

# Can These Bones Live

By Dr. Brian DeVries

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**Bible Text:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

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## **Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation**

540 Crescent St NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Website:** [www.hnrc.org](http://www.hnrc.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/hnrc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/hnrc)

And then our Scripture reading this morning is from the prophet Ezekiel, the book of Ezekiel chapter 37. We will read the first 14 verses of this prophecy.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-14.

So far God's Word from his Word to us this morning.

No doubt each one of us has been following the news of the economic situation in the world and particularly, of course, in Wall Street in New York City. Dow Jones Industrial Average falling so many points for so many days in a row. And all of us, of course, are aware of this news, this financial situation. It causes concern, no doubt, not only to the investors, but to many of us, perhaps, who are concerned about the future of the economy, about our jobs, about other financial matters, a cause for concern, no doubt.

And any of us who have access to any form of media, of course, cannot also avoid the other issue that is a cause for concern, the political situation in North America. We are all bombarded, of course, particularly in Michigan here by political statements of the various parties, all, of course, promoting their own cause and we, as Christians look at the cause, below the cause. We look at the Christian cause, of course, and we look at the Christian ideology of the various individuals that are running for office. And, we, of course, in a pulpit, a place like this, a church gathering, we don't support any particular party. Of course not. The pulpit is no place for that and we make no prophecies either about whether one is the antichrist or anything like this. This is foolish thinking.

But we are very concerned, are we not, about the state of the political situation, the moral situation here in North America. And as we see the various political parties and we recognize there is not that much that is really strongly in support of Christian values, we wonder, don't we? We wonder what might happen and we, of course, are called to vote accordingly.

Economically there is challenges. Politically there are many challenges. But let's go a little deeper. What about the moral situation in North America, the moral environment in our land, this land that we love. Politically there are major issues, but we know that many of these are caused by socioeconomic, cultural, undertones of immorality, godlessness.

Or I was at a conference earlier this week. We were talking there, a missions conference, about churchless Christianity. People who call themselves Christians, but Sunday morning they are not in a church or they are travelling to various churches each week, churchless Christianity, not part of a church family. And that is just one symptom of a greater issue in North America here of immorality and debauchery and all these challenges and sin that we see in just the media lone, for instance.

So financially, politically, morally there are many challenges that we are facing here in North America at this present time, this very morning.

But that is not the focus of the message this morning. That is not the focus of God's Word this morning because we need to get even deeper. As Christians we look deeper. We look at the spiritual state of society. Not just the morality, the outward way of living, but spiritually where... what is the condition of the souls?

This morning as you drove to church, maybe 15 minutes, maybe 20, maybe longer. How many souls did you pass on the way to church? Houses full of people, cars, people.

Maybe you to go to shopping centers, you know, or malls or airports that you travel some and you see a crowds of people. What is the state of their soul?

What is the state of their soul, their state before God, their never dying soul that is either spiritual dead or being spiritually recreated alive? Well, let's come a little closer. What about our church? Not just churches, but our church? What is the state of our soul? What is the state of our spiritual life, our walk with God? Is it strong? Is it vibrant? Or is it dead?

Are we still outside of Christ? Are we still in this state of spiritual deadness? How about your own family? Maybe the Lord has given you spiritual life that desires after him, the panting for his Christ. What about your children? What is their spiritual state? Some of them, perhaps, outwardly displaying the fact that they are not Christians, at least not in their hearts. Others perhaps we call it serious minded in our circles, don't we, but we know that serious minded is not enough for salvation, or your own soul.

I know there are people here in this church, in my church family, who come to church week after week, year after year, decade after decade and still profess, "I am not a Christian in my heart."

They hear the message, but some how it doesn't awaken them and give them new life. What is your own spiritual state?

And when we consider these things we recognize that the spiritual crisis in America, the spiritual crisis in our own churches even is a greater issue than all the other these other concerns I just listed.

What is your spiritual state before God in our never dying souls?

These things are in back of the message this morning. We will return to them.

I want to focus with you, though, this morning on our text. Our text is from Ezekiel chapter 37 and really the whole thing, verses one through 14 is the passage this morning for our text, because I am going to look at each verse with you. But I want to just read with you right now verse three which is the pivot point, the turning point in this passage. And we will explain that later.

Verse three of Ezekiel 37.

