

Can These Bones Live ?

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Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 00] Thank you very much.

Psalm 67, first version.

Lord, let them praise thee, both great and small. The earth her fruit shall yield, of God shall blessings send. God shall us bless, men shall in fear, unto earth's utmost end.

The whole of Psalm 67, the first version of the psalm, Lord bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face.

Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face.

[1 : 42] That the earth thy way and nations all may know thy saving grace.

Let people bless thee, Lord. Let people love thee, praise.

Oh, let the nations be glad. In songs their voices raise.

Thou justly people, judge. On earth rule nations all.

Let people praise thee, Lord. Let them praise thee, both great and small.

[3 : 03] The earth her fruit shall yield. God shall bless thee, both great and small. The earth shall bless thee, both great and small.

God shall bless thee, both great and small. God shall bless thee, both great and small. Let them praise thee, both great and small.

The earth shall bless thee, both great and small. Let's join together in prayer. Let us pray.

Let us pray.

Let us pray.

[4 : 43] Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

[6 : 43] Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. that you have endowed them with the grace of repentance by which they may turn from such sin and seek forgiveness for it and close in yet again with Christ and seek the embrace of his love.

We give thanks that that is what awaits your people who are truly aware of who Christ is and their dependence upon him. And that they are indeed a people who have enjoyed many great privileges under your hand.

We are encouraged by those who would seek to join with us today in your worship and who find themselves in a place that they are content to fill and that they have occupied for many decades some of them and that they are complying with the word of the Lord to them to gather with the Lord's people to worship.

[8 : 18] And yet, sad to say, they are yet to be numbered amongst them. Some at least have not professed your name and whatever lack they may have a prayer is today to you, O Lord, that you would open the eyes of their understanding and that they may find themselves seeking the Lord with determination with which they enter into many of the activities of life.

The determination not to know anything but him and him crucified and that they might know him as their own Lord and their own saviour.

So we pray for them and pray that you would open blind eyes, that you would give hearts of flesh where hearts of stone exist, that you would encourage them to believe that you, the Lord, are able to do that for them.

That is what we pray for our own congregation here. Those who are present in it and those who are met together in your name to the far corners of the earth.

We begin with our own congregation and our own presbytery and all who seek to occupy porpoids, proclaiming Christ, encouraged to do so by virtue of your own hand upon them and that they may freely and without ambiguity set Christ before all men, young and old and that they would see fruit for their labour.

[9 : 56] We pray for the congregations of our denomination and all the congregations that are met in your name to present Christ as the alone saviour of sinners to encourage all to come to him in order to have life without end.

We pray for the nations of the earth and the missionary activity of the church into these nations. Thankful that such activity exists, even though when we compare our generation with previous generations where the way in which we look at things is so insular and so inward looking rather than looking beyond our own peculiar needs.

There were so many who had a seal for Christ and who set out to bring the gospel to dark parts of the world where there were all kinds of false religions and all kinds of idolatrous practices and a wickedness that accompanied such in parts of the world that had no time for the genuine gospel of free grace and their whole ethos was to enslave and to bring terror and to to enchain those who adhered to their particular doctrines.

And we pray that you would remind us of the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that whatever the chains are he is able to break them and to free those who are bound by them.

To that end we commit all the missionary activities of the church and we remember the places where the church labors especially parts of the world that are employed in war and we think again of the Ukraine and we remember the conflict there and we think of places such as Gaza and places that we are so seldom reminded of within the media that have ongoing conflicts for decades and we remember displaced peoples people who have been driven from their homes who have been so long following the paths into the wastelands that they have no real connection with the places that their parents took them from so many decades ago and they have been driven from their homes and we are reminded of that even today in our worship that that could happen and has happened and will inevitably happen again but under your hand you are able to bring good out of evil and you are able to bring blessing out of those who would curse so encourage us to look for your hand at work in all kinds of different situations no matter how dark they may seem to us we pray for those of our own number who may be struggling with soul providences at this time we know that there are many ways in which your lives are complicated by the things that we must encounter sometimes we have to meet illness and the trials that illness brings sometimes we have to encounter bereavement and death is not far from us in our own experience or in the experience of others so for that reason we pray for your sanctifying grace to accompany every way in which you work in our lives that we may look for Christ in these things and that

