

“Sovereign Lord, You Alone Know” (Ezekiel 37:1–14)(3.22.20)

Ezekiel 37:1–14 (NIV84) **The Valley of Dry Bones**

37 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.’ ”

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: “Sovereign Lord, You Alone Know”

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

What does this ancient account in Ezekiel have to do with us? I say everything. Do you really think, like so many of this modern age, that the human race has improved as a species? I say, “It has not.” Human nature has not changed. We are like our first parents, Adam and Eve. We are like the wayward children of Israel. We in the Church are not immune to human folly. But, we are supposed to be the voice crying in the wilderness,

“Make straight the way for the LORD.” If we look and live like the world, no one will hear our voice.

BODY:

This is an amazing text. The imagery is dramatic. With machine gun repetition we hear: bones, bones, dry bones; a whole valley filled with bones. It is a dreadful depiction of death, of hopelessness. The dead bones had not even been retrieved and placed in the family ossuary. There is no nation. There is no people. They have been exiled or slain. There is no hope. “Son of man, can these bones live?”

How did this happen? How is it even possible? It happened through disobedience to the Sovereign Lord. It’s possible because they deserted the Sovereign Lord. The prophets came and the prophets warned. The people killed the Lord’s messengers. Idolatry, immorality, and irresponsibility to the widow and orphan results in a valley of bones. From the very beginning Yahweh had told Israel that their failures would lead to exile. (Leviticus 26:33) And so, decimation and destruction came upon God’s chosen people. “Son of man, can these bones live?”

Our nation is a valley of dry bones. Heartbreakingly, there are the tiny bones of 61 million children sacrificed to Molech. We opine the opioid crisis. We fear fentanyl. Suicide rates are on the rise. These are symptoms of soul sickness. People are crying out for connection. In place of a relationship with the living God and our neighbor, we have substituted our screens. There is no end to our idolatry. The basic unit of humanity, the family, has been under attack. Where are the fathers? More and more, raising children has become the job of the state and the schools. And, the schools are not places of learning but of indoctrination. We cannot make enough laws to overcome human depravity; and, we cannot build enough prisons to incarcerate all the criminals. At the same time, what was once sin, is now sanctioned and even promoted by our government. Gambling has become an industry on which whole communities depend. Methadone and needles are supplied with the public tax dollar. Pornography has infiltrated every crack in the culture. Human trafficking, child sex-trafficking, violates all that is good on many levels. We have so much “stuff” that the Self-Storage industry has flourished. While at the same time, those in need struggle for the basic necessities.

Whether you get your statistics from Gallup or The Barna Group, there is a steady decline in the U.S. Christian Church. And, the decline has accelerated. In the last 20 years, attendance has dropped 20 percentage points. Thousands of churches close every year. The culture has invaded our churches, meaning that many attenders are likely not true disciples of Jesus. Celebrity pastors make big news as they fall from grace. Prosperity preaching abounds. People want a valet Jesus to wait on them.

The United Methodist Church is part of that sharp decline the Protestant Mainline Churches face. The bishops chorused, "Unity, unity, when there was no unity." Now they chorus, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Methodism has not been a movement in the US for quite some time. Instead, it is a monolith, an institution primarily focused on maintenance. In our efforts to become more relevant to the culture, we have become more relative to the culture.

Many of our local churches are surrounded by cemeteries. Sadly, oftentimes there is more life outside the building than inside the building. When we preach the Valley of Dry Bones, we open the windows so that all the dead may hear. Our congregations are aging out. The list of "shut-ins" grows while Sunday schools languish. Leadership positions lie vacant and those that are left are burning out by carrying too large of a burden.

"Son of man, can these bones live?" O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

The Israelites in the desert quarreled with Moses and Aaron because of their thirst. The LORD told Moses to speak to the rock and it will pour out its water. Paul recounts in 1 Corinthians 10:3-4 (NIV84):

3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14) Yes, the Lord Jesus is the only satisfactory solution to spiritual thirst.

For dead dry bones to come to life we need the Spirit of God. We need God to breathe life into our churches, into our nation. This must happen with each person. As pastors, we must prophecy this truth; proclaim it; preach it. We are to be Ezekiel; to prophecy to the dry bones; to prophecy to the breath of God; to call on the Sovereign LORD to come from the four winds. We are to be prophets proclaiming God's word, proclaiming God's promises. Now, I wrote these words a few weeks ago for a class on preaching. This was when Covid19 was something happening overseas. This was before being reminded what we learned as five year olds, to wash our hands. This was before social distancing. This was before restricted gatherings. This was before the governor's order to stay at home. My friends it is time for the world to awake. It is time for our spiritual eyes to open.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN preached 140 years ago:

The valley full of dry bones is but too correct a description of the aspect which a world 'dead in trespasses and sins' bears, when seen from the mountain-top by pure and heavenly eyes. The activities of godless lives mask the real spiritual death, which is the condition of every soul that is separated from God. Galvanised corpses may have muscular

movements, but they are dead, notwithstanding their twitching. They that live without God are dead while they live.

We may note that it is possible to have the outward form of a living body, and yet to have no life. Churches and individuals may be perfectly organised and perfectly dead. Creeds may be articulated most correctly, every bone in its place, and yet have no vitality in them. Forms of worship may be punctiliously proper, and have no breath of life in them. Religion must have a body, but often the body is not so much the organ as the sepulchre of the spirit. We have to take heed that the externals do not kill the inward life.

So-called Christian teachers, who do not believe that the race is dead in sin, or who, believing it, do not feel the tragedy of the fact, and the power lodged in their hands to bring the true life, may prophesy to the dry bones forever, and there will be no shaking among them.

CONCLUSION:

Today, I prophecy to the dry bones that fill the valley. I prophecy to the breath of God. Imagine standing in the middle of that valley of dry bones when the rattling starts. Feel the hairs on the back of your neck stand up as the bones come together. Feel the tingling in your limbs as the skeletons are covered with flesh. Feel the weakness in your knees as you witness this valley of corpses filled with the breath of God, as they rise from their gruesome grave and become an army of new life.

Yes, our God is the Lord of life. Our God is the God of restoration and revival. Our God is the God of resurrection. "Son of man, can these bones live?" O Sovereign Lord, you tell us in your word: Colossians 2:13-14 (NIV84)

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

The Sovereign Lord says, "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."

Amen and amen. Let us pray.