"And he [that is God, the Lord] said unto me [that is Ezekiel], Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 37:3.

Can these bones live? Three thoughts. First, the battle field of bones that we find here in this passage; second, the Spirit of prophecy. And in the bulletin I see the letter S in spirit is not capitalized. It is not the person who makes the bulletin's fault. That is my fault. It should be a capital S there. And then also the third point, the promise of the Lord. The bones, the Spirit and the promise.

Who is Ezekiel the prophet? Now this is one of those books in the Old Testament that when you come to it in your private devotions, perhaps, or your family reading you kind of stumble through it sometimes, don't you, if you don't really take the time to really in depth understand the background and also the context in which this prophecy is given.

Ezekiel is a prophet, both a prophet and a priest speaking to the children of particularly Judah, but to those Israelites who are exiled starting roughly at 597 BC and prophesying for about 20 some years. So from 597 to 577 or so, which, if you know your Old Testament history well, is the period in which Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

So Ezekiel's prophecy starts by predicting the fall of Judah, the southern kingdom, Jerusalem to the Babylonians. And he ends by giving comfort to God's people who are in exile.

In chapter 37 we are coming toward the end of the book, assuming that it is in chronological order. And this is likely happening right around the fall of Jerusalem or probably just after the fall to the people in exile encouraging them, comforting them, giving them hope again as we will see.

Now he sees this very unusual vision. We will examine it together. A battlefield of bones. Who is he speaking to? Well, he is speaking to people, most likely after the fall of Jerusalem, certainly long after the fall of Samaria the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, speaking to God's covenant people in exile in a state of destruction really, despair, despondency, discouragement.

You think the financial crisis is bad here in America or the political situation, but consider the situation, the days of these people. Jerusalem destroyed, the temple burned, nothing left, the stone cast down, people in exile all because of prophecy that was fulfilled. Their sins brought judgment upon themselves and now they are reaping the results of their activities.

The people were discouraged, no doubt. And any hope of being returned to the land, we find that.... those themes throughout this passage. Any hope of being restored as a nation almost impossible. It seemed unlikely?

So God here is stressing his sovereign power and ability to work mighty revival.

Now this is the first of several prophecies in this chapter and the next that seek to focus on how God will make a difference in the life of his people. And these prophecies give us

hope today as well as we understand the context of that day, but also as we understand our own context and show how God's Word also applies to us in the same way, and the same truths can be learned from this passage, a passage meant to encourage.

Verse one. Look at it with me.

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley.”<sup>3</sup>

The first question we must answer is: Who is the spirit of the Lord? Because that seems to be the agent here, doesn't it? Not the prophet, it is the prophet being moved by the spirit and so we start by understanding the Spirit of the Lord, the hand of the Lord in the spirit of the Lord.

Now let's pause there a second. The word “spirit” in Hebrew is the same word as the word breath. And normally we wouldn't get into all the differences of terminology, Hebrew terminology, perhaps in a study like this, but this is very important for this passage. Spirit and breath, two English words, but one word in the Hebrew.

So just think about this passage now. Verse one, the spirit of the Lord.

But then look down verse five, verse six, verse eight. What do we see here?

Verse five. Cause breath to enter into the bones.

Or verse eight. “There was no breath in them.”<sup>4</sup>

Same word in the Hebrew as the word “spirit.” That must be established before we can understand this passage. The same applies, then, of course, further on the passage.

Verse nine. Prophecy to the wind or the breath or the spirit and say to the wind or the breath or the spirit, “Come from the four spirits or winds or breath and breathe on these slain.”

All one word in the Hebrew.

But who is the Spirit of the Lord? We find the Lord's Spirit here in the Old Testament often not as clearly described, though he is certainly present, but we find particularly in books like Ezekiel and Jeremiah reference particularly future looking reference of what the Spirit would do. And so, too, in this chapter we studied together.

This is the Lord's Spirit, the third person of the trinity, almighty God, the Spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ we learn in the New Testament. That is who is moving the prophet in this chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 37:1.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 37:8.

How about that second phrase, though, the hand of the Lord? This, too, is a very important phrase that sets the context for this passage.

If you do a word study on this phrase, “The hand of the Lord,” particularly in the Old Testament you find it refers to God’s power at work in the world which is none other than God’s Spirit of power at work in the world through Christ.