[14 : 12] Christ the Lord would magnify his name and presence to us we ask Lord for your blessing upon the places that care for our weak elderly we think of the various homes and the hospice we pray for those who are entrusted with caring for frail elderly in their own homes and we see so many privileges that are afforded us we acknowledge our indebtedness to you and to those who act as your hands and your feet and your mouth and your eyes in different quarters so be near to one and all watch over us and cleanse us from every sin we ask it for the forgiveness of sin in Christ amen we're going to sing to God's praise now from psalm 38 psalm 38 we're singing from the beginning of the psalm in thy great indignation oh lord rebuke me not nor on me lay thy chastening hand in thy displeasure thought for in me fast thine arrow stick thine hand doth press me sore and in my flesh there is no health nor soundness any more this grief

I have because thy wrath is forth against me gone and in my bones there is no rest for sin that I have done because gone up above mine head my great transgressions be and as a wavy burden they too heavy are for me my wounds do stink and are corrupt my folly makes it so I troubled am and much bound down all day my morning go for a disease that loathsome is so fills my loins with pain that in my weak and weary flesh no soundness does remain and so on these verses psalm 38 verses 1-7 and I great indignation O Lord rebuke me not O

Lord rebuke me not nor on belay thy chastening hand in lightest pleasure caught for in me plants thine arrow sick thine hand God press me so and in my flesh there is no health nor sound this any more this grief

I have because I run is forth against me gone I dare my bones there is no rest for sin that I have done because God brought above my head my great transgressions me and as a weighty burden lay to have be all for me my wounds distinct and accord of my holy mixed soul

I trouble now and much thou down all day day I more endure for that deceit that closeness so else my heart will gain that in my weak and griffy flesh no sound ness does regain the amen we can hear

[20 : 17] God's word as we find it in the Old Testament scriptures the book of the prophet Ezekiel we're reading from chapter 37 from the beginning of the chapter down to verse 14 the book of the prophet Ezekiel chapter 37 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 behold 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 prophesy 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 behold I will cause breath to enter into you and he 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 he shall live and he 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 he made of the bones and the bones and the bones and the bones and the bones they multiplexed.

So I prophesied as I was commanded.

So I prophesied as I was commanded.

So I prophesied as I was commanded.

And you shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves. O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.

[23 : 32] And shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live. And I shall place you in your own land. Then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.

And so on. May the Lord add his blessing through a reading of this portion of his word. Let us sing now from Psalm 51.

Psalm 51. Psalm 51. Psalm 51. From verse 7 down to verse 14. Psalm 51. Psalm 51. Psalm 51. Psalm 51.

Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me. I shall be cleansed so. May wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow.

Of gladness and of joyfulness make me to hear the voice. And so these very bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. All mine iniquities blot out thy face hide from my sin.

[24 : 38] Create a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit me within. Cast me not from thy sight, nor take thy Holy Spirit away. Restore me thy salvation's joy.

With thy free spirit me stay. Then will I teach thy ways unto those that transgressors be. And those that sinners are shall then be turned unto thee.

O God of my salvation, guard me from blood guiltiness free. And then shall my tongue aloud sing of thy righteousness.

And so on. These verses 7 to 14 of Psalm 51. Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me. I shall be cleansed so. To thou with hyssop sprinkle me.

I shall be cleansed so. Yea, wash thou beyond.

[25 : 48] Then I shall be whiter than the snow.

Of gladness and of joyfulness. Make me to hear the voice.

That so this very boat which thou hast broken me.

Rejoice. All my iniquities.

All my iniquities. Blot out. Thy face. Thou from my sin.

