



Resurrection

Ezekiel 37:1-14 *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. 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. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."*

Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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.'"

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. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, 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.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

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.' Therefore prophecy 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. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 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.'"

Ezekiel's vision starts off as a most eerie and uncomfortable scene, something worthy of a horror movie, rather than a vision from God: the Spirit of the LORD set Ezekiel in the middle of a massive graveyard, a valley full of bones. But not only were there bones scattered everywhere in this lifeless place, the bones themselves were very dry. Bleached and sunbaked they were as inanimate as rocks; they were beyond dead. Later we're told these bones were a picture of God's people. By themselves they were as good as dead in every way: their nation was no more; their homeland was deserted and depopulated; they were scattered here and there among the peoples of the Babylonian Empire; they had no temple whereat to worship, no altar on which to sacrifice; humanly speaking they had no reason left to hope and nothing to hope for.

Have you ever been stuck in a dead end, trapped with no way out, a horror story for a past and nothing to expect from the future besides more of the same? When your life and mine are as desolate as a valley of dry bones--whether we've made a mess of things ourselves or are caught up in events far beyond our control--when it seems like all hope is gone, we can take heart and find reason to hope in Ezekiel's vision. But once again God's message through his prophet is not a do-it-yourself, try-harder, things aren't so bad as they seem, pick yourself up from the ground kind of pep talk! The situation for them really was bad, hopeless, helpless, with nothing at all that they could do, dry bones as they were. But when we're out of options, and escape routes and rescue are altogether impossible, when we have nothing left and give up on ourselves and our own puny capabilities, that is where God steps in, where he starts getting warmed up. By his almighty power he revives our souls as we look to him and his promises alone.

In the midst of this spectacular vision of a battlefield graveyard becoming a living breathing countless host, don't overlook the one thing that made it all possible: the prophet's prophesying, that is his proclaiming what God had told him to say. God's Word. That is where God's power is. That is where his power always has been and ever will be found. It's through the Word that the Holy Spirit works his sanctifying miracles where and when he wills. Through the Word the Spirit turns things 180 degrees. Where there is dead unbelief, he creates faith in Christ. Where there is despair, he breathes hope. Where there is pointlessness, he enfleshes purpose. And on the Last Day as the earth is littered with the bones of hundreds of generations since the beginning of time, he will keep his promise and restore immortality to all the dead. The Spirit will raise our bodies from their graves so that great and small alike will stand alive again before God's judgment throne. Until that Day comes that same life-giving Word is ours to proclaim to all who are destitute and despairing, to the breathless and the dying as the Spirit turns their hearts to rely entirely on the Lord. He is our life. He is our Savior. He has done it all.

Prayer: Lord God, when I was dead in unbelief and slain by my sins and shame, you sent your Spirit through the Word about Jesus to give me new life. Your Word of grace and forgiveness is life, and I need to hear it still. With your love in my heart and your breath in my lungs make me a proclaimer of your message so your Spirit can perform his miraculous work of resurrecting souls in Christ. Amen.