We find that also in Acts chapter 11 verses 19 and 20. We find the hand of the Lord was with the disciples, the believers and there was a great revival in the city of Antioch. So two very important phrases here that start this passage and give us the tone.

The Spirit is upon the prophet and brings him to this valley, this battlefield of bones.

“...set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.”<sup>5</sup>

Now this valley can also be interpreted as a wide open area, probably in the hilly region. It was just a flat area in the midst of mountains, perhaps. A likely place for battlefields to take place, battles to happen in those days with two armies, large armies come together with swords and other implements of war, a plain, an open area. No doubt this is picturing where two armies had clashed and there had been a great massacre and the bodies were left on the surface. In fact, it says an open valley. You can also translate that the bones were on the surface of the valley laying there exposed.

So here is this wide open vision that the prophet receives of all these bones, all these skulls and arm bones and bones, gruesome. Imagine it. You know, we see pictures, today perhaps in the media or other sources.

Cambodia killing fields, bones from the regime there that was so merciless or Hitler’s concentration camps. Heaps and heaps of skulls. Or even the American Civil War must have been gruesome like that as well, battlefield of bones.

And I see a [?] in this vision. We are supposed to kind of recoil, to draw back from the gruesomeness of this whole picture. In fact, what does it say?

The Spirit, verse two, caused Ezekiel to pass around them, almost as if the prophet is taken on this inspection tour wandering around past heaps of skulls and other bones. That is the idea here in this vision. Gross, gruesome.

The atmosphere of death permeated the place. That is the picture being given to us here in verses one and two, terrifying really.

But drawing attention to the finality and the terribleness of this massacre, thousands, perhaps millions, it doesn’t give us a number, of bones.

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<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 37:1.

A cemetery is a much nicer sight than what the prophet saw, just to put things in context, because in cemeteries we cover it over, don't we? We have flowers even. But the prophet saw the stark reality of death.

Now what did the Lord ask the prophet at this very point? When this vision is fresh in his view, what does the Lord ask the prophet?

Verse three.

“And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?”<sup>6</sup>

Really that is an incredible question, isn't it? If we were to walk though the Cambodia killing fields—I have never been there, but if you can imagine—or just imagine what it must be like for this prophet to walk though these bones and he gets the question: Can these dead bones, these very dry bones, verse two, can these bones live?

Maybe bleached in the sun. Can they live? Will these bones live again is the question the prophet is asked.

And there is almost like it is a negative rhetorical question. It is impossible, is it not, for these bones to come to life again, for them to live? But it is a question asked by almighty God, the Lord. Notice capital letters. Yahweh, the covenant keeping God of the Old Testament, the triune God of the promise in the New Testament, same eternal almighty God asked this question. Can these bones live?

And we know and the prophet knew all things are possible with God.

How does he replay? How does Ezekiel answer?

Children, what does he say here? Verse three.

“And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.”<sup>7</sup>

What kind of answer is this? How should we interpret this answer? Was it as some have said a very evasive, kind of an answer kind of get out of the question. You are asked a pointed question and you kind of deflect and you say, “Ah,” you give an answer return that really doesn't answer the question, but gives a response at least. Oh, Lord, thou knowest, evasive.

Or is it more of an indifferent answer? Yeah, maybe. It is possible, I suppose. Maybe it is possible for these bones to live. It is an indifferent answer.

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<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel 37:3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Or is it an answer of wonder and trust? Oh Lord God, he evokes the covenant keeping name. Actually, he puts together both the almighty God and the covenant keeping name Yahweh. Oh Lord, sovereign Lord, sovereign keeper of the covenant, thou knowest.

I think this, as we see later as well, as well is an answer of faith. This answer displays the faith of the prophet in the covenant keeping and sovereign Lord. Oh Lord, thou knowest. All things that... it is impossible, but all things are possible with thee.

How about putting the question a little bit closer?

Situations in our own life, not just the financial crisis, perhaps, or financial questions that are surrounding us. Not just the moral decay of our nation, the onslaught and evilness that we see around us, the temptations that bombard us. But let's come a little closer to our church, to our own ministries.

Maybe you are one of the workers in Sunday school or some other ministry, jail or prison ministry and your hands they are hanging down right now because the work, well, it goes on. It continues. Maybe Sunday school, every Sunday afternoon and you really wouldn't like to spend time with the family and this is a lot of work. It is a huge commitment not just on Sunday, but preparing as well. Or whatever ministry you are a part of, or maybe as a mother praying of that son or that daughter that seems to be going every step in the wrong direction.