[26 : 54] Create a clean heart. Lord, Lord, renew. Arise. Arise. Set me within.

Cast me not from thy sight. Nor take thy holy spirit away. Restore me thy salvation's joy. With thy heart. Cast me not from thy sight.

Nor take thy holy spirit away. Restore me thy salvation's joy. Restore me thy salvation's joy. Restore me thy salvation's joy.

Restore me thy salvation's joy. Will thy grace certainly stay.

Then will thy grace my son too. Those that transgressors be.

[28 : 08] And those that sinners shall. shall then be turned unto thee.

O God of my salvation, God, meet from blood guiltiness, send thee there shall my tongue aloud, sing of thy righteousness.

Now this morning we're going to look at this passage that we read together from the Old Testament book of the prophet Ezekiel.

We're going to look at this section of the prophecy and what I'd like us to do is, first of all, understand the prophet who has this message to deliver and then consider the people to whom this message is brought and the implications of that message to them in their own particular situation.

And then perhaps a word at the end about the reminder that there is there through God's dealings with his people of the power that God alone possesses that is able to make that difference in his people's lives.

[30 : 15] We probably, the imagery, the visual images that this passage presents to you is a memorable one.

So I'm sure those of you who have read your Bibles have probably at some point read and re-read this part of the Bible.

It's probably hazard a guess and say that those of you who often read your Bibles would not instinctively turn to the prophecy of Ezekiel.

It's not an easy part of the Scripture to read. There are many things in it that are puzzling and that are beyond our natural capability to understand.

But if we have read Ezekiel, we've probably read this part of it and it's such a vivid picture of a gory scene.

[31 : 38] Gory is not the right one because there's no blood there. All they have is dry bones. But our instinct with regard to bones is to draw back. So the picture is a very vivid one.

So I'm sure it's imprinted upon our heads. But that is, we have to remind ourselves, this is a vision. This is something that God presented to the mind and the heart of the prophet.

And that is something that we have to be aware of when we look at it rather than look at it with a view to interpreting the words that are there.

What we, I think, need to understand is that the image itself is meant to convey to us something that is declaring to us the truth about how Israel were in their own estimation.

So, with that in mind, if I remind you of who Isidiel was, and I'm not going to give you a biography of it, but just to refer you to the first verses of the prophecy.

[33 : 02] The prophecy begins with a declaration about the prophet himself that tells us, we'll read the three verses at the beginning.

of the prophecy. It came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Kebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of King Jehoiakim's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Boothi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Kebar, and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.

It doesn't say an awful lot to us, I would imagine, but there are three things that stand there. First of all, first of all, this person, Ezekiel, is identified as a priest of the Lord, and most of the commentators suggest that he was not just a priest, but the son of a priest, which is normally the case anyway of that priestly caste that they, from birth, are appointed to, I think when he would be thirty years of age, he would take up that role as priest in Israel.

So he was of the priestly caste, and a priest in his role, or destined to be. I think some commentators have suggested that at the time of the prophecy he was about twenty-five years of age.

[34 : 46] And the historical detail, the dates that are given to us, are quite definite. So there are certain things that can be understood from that.

The second thing is that not only was Ezekiel a priest, he is going to act as a prophet, because we are told that the hand of the Lord was upon him.

And usually, in that sense, that means, from the context and the use of the language, that God was going to use this person as a prophetic instrument.

He was going to prophesy, he was going to proclaim God's word to the people, and act in that role. And the third thing that we know is that the location of which he speaks tells us that at the time that he experienced God's call to the prophetic ministry, he was already an exile.

He was an exile. He was not living in Jerusalem, he wasn't living in Judah, he was with the exiled people of God that had been taken and took activity.

[36 : 11] And the detail of that, I suppose, is probably better found in the account we have in the second book of Kings.

But a description is given to us there of how God judged his people. And it's all down to God's relationship with his people that these events came about.

But in 2 Kings 24 and verse 11, the detail is there for us to understand what took place. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against the city and his servants stood besieged.

And Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, went out to the king of Babylon. He and his mother and his servants and his princes and his officers and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon, king of Israel, had made in the temple of the Lord as the Lord had said.

[37 : 26] And he carried away all Jerusalem and all the princes and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives and all the craftsmen and smiths, none remained save the poorest sort of the people of the land.

And so on. Now, that picture describes to us how the first group of exiles were taken in block into Babylon.

And from a reading of the opening verses there, the picture that we have of the seed here is that he is sitting or standing by a river in Babylon where the Lord calls him into prophetic ministry.

So, this is important for us to understand the nature of this vision, what it actually means. Because our inclination to understand it is very often governed by an application that is separated from the historical context.

But the historical context requires us to understand this was a vision given to God's servant, a prophet of his own making, when he was in exile in Babylon.

[39 : 06] And he had been in exile supposedly, I think, the dates if you worked them out would be requiring a bit of effort. It's possibly as many years as five years into exile when the Lord called him to this ministry.

So, he's to preach and to proclaim the word about this people who are in exile and delivered to him by way of preaching, proclamation, words that are often accompanied with symbolic actions, which is part of the difficulty that belongs to this prophet.

There are often very, very powerful symbolic images there, which if we take them literally are very difficult to understand. But the idea behind them, the idea is that they project very powerful images into the mind of what God has done, is doing, and will yet do.

And this vision that the prophet receives is of that sort, a vision of dry bones. and the vision is to be delivered, the explanation of it is to be delivered to the people.

And perhaps the key to this is that when you read verse 11, the key to the prophecy is found there, or to the vision rather, then he said unto me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

[41 : 00] Behold, they say, our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts. And that's their feeling, that's what they feel themselves to be.

And the prophet is to project into their psyche, what they're thinking, what they're feeling about themselves.

This vision that God has given to him of the dry bones, which corresponds with what they think of themselves, and he is to speak into their situation in that way, which is important for us to understand, if we're going to make sense of what is there.

And with regard to the prophecy itself, and to the activity of the prophet, we have to remember that when he speaks God's word, he is not just going to speak it and people are going to clap their hands and rejoice at what they're hearing.

Not only is he going to present a message that they find confusing, perhaps, but in the background and very much in opposition, is the message that comes from other prophets or self-declared prophets who are presenting a completely different picture of what God is doing or what God is yet doing.

[42 : 36] Just to give you an example, if you go to chapter 13, we are told there of the kind opposition that exists.

Supposedly, God's servants are speaking into the context of their historical situation and saying to the people some of the things that are to give to them hope and to encourage them.

Thus saith the Lord God, the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy and say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, hear ye the word of the Lord.

Thus saith the Lord God, woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. And then in verse six, they have seen vanity and lying divination saying, the Lord saith and the Lord hath not sent them and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word.

And just read on if you have time down in that chapter where a definite statement is made, because even because they have seduced my people saying peace and there was no peace.

[44 : 07] And one built up a wall and lo, others daubed it with untempted martyrs and so on. Their message contradicts the message that God has given through his servant.

Their message is one of hope, but it is a false hope. The message that the prophet is given to deliver is one that is slack, forbidding, it is condemnatory, and it explains to them the reason for their exile, it describes to them that they are where they are because of their wrong doing, not because something, chance occurred over which they had no control.

And I suppose looking at the history of the world, there are so many dynasties that rise up and to all intents and purposes these things take place and there is no rhyme or reason to them.

Power is in the hands of different people at different times, that's just a way of things. But the way God works in this world, he at times is front and centre in what is happening, and at times he is hidden from view, but all events providentially work as he is orchestrating it.

So that is a background that is essential for our understanding the true meaning of this word. So Ezekiel has to declare God's word to them, and here he is given a vision, and he is to describe to the people the vision, and even though the vision is so fearfully grim, it is still something that he is required to present to them, and remind them, show to them that what has taken place in their experience, they were to blame for it.

