to be.**

Titus 3:5 (ESV) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

God still comes to be with us – to give life- from death to life. (Regeneration is what happens when we are rescued. Death to life – like the bones in Ezekiel's vision.)

Pics of John Smith – *Almost 2 years ago on Martin Luther King day – John Smith fell thru the ice on Lake St Louis and was under water for 15 minutes, no pulse for 45 minutes – dead. Came back to life. From death to life.*

This passage says the Holy Spirit of God brings people from death to life. **God is not interested in making a better version of you – because before Christ you are dead. Your soul is broken, unable to know God, and needs life breathed into.** The Spirit does not give better morals, or a better way to live, or a ticket to heaven. **He regenerates us – from death to life – Just like John.**

2) This passage also says the Spirit comes to renew us or restore us into what we were intended to be.

5 ... and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

God is with us now – by the person of the Holy Spirit – breathing new life into us day after day.

God is intervening in our world ...

* **by constantly intervening in the life and death of all people.** *All life & death is Gods. Ps 139:16 in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

* **by constantly intervening in the broken fabric of our society – restoring people that affect families, neighborhoods, and communities.** *In the new year – you will hear about our partnering with inner city church plants. Our hope – the Spirit of God breaths life into hopeless places.*

PICS - Kenny Petty, Kempton Turner, Michael Byrd – pray for these pastors and us. (God is there!)

* **by constantly intervening in the lives of leaders to move for God's good and glory.**

That's why it matters – what we do in this world. When we believe the Holy Spirit of God is at work in this world – I will join God's church in the ongoing restorative work of the kingdom in this world. This makes the church not an Us vs Them. It makes us for our city. God is intervening in our world and ...

God is intervening in our lives ...

* by healing our bodies. **Sally Rasmussen** – a member – died while water skiing several years ago – and was dead for over 10 minutes and God brought her to life. I want her & Tim to tell the story – next year

* by healing our minds and hearts. *He is healing the mind and heart of many of you who have had loved ones die in the last years.*

* by healing broken relationships. *There are marriages and families being healed now because God is with us.*

God is intervening in (our world, our lives and) our souls ...

* by uniting enemies of God and one another into the beautiful and powerful body of Christ.

The early church saw hated enemies by religion & race: Jews, Samaritans Romans, and more all together. Will you believe God can do this now in your soul and the souls of others to make the church one tapestry.

* by restoring our souls – even to the deepest darkest crevices.

God is with us - breathing life into dark parts of our soul. Will you avail yourself to his breath?

Join us – come to Pastor's Coffee and see what God is up to here. CGs, DNA groups, and more – people!

* by drawing us to Jesus to see our need for a Rescuer.

Is this you? Is God drawing you to him. Has hearing the words of God and how he is with us now opening your soul to your need for a Rescuer. Trust Him now!

John 20:19-22 (ESV) 19 ... and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

*When Jesus came into the room – the first words out of his mouth were Peace. **Shalom** – the Hebrew word peace is the word for God's perfect peace when all is in His order and control. It was the word used after creation to describe God's perfect creation. There was shalom – perfect peace. This is Jesus' first word – peace, shalom. I have come to restore all things to my perfect working order. Not don't be afraid – but Shalom – my perfect order is here by my Spirit – receive my Presence. I have come to be with you always!*

*When I met Fran – I didn't want to go. I went to coach her team out of all sorts of pity. What's really crazy – is that when Fran actually met me – she didn't want to have anything to do with me because she thought I was a sophomore. She was a senior and the apartment called was a bunch of sophomore guys. So she didn't want to have anything to do with me either. **God wants to be with you and it has been his plan from the beginning of time.***

*Because of this – He gave His Presence – His Spirit to be with us. **You are not alone.***

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Then, just as it has always been, God comes to be with us – through the Spirit that breaths life.

Because of Jesus – we trust that God is with us now - through the Spirit that breaths life.

- 1) Receive- Christ today by faith – and the Spirit will come and birth life in you. Awake you to God.
- 2) Believer – turn from your doubts that God wants to be here with you. Turn to a Jesus who walked thru countless walls to come and be with you forever. The Spirit is here now and will intervene today. Ask Him ...