We are dealing with spiritual issues here in this chapter. This is not a literal prophecy as we will soon see. This is a spiritual matter. And the question comes to the prophet: Can these bones live? The question comes to us, as well. The situation in which you are working, the situation in which you find yourself, in Sunday school. As the children are there goofing off, talking with a coworker at work. Can these bones live?

How can this sinner ever be given new life? How can this hopeless situation be turned around? How can my life be made conformable to the image of Christ when I live like this, when I have these sins plaguing me or these temptations bombarding me? How can I ever get through to my son? It seems like there is no communication. Talk to the hand is the only response. How can I get through to him?

Can these bones live?

How can we as a church be witness in this community when there are so many things testifying against us? Oh, they are just rich people with nice cars. They don't care about us. Or even deeper, maybe our own inconsistencies that stand in the way. Or the hardness of those we reach. How can we do mission work? How can we do evangelism? The question comes to us as it came to Ezekiel in this battle field of bones. Can these bones live? Is this possible? Can life be given to spiritual dead people?

Now this prophecy some have interpreted it with a literal meaning, saying that this literally will happen some day after this point in which Ezekiel receives this prophecy.



Israel will be returned to their own land. Either the return of the exiles from Babylon or perhaps 1948 when Israel returned to Palestine more recently. Some have tried to find a contemporary literal meaning in these words. Somehow or other the Jewish nation will be restored.

But most reformed commentaries leave the literal aside and say the meaning is spiritual and that is the safe answer as well, because look at verse 11. God himself says to Ezekiel:

“These bones are the whole house of Israel.”<sup>8</sup>

These bones represent the spiritual reality of the state of the church in Ezekiel’s day. That is God’s interpretation. We will come back to that later.

So this prophecy, rather than being literal, a return to the land by either the Jewish nation or whatever ethnic group wants to read these words for themselves. I think that is misinterpreting Scripture.

These bones are the house of Israel. These bones refer to the state of the Church in Ezekiel’s day and the state of God’s people in our day today, spiritually bankrupt, spiritually dry, even dead.

And so Ezekiel gives this prophecy to the people of the Lord, rather he gives it through Ezekiel to the people in order what? In order to encourage them not to look at the circumstances, the deadness of the bones, but to place their trust in him. In order for them to place their trust and hope in the promised one and to cause them to desire him. And that is the same meaning for us today.

So when we consider situations in our own life and our own ministries, perhaps and the ministry that the Lord gives each one of his people in this place, the personal witness, what... however that finds expression of all of God’s people, when we consider these things, we look at this prophecy not just to focus on the hopelessness of this battle field in which we find ourselves, but rather to look away from this hopelessness and this hopeless situation, to look away from ourselves and the circumstances and, rather, to answer with Ezekiel in faith, “Oh Lord, God, thou knowest.”

Will my son return again to the faith? Oh Lord God, thou knowest.

Will I be able to preach thy Word in Sunday school and share it and witness it in such a way so that many others also are added to this, to thy church? Oh, Lord God, thou knowest.

What about this stony heart perhaps one of you says. That still does not fear thee after decades of worship in this place. Oh Lord God, thou knowest.

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<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 37:11.

You see, God can take this dead stony heart that you might have and turn it into a life breathing, living, faith demonstrating soul.

Ezekiel knew this. And so he is very careful to demonstrate his faith in the sovereign Lords.

“Thou knowest, oh Lord.”

And he cautiously places his hope in this reality because Ezekiel knew the Lord as the whole book testifies and he knew the power of the Spirit of the Word of prophecy.

The second point to which we turn. The spirit of prophecy.

Let me look with you at five or six statements in these verses. Let’s just pick out a few of them to get the idea. Verse two. Let me highlight this, the last part of verse two.

It says:

“...and, lo, they were very dry.”<sup>9</sup>

I have already spent some time here, but let me just make note of this again. They were very dry, these bones, very dry.

Often when we are doing evangelism, let’s say, or when we are hoping that a change will come in the person to which we were witnessing, we look for signs of life, don’t we? And that is a good thing. But without the work of the Lord, these bones are very dry.

