

A Vision of Hope

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[0 : 00] This is a wonderfully awkward moment. I would very much like to be able to tell you what I'm feeling right now, but I can't. It's not appropriate.

That's because you have to vote after I speak and decide whether it is right for me to feel what I'm feeling. You can tell by my face what I'm feeling.

This is sort of like going on a blind date, isn't it? The pastor nominating committee was sent out to find that special someone who could help love you deeper into the kingdom, and they think they found a good candidate.

And so they brought us together for this encounter today. They've told me a lot about you, and what I've heard about you has pulled deeply at my soul, a kind of deep calling to deep experience, and it's made me show up at your doorstep.

The committee's told you a lot about me, hoping that what you've heard and what you're going to hear this morning will make you invite me in. After reading the brochure which the PNC put together and hearing some of the kinds of things that have been said about me, I'm reminded of a story that Lloyd Ogilvie, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, tells.

[1 : 20] He was speaking at a major convention, and the woman who introduced him just before his first presentation began with the words, we have a very unusual privilege tonight, for in our midst is without doubt the world's finest communicator.

He is extremely sensitive, alert, perceptive, compassionate, and wise. He can sense a person's hurt and speak just the right word that brings healing.

And on and on this woman went in this vein. And Dr. Ogilvie says he was at once flattered and frightened. How was he ever going to live up to that kind of billing? Well, finally the woman came to the end of the introduction and she said, We are in for a wonderful experience tonight because of the lover of people in our midst.

Who is he? He is Jesus Christ, and here to tell us about him is Lloyd Ogilvie. Yes.

Yes. I have chosen for this wonderfully awkward moment two texts of Scripture, one from the old and one from the new. Will you please open your Bibles first to the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 37, verses 1 through 14, and then turn to the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Rome, chapter 8, verses 18 to 26.

[2 : 45] We begin with Ezekiel 37. Hear the word of God. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones.

And he caused me to pass around about them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and, lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live?

And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. And again he said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, that you may come to life, and I will put sinews on you, and make flesh grow back on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, that you may come alive, and you will know that I am the Lord.

So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling, and bones came together, bone to its bone, and I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

[4 : 05] Then he said to me, Prophesy to the breath, Prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may come to life.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet in exceedingly great army. Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, my people.

I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, my people. And I will put my spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.

And then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it, declares the Lord. And then from Romans 8, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[5 : 18] For the anxious longing of creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the children of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will also be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as children, the redemption of our body.

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope. For why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

And in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes with us with groanings too deep for words.

Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired the writing of these words so long ago. And now we pray that by your mercy, you will take these words off the page and make them come alive in each of us as never before.

[6 : 39] For we pray this in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen. Amen. I want to talk about hope this morning.

Would you agree with me that as long as there is hope, we can keep on going. There is energy and there's drive and there's will to keep on going.

It was the Swiss theologian, Emil Bruner, who once compared hope to oxygen. Take oxygen away, he writes, and death occurs through suffocation. Take hope away, and humanity is constricted through the lack of breath.

One of the most devastating messages any of us can ever receive is the word, I'm sorry, there's nothing more that we can do. The vision given to the prophet Ezekiel awakens tremendous hope, even at the grave of dashed hopes.

For the one who gives Ezekiel this vision is the one who in the beginning simply spoke and order came out of chaos and light out of darkness.

[7 : 54] The one who gives this vision is the God who in the middle of history comes to us as Jesus of Nazareth and in the words of Richard Mao, from womb to tomb brings life out of nothing.

Consider the hopelessness of the situation Ezekiel faced. It was during the 6th century before the birth of Christ. Israel had been taken captive by the superpower Babylon.

Jerusalem, the great city of the king, lay in ruins. The temple, the place where the God above all gods was to be worshipped, was a heap of stones. The whole economic, social, moral infrastructure was not only in trouble, it was completely gone.

And the nation expressed its assessment of this predicament in the words of verse 11. Our bones are dried up, our hope has perished, we are cut off.

Ever felt that way? Ever felt that your hope has perished? While facing that hopeless situation, God brings Ezekiel by the power of the Spirit into this valley.

[8 : 57] God portrays Israel's predicament using the picture of decaying bones of a defeated army. And God further heightens, or should I say deepens, the sense of hopelessness by speaking of graves.

Israel was decaying, was defeated, was dried up for all intents and purposes. Israel was dead. As Ezekiel surveys this valley and realizes that it portrays him and his people, God asks, Son of man, in that context, it simply means mortal, Son of man, can these bones live?

Ezekiel responds, O sovereign Lord, you alone know. As far as Ezekiel is concerned, when this situation was considered from the human standpoint only, it is utterly hopeless.

