

April 3, 2026 – John 19:30

In the beginning, God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He stooped down to the earth he had made. And then he did something no creature could do: he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being. Humanity lives because the Creator gives us His breath. Humanity lives because God gives us His Spirit.

But tonight we hear about the impossible taking place. The Creator hangs upon a cross. The One who breathed life into Adam now struggles to breathe. His chest rises and falls in agony. His lungs strain against the weight of his own body. And then, he finally speaks those incredible words: *“It is finished.”* And he gives up his spirit.

He gives it up. No one takes it from him. He lays it down of his own accord. The same God that once filled the lungs of Adam now empties his own. The Giver of life gives up his life. The One who breathed into man now breathes his last.

Isaiah foresaw it centuries earlier: *“He poured out his soul to death.”* His life wasn't taken from him unwilling. His spirit wasn't stolen from him. He poured it out. Like a drink offering. Like a sacrifice placed upon the altar. The Servant of the Lord doesn't cling to life and breath. He gives it away.

Why? Because of sin. Sin isn't just wrongdoing. It's a sort of suffocation. It's the choking grip of death upon the human race. From the moment Adam first drew breath, that breath stood under a warning: *“in the day that you eat of it – in the day that you disobey the one who gave you breath and life and every good thing – you shall surely die.”* The breath that God gave was never self-sustaining. It was always a gift. One that could be lost.

One that was lost in the fall into sin. And so God declared, *“You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* The breath that God gave would one day be taken away.

You know this reality. You feel it in the frailty of your body. In sickness. In weakness. In the slow wearing down of life. Every breath you take is a reminder that you are not self-sustaining. You are not eternal in and of yourself. The breath you have can be lost. The breath you have will one day end. And you will be a lump of dirt in the ground once again.

But, more than that, sin corrupts not only the body, but the spirit. The breath of life becomes a breath burdened with guilt. Words that should praise God instead curse. Lungs that should sing praises instead groan under the weight of sin. The life God gave is turned inward. Curved in on itself. Crushed under the weight of its own rebellion. This is our mortal condition: alive, but dying. Breathing, but suffocating.

So the Son of God enters into this condition. He takes on flesh. He takes on lungs that must breathe. He takes on a body that can suffer. Hebrews tells us that *“in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears.”* He knows what it is to breathe the air of this fallen world. He knows what it is to groan, to weep, to cry out. And yet, unlike us, his breath is without sin. His life is holy. His spirit is undefiled.

Which is precisely why He is sent. Because the wages of sin is death. And if sinners are to live, then the it is a sinless man must die. If those who have corrupted the breath of life are to breathe again, then the One who has perfect life must give His up.

And so He does. On the cross, every breath is a labor. Every word is difficult. *“I thirst.”* *“Father, forgive them.”* *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* Each word is paid for with pain.

Until finally, there is one last word: *“It is finished.”* Everything required for your salvation. Every sin that must be carried. The very wrath of God against sinners. The very curse of Adam that lay upon your breath, your body, your life. All of it is finished.

And only then does he give up his spirit. Because Jesus isn't overtaken by death. He doesn't gasp out a final hope that perhaps something has been accomplished. No, he declares, he proclaims, he pronounces as a divine edict, "*It is finished.*" The work is done. The salvation of the world is complete. And only then, in full authority, He gives up his spirit.

And when Jesus breathes his last, something else begins. The old creation, bound to sin, bound to decay, bound to this fading breath, is brought to its end in him. He carries it all into death. He carries your sin, your guilt, your mortality, your final breath. He carries it all. And it dies with him.

So that something new may begin. Isaiah again says: "*Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.*" Pouring out His life isn't the end. It's the means to something more. The death of Christ is the doorway to life.

Because the one who gives up His spirit will take it up again. On the third day, he will breathe again. Not as one subject to death, but as the Lord of life. The breath that once left his body will return, never to depart again. And in that risen breath is life for all who belong to him. He dies that you may live.

That you may breathe again. Not merely with the fragile breath of this mortal life, but with the breath of the Spirit. For the risen Christ breathes on his disciples and says, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" The Creator breathes again into his new creation. The breath lost in Adam is restored in Christ. And it is given to you.

In the forgiveness of sins, your breath is no longer held captive by sin, death, and the devil. In the absolution spoken into your ears, the suffocation of sin is lifted. In the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you, the life he offered up becomes the life you receive. You live because he died.

You breathe because he gave up his breath. And so even now, in this life, your breathing is different. It's no longer the anxious gasp of one clinging to a life that we know will end in death. It is the steady breathing of one whose life is secure in Christ. Even as your body weakens, even as your breath one day will fail, you do not fear.

Because your life isn't in your lungs. Your life is in him. Your life is in the One who said, "*It is finished.*" Your life is in the One who gave up his spirit. Your life is in the One who now lives and reigns forever. When your final breath comes, it won't be the end. It'll be the moment you are brought into the presence of the One who conquered death by dying.

And on the last day, even your body will breathe again. The same Lord who breathed life into Adam, the same Lord who breathed his last upon the cross, will raise you. Your lungs will fill. Your body will live. Your spirit will rejoice.

In verse five of "O Love, How Deep" we sing, "For us by wickedness betrayed, for us, in crown of thorns arrayed, He bore the shameful cross and death; for us He gave His dying breath."

For us. The breath that once gave life to Adam is now given up for Adam's children. The holy lungs of the Son of God fall silent so that your sinful breath may be restored. Every step to the cross, every thorn in his brow, every nail in his hands and feet, every labored breath he took... for us.

And because it is for us, it is finished for us. When he gives up his spirit, he gives us life. When he breathes his last, he secures your first breath into eternity. So now you live, not by your own strength, not by the frail rhythm of your failing body, but by the finished work of Christ.

And when your final breath comes, it won't mean you have lost your life, but that you are given new life. It will be the moment you are gathered into the life he has won. For us he gave his dying breath. And because he did, you will breathe again. Amen.