Total depravity is a doctrine that we confess and a doctrine that finds expression. When we deal with others in the community, for instance, as we seek to evangelize or in our own families even as we seek to be a witness, a careful quiet witness, we want to give credit to the condition, but there is no hope in the human situation.

Even in missions sometimes, in missions literature they look for this wider hope. Maybe some common goodness in people, but no. It is not there. The bones in this illustration, this vision are very dry. We must look elsewhere for hope. And so none of our hopes can be placed on anything in humanness or in the human condition.

Verse four. What do we see? Verse four.

Ezekiel is commanded to prophecy.

“Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 37:2.

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 37:4.

I love this verse because it describes so beautifully, it depicts, it gives us a picture of what ministry is all about. Maybe you are teaching your children from youth and you are fulfilling your baptism vows and you are patiently instructing them, patiently instructing them, but it just seems as if it... you know the expression in one ear, out the other or as if you are talking to a brick wall or as if it has no effect.

What is Ezekiel commanded to do?

“Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.”<sup>11</sup>

Evangelism is like standing in a cemetery and offering food to the first one who takes it. Anyone here in this cemetery want some free food? No doubt you are hungry. Come and get some free food. That is evangelism.

We offer the gospel. We speak the truth. We let the bones hear the Word of the Lord to people who are dead knowing full well they are dead, in fact, knowing full well they are very dry. But this is what we are commanded to do as Christians. It is not optional to speak with those around us who do not know our Savior. It is not optional.

Speak to the bones. Hear ye the Word of the Lord.

You notice the authority there doesn't come from the speaker. The Word of the Lord comes with authority in itself.

Command them. Hear the Word.

Verse six. God makes a promise here. Speak to the bones:

“And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live.”<sup>12</sup>

That is motivation for our work, isn't it, whatever our ministry is. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will says the Lord.

We only have to share the Word to dry dead bones. We have to look away from the situation and look the Word and share this powerful message, this passionate truth, the gospel promise. God will.

Think of what this meant for the people in Ezekiel's day in exile, on the banks of Babylon. Their harps are hung on the willows, singing a dirge, a death song, mournful melodies, recognizing the hopelessness of their situation.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 37:6.

Think of what this meant to the people that day. Hopelessness permeated their thinking no doubt, but God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will do all of the se things. Speak the Word of the Lord.”

That is the command. That is the promise. That is the glorious activity of gospel witness that each Christian is called to do. Each believer who has experienced the truth of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is commanded to share that truth with others knowing full well that nothing in themselves will accomplish anything.

Verse eight.

“...but there was no breath in them.”<sup>13</sup>

These bones, no breath in them.

Maybe some of you are discouraged in whatever activity you are engaged in these days. I am being general, of course, speaking in general terms about ministry because the Lord gives each one of us a separate one, but maybe you are discouraged and you say, “Ah, but there is no breath in them.”

But kids come to Sunday school. There is a large crowd, but there is no spiritual life there. Unable to witness to people I speak to them, I share with them, I am ministering. Maybe the rest homes, maybe in other situations, but it seems like it is plowing on rocks. There is no breath in them.

Ezekiel saw the bones coming together. See the power of the Word bringing the bones together, sinews upon them even, a great noise shaking, amazing things. But no breath in them.

And in this, too, we must confess our dependency again upon the Lord, must we not? The Word may come with power. All of the arguments may be lined up. It may be exegeted perfectly. All the tactics and strategies may be employed in missions, let’s say or in evangelism or in whatever methodology we are finding ourselves finding comfort in. But all these things are hopeless. They only bring bone together. And that we must always confess.

Spurgeon has a sermon, I forget which one, I was listening to recently. He talks about a church. Some churches, he says, are like ... what does he call it? A crowd of corpses. People coming together weekly coming together but there is no life there. There is no spiritual vibrancy. There is no true spiritual commitment.

And I am not judging this church. I am not judging any particular church. I am making note of the fact, though, there can be coming together. There can be outward success on our results. There can be numbers as we humans always want, but without the power of the breath, the Spirit, there is no life.

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<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel 37:8.

So that causes us to look further into the text.

Verse nine. So the Lord said to Ezekiel:

“Prophesy unto the wind.”<sup>14</sup>

You know, this is... the Lord speaks this way to those who are faithful in ministry and he speaks verse nine to us when we are discouraged, sometimes, doesn't he? When we recognize the impossibilities that we return in faith to the Lord and say, “Thou knowest,” when we see some minor result, upward result on our work and yet don't see what we are really looking for we can get discouraged. And then the Lord comes with verse nine.