[46 : 22] So what then about the vision? we have to, I suppose, correct, or suggest, at least, that many have read this and instinctively gone to the resurrection.

instinctively they've gone to the last days, when the graves will open, the bodies will rise, and the power of God is to be seen in that.

And some have taught that, and some have preached that, and it's not that that is not found in the Bible, it's not that the resurrection is not taught, yes, the doctrine of the resurrection is clearly a doctrine that you will find in your Bibles, that there is a day coming when the graves will open, the dead will rise.

It won't correspond exactly to this image here, because this image is slightly different, because the bones are lying bleached on the ground, there's no grave to speak of.

But it's not really a doctrine of the resurrection that the prophet has to present. Nor is it, if we are to understand the historical context, the teaching of spiritual resurrection, in the terms in which it is usually preached, that it is a description to us of the gospel, and the power of the gospel, and the quickening that accompanies the preaching of God's word.

[48 : 10] while it may suggest to us a comparison, it is not what the prophet has in mind.

As I said, the answer to what the prophet is doing has to be bound in with the words that we read there of what the people consider to be true of themselves in verse 11.

the exiled nation of Israel have fallen into despair and hopelessness.

As you would imagine, whatever it is that they thought their future would hold, they don't hold out much hope.

And further on into that experience they go, where they are cut off from their home and the promises that God gave to them concerning the land that there was their home, the places that they associated in their minds with the worship of God, the God that they worshipped, however poorly they worshipped, was nowhere to be found and they came to their own conclusions concerning that.

[49 : 40] Patrick Fairburn gives us a helpful explanation of what these people are going through. They felt as if they had become like bones dried and scattered at the mouth of the grave.

The prophet carried by the spirit to the valley of destruction, the whole ground covered with bones, all apparent capability of life had left them.

That's a good summary of what we have here. A picture, a picture that was vivid and a picture that was portraying their own sense of spiritual hopelessness.

And the question that is asked and is posed the question that is found at the very beginning of this encounter with God through vision.

Son of man, can these bones live? And what answer would you expect? son of man, would you expect these bones to live?

[50 : 55] Can these bones live? And if you were standing in his shoes and you're looking at the ground, white with bones, bleached by the sun, dead for who knows how long, clearly lifeless and clearly without the prospect of life ever being restored to them, the question seems a question that is a pointless one, can these bones live?

But this is a prophet, this is the servant of the Lord, this is God's emissary to a people and possibly, maybe it's not right to suggest it, but by reason of the fact that the question is being asked by God, he is more than suspicious that the answer is not as you would expect it to be.

Can these bones live? Well, obviously, humanly speaking, naturally, you wouldn't expect life. But he answers very cautiously and he says, in answer to that, O Lord, God, thou knowest.

thou knowest. And I suppose what we need to understand is that their situation is depicted in a way that corresponds with the vision of the servant of the Lord.

The valley of the dry bones speaks loudly and speaks loudly and clearly of the spiritual condition of the people.

[52 : 50] And the people are quite right in saying about themselves, as they are spiritually, there is no prospect of restoration as things stand.

and then you're confronted with the prophet being instructed to do something which is stupid.

He's told to do something stupid. Prophecy, he says, upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

what is the point of that? He's already established the fact by that very probing question, are these dead bones?

Are they going to come to life? And the thought is very strongly there's no prospect of it.

[53 : 56] And then he's told prophecy to them. Preach to them. Preach to these dead bleached, sun bleached bones that are lying on the ground. Speak to them and just do that.

And you would think, what a thankless task. What a pointless exercise. What a futile job to give to someone who clearly understands the nature of death and the nature of prolonged experience of death.

There is no point to that. But the prophet is obedient and he prophesies to the bones. Tell them what the Lord is going to do and when he does, in his obedience there is response, which seems unlikely, which seems improbable.

But the prophet sent by the Lord to speak to dry bones sees these bones respond. Impossible, but yet it happens.

