

New Life For Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37:1-14

⁽¹⁾The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ⁽²⁾He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ⁽³⁾He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." ⁽⁴⁾Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁽⁵⁾This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁽⁶⁾I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' " ⁽⁷⁾So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁽⁸⁾I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁽⁹⁾Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " ⁽¹⁰⁾So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. ⁽¹¹⁾Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ⁽¹²⁾Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ⁽¹³⁾Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ⁽¹⁴⁾I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' " (NIV)

Focus verse: **He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.** (Ezekiel 37:3-6)

Construction season is upon us as summer begins. Once construction begins, the goal is to work without interruptions from weather until the project is complete. There are a few things, other than weather, that can bring a construction project to a halt. One is a “Stop Work” order from a judge. This usually stems from a legal protest about something that has been happening. A second item that can bring construction to a halt is a strike. Picketing workers can bring an end to the important work being done. Perhaps a more dramatic event is uncovering human bones during the excavation process. Finding human bones doesn’t happen all of the time, but when it does happen, it makes a big impression on the news media.

Recently, an area church bought a funeral home building at a tax sale. They were very shocked when they entered the building, for the funeral home owner had left four bodies in the funeral home. They had been there for several years after the funeral home closed. People were outraged at what had happened. Just as construction is stopped to allow the bones to be carefully removed and given honor and respect, so this church will stop their plans until the bodies can be identified and then respectfully removed from the building. We commonly understand the importance of honoring those who have died.

This is not something new to culture. As far back as the early days of creation, bodies were given honor and respect. Joseph didn't want his body, his bones, left behind in Egypt when the people of Israel left their captivity. He gave instructions for the people to take his bones with them when they left. This was such an important promise that it was still in the minds of the people four hundred years later. Moses would finally fulfill the promise to treat the bones with respect according to the request of the person involved.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." (Exodus 13:19)

The final gift we provide to our loved ones is to treat their bodies with respect and honor. It is appropriate that work should stop when human bones are uncovered at a construction work site.

Ezekiel wasn't involved in a construction project. Instead, he was living at a difficult time in the history of his country. The people were living in exile, separated from their homeland. They had no hope for the future. Everything was seemingly falling apart. Their homeland and their cherished city were both in decline. His situation was much like our world today. People are being exiled from their jobs. There are many questions about the future.

Many things are falling apart as major corporations are on the brink of failure. Major cities are in trouble.

It was in this situation in Ezekiel's life, that God revealed a vision to him, a vision of bones left on a battle field. The bones were a reminder that there had been a lost battle. The battle was so devastating that there was no one left to bury the bodies, to give honor and respect to the dead. The Psalmist speaks of a time like that when writing,

¹ O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. ² They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. ³ They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. (Psalm 79:1-3)

Not only are the bones an indication of a lost battle, but they are also dry bones. Dry bones are a reminder that much time has passed since the battle. The people living with anxious anticipation of a fast return were very disappointed. We understand that in our world today as many are anxious for a fast economic recovery that may or may not happen. Ezekiel also saw many bones, a reminder of how great the loss of life had been. God didn't just show this vision to Ezekiel. He placed him in the middle of the dry bones.

These dry bones in most other circumstances might have led to a "stop work" order. But in God's plan, things are entirely different. For God, this was the beginning of his work. First the bones must be sorted, so they could be reassembled. Once reassembled, they must then be reattached to muscles and tendons. God would then place skin over all of this. But even with this amazing miracle, there still was no life in these bodies and bones. To bring them to life, God must once again do what he did at the beginning of creation, and breathe into them new breath and life.

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

For these dry bones to come to life, God must send his breath, his Spirit into them to raise them to new life.

This event continues in our lives today. God has encountered our bones of sin and death. His plan is not a “stop work” order in our lives, but a “start work” order. The bones he encounters are bones found on a battle field where both God and Satan are found. Death is all around in this battle field just as it was at the beginning of this battle with a single man and woman. At creation, death became real.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3:19)

This battle field isn't just filled with many bodies. It is filled with all our bodies. We all are destined for this end of eternal exile from God without any hope and without a future. The Apostle Paul reminds us,

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

God's work would start with One who would be in the middle of the dry bones. It wasn't Ezekiel. It was Jesus Christ. What Jesus experienced was not a vision or a dream. It was real. He did not abandon the many dry bones. Instead He took action to give them life. That action required that His bones would be torn apart in a death by crucifixion. The lifeless bodies of sinners would be given His eternal breath from the cross. Each breath of pain and suffering was a beginning of life for sinners. His death fulfilled His promise to us,

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10a)

At His death, His body would be placed lovingly and carefully in the grave so that God's prophecy could be fulfilled,

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (Psalm 16:9-10)

Three days after His death, Jesus was given new life in resurrection. That new life is now daily breathed into us by a loving, living, and caring God.

The Pentecost event continues for us today. We come as many lifeless and dry bones when we stand at the baptismal font. When God places that water of baptism upon us, we receive that powerful Holy Spirit in our life. The Apostle Paul spoke of that as he wrote,

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit... (Titus 3:4-5)

God pours that living Holy Spirit in us when we recognize that we are dead and dry bones. God brings us back to life through that Holy Spirit that Ezekiel saw in that vision and through the great work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This gift brings with it more than just the gift of life. There is another benefit that is very important to us.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” (John 16:13)

This Holy Spirit now is at work in us to guide us into the truth of our death and the truth of new life through Jesus. Even more importantly, this Holy Spirit “will tell you what is yet to come.”

The Apostle Paul speaks of what is to come. It is our own dry bones raised to life. He writes,

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must

clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (I Corinthians 15:51-54)

Through Jesus, now we see that our bodies will not be left as dry bones on that battlefield.

Instead, they will be restored to even more glorious, imperishable, immortal bodies that will serve Jesus forever!

You might wonder who this message is for. Is it just for many? Or is it for you? It is a message for those who are in exile. It is a message for those who have no hope. It is for those whose world is falling apart. It is for all people. As you look upon that valley once again today, believe the work God has accomplished through Jesus Christ and his life given on the cross for you.

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 37:3-6)