He says:

“Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain.”<sup>15</sup>

Now step back a second. That word “wind” in this version, the King James Version, other versions I think maybe it says breath or even Spirit in some versions, perhaps, I don't know. Prophesy to the Spirit. Prophesy to the breath. That is the idea here. It is the same word in the Hebrew I said earlier.

The Lord tells the prophet to prophesy to the Spirit. Now what does he tell him to tell him?

Thus says the Lord, an oracle from God, a command with a promise. Thus says the Lord God. So speaks almighty God with authority and power. Say this.

“Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain.”<sup>16</sup>

The coming of the Holy Spirit is to prophesy and this verse... perhaps you put a question mark there next to it. You say, “But now can we sons of men, daughters of men, how do we have the authority to speak to the Spirit of God in that way?”

Because we know we need the Spirit. We know that without the Spirit giving life, they are but dead bones. No breath, no spirit in them. The situation is desperately hopeless without the Spirit, without spiritual life. How do we have that authority to command with an oracle, “Come, Holy Spirit, breathe.”

But it says it here, doesn't it?

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<sup>14</sup> Ezekiel 37:9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Prophesy unto the Spirit. And so that is our prayer and that is the prayer and confession of the Church of all ages. When we consider the bones around us and the Word within us. We prophesy to the Spirit. We say, "Come, Holy Spirit, come."

When we see the Sunday School children, when we re ministering in the jail ministry, when we are talking to our coworker and he is bringing all these endless arguments against the faith, when we are trying to reason very carefully with a friend from our past friend from high school many years ago who has now denied and we are trying, trying, trying to bring him back to what he once knew and we see it is not going anywhere. This is our prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit.

It is a confession, first of all, I think, a confession of our dependency, a confession of our weakness.

I like that phrase that the Lord uses, son of man. That is throughout the book of Ezekiel. It highlights the prophet's humanity, his weakness, his nothing in God's sight and our nothingness even as we are witnesses for Christ.

Son of man, this son of man confesses his dependency upon the sovereign Lord, a confession of dependency on the Spirit of God.

Our ministries are nothing without the Spirit. Our feeble efforts, maybe if other ministries, tract ministries, sending out literature all around the world, or books, our ministries are nothing without the blessing of the Holy Spirit and if we ever think they are anything more than nothing we are in the wrong place, because without the Spirit there is no breath in them.

And so this is a confession, first of all a confession of dependency on the Spirit of God and a prayer, the prayer of the Church of all ages.

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe, give life, give spirit, give breath to dead bones.

And that is the prophet's duty. And you, if you are a believer, it is your duty because in the New Testament we are all prophets.

Revelation 19:10.

"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."<sup>17</sup>

We are all prophets in this sense that we are called to speak the Word with the prayer that the Spirit will bless the Word to our audience, whoever that audience may be.

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<sup>17</sup> Revelation 19:10.

So the prophet prophesies and so the Spirit comes and so a great army is raised, verse 10, an exceeding great army, the result of the Spirit's revival, an exceeding great army.

Beyond human calculations, expectations, forecast and analysis, none of that. When the Spirit works, we only can marvel. When the Spirit chooses to us, sinful sons and daughters of men then we marvel. We say, "Wow. This is the Lord at work."

Do you, my friends, do you expect the Lord to work in this way today? Do you expect a revival?

We see the bones around us. That is undeniable. We can detail all the various pieces and parts of the body skeleton, I suppose, if we look at our society. We see the bones around us and they are very dry. Do you expect revival? Do you expect the Lord to work in his own sovereign time, in his own sovereign way, but work mightily in revival? Are you praying this?

If the question came to you as you are engaged in whatever ministry is laid upon your shoulders, if the question came to you and the Lord said to you, "Can these bones live?" your answer would be what?

When you look at your grandchildren and you count them every day perhaps in prayer and you count the ones who are believers and you count the ones who are not believers, do you expect the Lord to work wonders? Can these bones live? Is your answer an answer of faith, sovereign surrender and confession and faith and hope and trust in the I wills of the Lord?

Thou Lord, oh Lord, thou knowest. Sovereign God of grace, though knowest.