And what you see, what you see described in this vision is, I will lay sinures upon you, will bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin, put breath in you, and you shall live.

[55 : 19] And that is the way things were. Bone to bone, sinure to sinure, clothed in flesh, and these bones demonstrated that they were alive.

But the prophet just wasn't given this task to speak to dead, dry bones. He was told after they had come to life, supposedly, or seemingly.

As I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bones. And when I beheld, lo, the sinures and the flesh came upon him, the skin covered him above, but there was no breath in me.

Now, why is it so described to us in this way? truly, it could have been done in one package.

The preaching, the proclamation, the prophesying to dry bones, resulting in life, and not just life, but spiritual life.

[56 : 35] And I think the answer has to be that God wanted this people who had gone away from him, from him, and who had fallen into the situation where their spirituality was totally null and void.

That they needed to understand that there was more to life than just the external motions and movements that the body would present. That there needed to be an understanding that there was more to their life in the sight of God than simply looking at the activity that was external.

So the prophet is given a second task. I prophesy unto the wind, prophesy son of man, and say unto the wind, thus saith the Lord God, come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may lift.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came unto them, and they looked, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. They become different.

The difference lies in the breath that they are endowed with, which is the psuche, the psyche, the spirit of the Lord, the ruach of the spirit, the power of God through the spirit coming into their very being, to make what was a body, a spiritual body, to make what was a group of people moving in motion as one to be a great army, an exceeding great army.

[58 : 31] And God is presented to them what needs to happen, and only by his power can it happen. God is going to, if you read on in this section, read from verse 12 to 14, 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, bring you into the land of Israel, where they are not found.

You 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 you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land.

Then shall you know that I, the Lord, have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord. This is God's doing. And not only must they be the fruit of God's doing, not only must the life that they show be the result of God's activity, they must know that it is the result of God's activity.

And they will know that by the promises that God has given to them being fulfilled. He is going to take them back to the land that they are exiled from, they are going to know him as their God, and they are going to serve him as their God.

So the prophet is teaching us there something that historically is going to come to place. Come into place.

[60 : 21] They will know that God has done this. Spiritual darkness followed by renewal and restoration. And that's what this is all about.

That's what all this is about. Now I'm not here to give you a history lesson. but without the history lesson you will not realize the power of the God who is the God of the gospel.

Without the history lesson that God presents to us in his word, describing to us the activity that he is responsible for in the experience of his own people, his choice people, Israel.

Some of the promises that he has made concerning them may yet to be fulfilled. And time will tell.

But what he wants them to understand, as he wants you to understand, is that it is not by any means, but his means and his power that this will happen.

[61 : 38] is not but the final thought on this is, it is no wonder that people look at this passage and probably put to the side the whole historical context of it.

It is no surprise that they will do that, because there is a reminder to you, is there not, of how things are in real terms with regard to those who are sitting under the gospel.

That there is a connection between this image and God's gospel blessing. I think in most minds that is the case. When we fell in our first parents, when we sinned in our first parents, when sin took a hold on us, and we added to it in our lives, spiritual deadness is something that overtook us, blindness was something that we were afflicted with, dumbness, lack of understanding.

Put yourself in my shoes today. I'm standing here and I'm looking out on a congregation and if what I was seeing was pews full of dead dry bones, how do you think that would make me feel?

I can't see you like that. I'm seeing men and women, I'm seeing boys and girls. God has hidden from my side what you are really like.

[63 : 24] And I thought, I'm sure that image is disturbing to you. The minister is saying I'm just a dried up, sun-bleached skeleton.

And that's how he sees me. But that's not what I'm saying to you. What I'm saying to you is what God's word says to you and to me again and again.

Is that spiritually our condition is one that has left us incapable of responding to God.

If you read Paul's epistle to Ephesians chapter 2 Paul describes to us there his words to God's people who are no longer what they once were.

They were at one time like this but they are no longer in that way because something has happened in their life that has translated them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his marvelous light.

