

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Dear Christians Brought from Death to Life by God's Grace:

I don't know about you, but I'm not into horror movies. When I was a little shaver I actually had to get up and leave the theater watching a souped up version of "Jack & the Beanstalk" called "Jack the Giant Killer." The giants in the movie scared me to death! So if I can't stomach a 1960s clay-mation movie, I can't imagine what all the gore and violence in modern scary movies would do today. No thanks!

The picture painted in Ezekiel would probably make a good horror flick: bones lying all over a valley -- bones not of cattle that haplessly wandered into Death Valley, but human bones all jumbled up and dry as dust -- as macabre as what might be discovered in the killing fields of Cambodia or mass graves of war-torn Syria.

But this vision has a purpose. It wasn't meant to scare Ezekiel, but to transmit a message of promise -- one of hope, restoration, and life. With these words we see this valuable truth: **The Spirit Resurrects...**(1) *Ezekiel's Israel* (2) *The Dead in Sin* (3) *Those Who Rest in the grave*.

1

Ezekiel was an Israelite prophet, but he wasn't living in Israel. He was in Babylon, the powerful kingdom between the Tigris & Euphrates Rivers -- modern day Iraq. The Israelites ended up there because they had been defeated militarily by Babylon, and many were carried off into captivity. God had sent them prophets like Isaiah & Jeremiah and many others to warn them about this impending doom if they continued to ignore God's Word. But they choose not to listen. Disaster struck.

In his mercy, however, God continued to minister to his people in Babylon through prophets like Ezekiel. He promised that one day a remnant of the Israelites would return home again.

This Valley of Dry Bones vision was part of that promise. God said to Ezekiel, ***"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, 'My bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.'"*** In their present situation, the Jews in Babylon felt like those dry, scattered bones. It seemed unlikely that they would ever see their homeland and be gathered together again -- as unlikely as those bones in the valley could be gathered together and live again. They felt like a dead nation. They now realized how foolish they had been to laugh at God and despise his commandments and Word.

But in his grace God said to them, ***"I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people, and bring you into the land of Israel."*** It was a message of hope and revival and resurrection as a nation! The vestige of faithful Israel would be brought together again. And as history tells us, the Babylonian Captivity lasted 70 years, and many of the Jews returned home.

Why did God do this? Not just for the sake of Israel, but for the sake of the whole world, including you! God had promised that through this nation, Abraham's descendants, ***"All nations on earth would be blessed."*** How? Through the birth of a Savior hundreds of years later. God was resurrecting this nation from its Babylonian grave so that the Lord Jesus Christ would be born exactly as God promised, he would live and die for our sins, and you and I would be saved.

2

What a huge blessing that is! Without that Savior, you and I and all people would be dead in our sins. By nature, you and I are born into this world as spiritual zombies. Our world is filled with people who live & breathe & work & laugh & play -- but who are just as dead as those dry bones in the valley. God says through Paul, ***"You were dead in your transgressions and sins"*** (Eph 2:1).

But by grace we have been spiritually resurrected. We ***"have been brought from death to life"*** (Rom 6:13) -- just like those old, dry bones. Did you notice how God said this would be accomplished? He said to Ezekiel, ***"Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of"***

the Lord!’” And he says, **“I am about to make breath enter you so you will come back to life....I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live!”** “Prophesy...speak!”

What would you think if I told you that after service today I was going to the cemetery to preach to the corpses buried there so that they would come back to life? You’d probably suggest I get checked out by a doctor! But that’s what you and I are doing, spiritually speaking, every time we share the Good News of life and salvation in Christ with an unbelieving person. And it’s what happened to us in Baptism. It’s the Holy Spirit who resurrects the spiritually dead through the Word. Just like the crowd of folks lying under Estabrooks Cemetery can’t bring themselves to life physically, neither can we spiritually. Here’s what Paul says, **“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions....God raised us up with Christ”** (Eph. 2:5,6).

A young man once said to his friend, *“You’re a Christian. You say you believe in eternal life. Well, what do I have to do to have that life?”* The Christian said, *“Friend, you’re too late.”* “What?” said the young man, *“You mean it’s too late for me to have this life you’ve been telling me about?”* “Oh, no,” was the reply. *“But it is too late for you to do anything to have it. It’s already been done. Jesus did everything needed to give you life 20 centuries ago.”*

Just as God called Ezekiel, so he has called you and me to prophesy to dry bones. These dry bones can live! The words we speak in love today can make a difference for all eternity. And by the way, thank you to you, St. Paul’s members, who have been encouraging your friends to get their children baptized. You are giving us wonderful opportunities to share the saving, resurrecting gospel with families who truly need to hear it.

3

And finally, it would not be right, as we look at this portion of God’s Word 2 weeks before Easter, if we didn’t mention the obvious connection between Ezekiel’s words and the huge event that will take place someday over the face of the whole earth. **“O my people,”** God says, **“I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves...”** Who can read these words and not be reminded of the truth that one day these very bodies of ours, earthen vessels, storage units for our immortal souls, will one day after we die and become dry bones, be raised from the grave when Jesus comes again!

Daniel, also in Babylon with Ezekiel, wrote about that Last Day: **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life; others, to shame and everlasting contempt”** (Dan. 12:2). And that which distinguishes between those who rise to life and those who rise to shame is one thing: faith in Jesus Christ -- that alone, and nothing else. As Jesus so beautifully said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”** (John 11:25-26).

There’s an old spiritual song about Ezekiel 37 many of you know: *“Them bones, them bones, them dry bones, now hear the Word of the Lord.”* As you sing through it, you tell how the *“foot bone is connected to the ankle bone, and the ankle bone is connected to the shin bone, etc...”* What’s important in that song, however, is remembering the subject of it all: It’s God and his Word. Nothing comes alive and nothing gets connected without God and his Word.

That’s what the Israelites originally forgot and what caused so much grief, pain, and regret. May the Lord help us never to forget, but daily to hear and heed God’s life-giving, resurrecting Word!

Amen.