Do you have faith in the power of a sovereign Savior and his Spirit?

Or maybe you are one of those who still rejects the Savior, the gospel promise, the I will so clearly explained, not my words, God's Word.

I will do all these things for them and they shall glorify me.

And you still say you know... you know, the phrase talk to the hand. That is what young people use among each other. But do you know what you are doing? When you deny this promise, when you reject the gospel promise as it goes out.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."<sup>18</sup>

You are saying to God, "Talk to the hand, God." That is your words. And yet God comes with power and in Spirit, strives with your spirit year after year perhaps.

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 16:31.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Confess your sins and be saved. He is the one who gives life and he is the one who is striving with the Spirit even now.

Do you believe the Lord can work wonders today? And do you passionately desire, passionately, expectantly desire to see the Lord work wonders not only here in America, but around the globe? Why not? Isn't our God almighty? Isn't he the gracious covenant keeping God of the Bible? Isn't he the one that worked throughout history, great revivals? Why can't he send revival in Africa like he did in Europe so many years ago? Why can't he transform a continent with so many challenges like our own? Why can't he raise up a church from all generations, for all areas and ethnic groups? Do you expect the Lord to do great things?

I think this chapter gives us hope like he gave hope to the people of God in Ezekiel's day. It gives us hope and expectation in the Lord God and it causes us to look away from the circumstances and the bones that surround us and to look to the sovereign Lord God who has sent his Spirit at Pentecost so that the nations may know that he is God.

And we will consider this promise, this glorious truth. Ezekiel the prophet came to the people in his day with this message from the Lord. We have considered it together, this vision that is to inspire hope and encouragement for the people in Ezekiel's day to encourage them to place their trust and faith and hope in the Lord God, the sovereign, covenant keeping gracious God and to realize that in him and in his deliverance worked by his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the covenant keeper, that they would then know the Lord, this relationship of love with the triune God.

Ye shall know that I am the Lord, this covenant fellowship.

So Ezekiel came to inspire, to motivate, to encourage faith, hope and love to the people in his day. And he comes, the living Word of God still comes to us today for the same purpose, for the same reason, to inspire in us the faith to look away from ourselves and the deadness of our situation, to grip, to hold on to that hope set before us, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who gives the Spirit.

To Christ, the one who gave his life for sinners, to Christ, the one who shed his blood so that covenant breakers like the people in Ezekiel's day who were in exile because of their sinfulness, because of their depravity, because of their repeated sin against God continually saying to him "talk to the hand," because of that sin they are in exile and yet the Christ, the Messiah has come to give hope to these people and to give hope to us as well, to each person here, even those who have been rejecting him for decades.

He comes to give his blood so that ye shall know that I am the Lord, the gracious God, the sovereign one who forgives, who reconciles, who receives back and who gives celebration and joy.



And that is the reason the Spirit is sent at Pentecost and the reason the Spirit goes out in the world today to all nations and the reason the Word of God comes to you this morning with a prayer that the Spirit will prophesy through it.

Speak to our souls to give us encouragement, faith, hope and love.

Now, three things to conclude with. Three things. First, God's commentary on Ezekiel's vision. How does God interpret this vision? We have been studying various passages here, but verses 11 and 12 there is some insight here I think we cannot overlook.

"Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel."<sup>19</sup>

So a spiritual vision of the spiritual state of God's people.

"...they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts."<sup>20</sup>

That is the language of the people of Israel. And sometimes we hear that language today, don't we?

Oh, there is no good in me. There is nothing I can do. There is no way for me to be saved. The promise isn't for me.

And the slough of despond kind of thinking, wallow along in the mire of the slough of despond.

Look at me. I am such a sinner.

All true statements if we know ourselves.

"...they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts."<sup>21</sup>

They say, "There is no hope here. Let's just give up and die."

They are not looking to me. They are looking at the bones.

"Our bones are dried."<sup>22</sup>

They are looking the wrong direction.

But I like the next word, verse 12. God says to Ezekiel, "This is what they are saying..."

Therefore, say to them. Therefore because they are talking like this...

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<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel 37:11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

“Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.”<sup>23</sup>

I have been prying the verb that is there present in the Hebrew.

I didn't even count the I wills in this one. But see what God is doing. To the very people who are wallowing in the mire of the slough of despond and saying the situation is hopeless and hanging their head in despair, God says, “Therefore,” telling them the promise.