[64 : 32] Something has happened that has made them living souls. Something has happened that has made them able to believe in God and trust in Christ and live as if they believe what the gospel is saying to them.

You hath he quickened to wear dead in trespasses and sins wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience among whom we also had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and whereby later the children of wrath, even as others, and so on.

The picture that Paul draws is a very dark picture, but it is a picture of a spiritually lifeless person or people, until the gospel of God came to them in power, and the preacher of the gospel came to them with a word of life from God, and the impossibility of what the preacher was asked to do probably was brought home to that preacher more than once.

Here am I preaching to a deaf, a blind, a person who is totally indifferent to the welfare of their soul, who are so intent in living in this world that they have no thought for the next, thinking that this world is all there is to it, and that there is no hell to worry about, and no God to meet with upon death.

But, nevertheless, even though you might think like that, and feel like that, and think that the minister is really off his trolley when he tries to present the word of God to you, because you know best.

[66 : 43] Forget the image of the dry bones, and ask yourself the question, is my response to the gospel which is a gospel which is good news for you, a gospel which suggests to you, tells you, insists upon the need that you have of a saviour for your soul, is your lack of response down to anything other than your own spiritual deadness.

John Owen the Puritan once said about the unbeliever, but the unbeliever is the way he is until God works in them.

And until God works in them, what they have is a heart of stone, what they have is a heart that is stubborn and resistant to the entreaties of God, a heart that is unbeliever, stone.

And it is God that must take that heart away. It is God that must take the heart of stone away. So when the minister, whoever the minister is, preaches to stony hearts, by God's grace he hopes that these hearts of stone will at one point even then become hearts of flesh.

Even then they might hear, even then that they might believe, even then that they might put their trust in Christ. Impossible as it may seem, unlikely as it may be.

[68 : 27] Perhaps when you came to church this morning, the last thing on your mind was that you would ever be converted, that you would ever come to faith, that you would ever change in your attitude to the gospel.

While you are not alone, many as a person came to church in that very same state of mind, and God in his mercy, and it was a mercy, transformed them, changed them, made them who thought so much of themselves, little in their sight, and God, the God that he is, a great God, a powerful God, a God who saves.

May God remind you of the way he works in the lives of others, of nations, that he is still working today, that he is still able to work in your heart today, change you today, if you are still unchanged.

May God bless you so let's pray. Lord, God, we may at times feel hopeless, and we feel despondent, and we feel dismayed that our words are not able to affect that change, and they cannot.

But in your hands you are able to do great things, and you are not only able to make the bleached bones that scatter, that are scattered throughout the thorough faith of this world to bring bone to bone, and sin you to sin you, and flesh upon flesh, and to make them walk, and not only walk, but to fill them with life, the life that is without end, that is what we crave for those who are still without Christ here in this place, be merciful to us one and all, forgive sin in him.

[70 : 29] Amen. We'll conclude by singing from Psalm 89, Psalm 89, and we're going to sing verses 13 to 16.

Thou hast an arm that's full of power, thy hand is great in might, and thy right hand exceedingly exalted is in height. Justice and judgment of thy throne are made the dwelling place.

Mercy accompanied with truth shall go before thy face. O greatly blessed the people are, the joyful sound that know in brightness of thy face, O Lord, they ever on shall go.

They in thy name shall all the day rejoice exceedingly, and in thy righteousness shall the exalted be on high. These verses thou hast an arm that's full of power, thy hand is great in might.

Thou hast an arm that's full of power, thy hand is great in might, and thy right hand exceeding we exalted is in height.

[71 : 54] justice and judgment on thy throne are made the dwelling bliss.

Mercy accompanied with truth shall know me for thy face.

O greatly blessed the people are the joyful son the new in brightness of thy soul they ever all shall do thee in thy name shall all the day rejoice exceedingly and in thy righteousness shall be exalted be on high now may grace and mercy and peace to God the Father and the Son and the Holy

Spirit rest and abide with you one ever and always amen