Tell them the promise again. I will, perhaps seven times. I will do all these things, says God. They say we are cut off. God says something different. He gives hope. He gives us hope.

But, secondly, in conclusion, there is another thing I think we need to highlight in this whole passage. God's promise, his sovereignty, his graciousness, his sovereignty and ability to save and the sovereignty even of the Spirit in salvation, all these things are highlighted here, are they not? Wonderful passage if we ever were discussing with some one about the fact that salvation is all of grace, a wonderful passage. I have used it many times.

But there is something else there that is also present in this passage that we cannot overlook and I must talk about it as we close.

What was the prophet's duty in all of this? Three times he is told to do what? Three times the Lord says, the sovereign Lord says, “Prophesy, son of man. You, the weak one, the son of man, the one who has no power, prophesy. Prophesy to these bones,” witnessing to those around us who are lifeless and spiritually. Prophesy to the Spirit praying, “Holy Spirit come. Come with power.” Prophesy to these people, verse 12. Repeat the promise to them, not just to the lifeless ones who do not know the promise, but especially to my people, says the Lord. They need to hear the promise again when their situation seems hopeless. Repeat the promise again.

Ezekiel's duty was to prophesy, to speak the Word of the Lord with boldness and clarity, to speak the authoritative Word with no authority in ourselves, to speak plainly and clearly the truths of Scripture, to simply put it in examples and illustrations, to teach it in the way, out of the way, in season, out of season, to rebuke, to correct, to instruct.

See, that is prophecy in that sense of the word. We are not charismatic, we are biblical. We believe in prophecy, the Word spoken with authority and clarity and boldness. And that last word, too, is important, in boldness.

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<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel 37:12.

How can you as a mother speak to your son who seems to be rejecting what you say about the truth/ Speak with boldness, not in yourself. For remember how we started.

Verse one. In the Spirit of the Lord and with the hand of the Lord.

In the New Testament the Spirit of God indwells all believers giving them boldness and empowering them for witness.

Acts one verse eight. When you receive the Spirit of God then you will be my witnesses. It starts with the Spirit. Speak with boldness, with authority, not in yourself, humble, loving boldness in the Spirit. That is Ezekiel's duty to the bones, to the people of God and even to the Spirit of God with boldness, holy, reverential, submitting boldness.

Oh, God, thou hast promised. Thou hast promised.

You know, often we fall prey to either one of two extremes in this regard. Sometimes we become bone specialists and we spend all our time examining bones, how dry they are, how dead they are, where they belong, perhaps, in the skeleton. Bone specialists, care takers in the kingdom, all the time focusing on the problems. That is a danger, isn't it? It is a serious danger.

There is an opposite extreme as well that we are probably less guilty of perhaps in this church, but also just as serious and just as terrible when you see it in other churches. We become physicians who create these artificial breeding machines and we try to give life to dead bones and we look and we set up all these machines and we say, "Look at all this life that we have created in our ministries."

Both extremes are extremely dangerous, because both of them do what? They minimize our dependency on the Holy Spirit. They minimize our faith in his power and the power of almighty God in the place of Christ and his ministry through the Spirit. Very dangerous.

Rather, we should be prophets of the Lord, witnesses of the prophetic senses speaking the Word with authority, the Lord's witnesses, faithful evangelists of this truth. And that was Ezekiel's duty. In this context of God's sovereignty and in monergism that is single work in salvation, so we find the prophet's duty in speaking the Word of the Lord with authority.

And, finally, briefly, let me close by again drawing your attention to the promise, to God's promise, to his despondent people. The I wills of the Lord already repeated several times. He addresses their situations.

"I will open your graves. I will bring you back to your own land. I will place my Spirit among you, in you and you shall live."

But more than that, not just a restoration, a spiritual restoration, not figurative, necessarily, but literal, spiritual restoration, not just that.

“When I have opened your graves, ye shall know that I am the Lord.”

That intimacy, that fellowship with Christ the Lord, the covenant keeping God. We will know it and we will know it more and more and the more the Spirit teaches us these things, the more the Spirit uses us in this process to teach others, the more we know this Lord, this covenant keeping God.

“Oh, my people, he says, “ye shall know that I am the Lord and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it and have performed it and will do it,” says the Lord.

Let us end with that trust and that dependency upon the Lord. Amen.