There is no way he or any other Israelite, or all the Israelites combined, could possibly bring these dry bones to life. No way. No way at all. Left to themselves.

They will never come to life. Now whether we realize it or not, and whether we're willing to own it or not, such is the human predicament.

[10:08] If it is all up to me to live a vital, living, spiritual life, then the dry bones of my dry soul will never live. If it is all up to pastors like me, and Marsha, and Greg, and Steve, and Tim, to bring vitality to Glendale Presbyterian Church and other churches represented in this place, if it's all up to us, then we may as well close the door after this worship service.

If it is all up to you and me as the church, if it is all up to all the churches of America combined to bring about a moral revolution which will break the chains that bind us, then there is no hope for this nation.

Son of man, can these bones live? Not by themselves. Not on their own. Left to themselves, they will remain dry and dead.

There is no hope. But you, O Lord, you know if they can live. So the Lord commands Ezekiel to prophesy, to prophesy.

To speak forth the word of God. Now, what good will that do? What good does speaking the word have to do in a national crisis?

[11:26] What possible effect can the word have on dry bones? Ezekiel obeys the strange command. Ezekiel speaks, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Dry bones, this is what the sovereign Lord says, I will cause breath to enter you and you will come alive. I will attach tendons to you and put flesh on you and put skin on you and I will put breath in you and you will live.

And the text says that as Ezekiel spoke that word, there was a noise, a rattling sound, bone came to bone and he looked and tendons and flesh were put on these bones.

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why did speaking the word have that effect on dry bones? Because of something special in Ezekiel?

Because of his oratorical skills? No. Because of the responsiveness of the dry bones? No. They could not respond.

[12:28] They were decayed. They were dead. You need to mark that in the text. Mark it strong. They were dead. There was no way they could possibly hear, let alone respond. Why then did speaking the word have this effect?

Because of the nature of the word. The word of God is living and active, powerful and creative. The word of God not only informs, the word of God performs.

The word of God makes things happen. Our words affect reality. That's a basic assumption of the advertising industry. How much more the words of God?

In the beginning God said. In the beginning God said. In the beginning God said, let there be and there was. Have you ever wondered who or what heard what God said in the beginning?

The answer is no one. Nothing. There was nothing there to hear. The speech of God brings into being that which it speaks.

[13:34] My friend Don McCulloch puts it this way. Nothing had to be something for something to be. The word of God creates what it announces. Ezekiel simply speaks the word and behold, look, bone comes to bone and there's flesh on it and they stand up.

But Ezekiel notices that although those bones look like human beings they still had no life in them. There was no breath he says. They were like Pinocchio the puppet who only looked like a little boy whose creator longed for the little boy to be real so that he could have a relationship with the creator.

So God commands Ezekiel to prophesy again. To speak the performative word of God again. But this time he's to speak the word to the breath. Ezekiel obeys.

Ezekiel speaks. This is what the sovereign Lord says. Come from the four winds O breath. That phrase four winds is an acadium idiom which means the four corners of the earth.

[14:38] The breath which gives life does not come out of the winds but comes from all the ends of the earth. Thus says the Lord come from the four corners of the earth and breathe into these slain that they may live.

And look what happens when he speaks that word again. Breath enters them. They come to life and they stand on their feet an exceedingly great army. Not just revived individuals but a new community so bonded together that they constitute a new army useful to God for his redemptive purposes in the world.

This vision gives me great hope. The God of this vision need only speak to and breathe upon human beings human institutions human cities human nations and they are revived they are restored they are renewed they are recreated.

Thus says the Lord I will put my spirit within you and you will live. On May 27th of this year I flew down here for my first face-to-face meeting with the whole pastor nominating committee.

I had met with individuals privately this was my time to meet with the whole committee. And as the plane descended into the Los Angeles basin and as I reflected on all that I had read about this place since the riots last year I heard in my head the phrase it doesn't have to be this way.

[16:06] It doesn't have to be this way I can make a difference. And as I was driven around Glendale that day and learned about some of its challenges and particularly the challenges in the public schools I kept hearing this phrase it doesn't have to be this way I can make a difference.

And he can. Who is this lover of people in our midst? He is Jesus Christ. And he can simply by the power of his speech and breath raise up a new army that transforms the face of the city.

I could use an amen about now. Come on, this is good.

Jonathan Edwards witnessed just such a spiritual awakening in his time. And Edwards came up with a definition of spiritual awakening that I think is very helpful. He writes, it is a sovereign movement of the Holy Spirit around and within the body of Christ by which the forces of darkness are increasingly driven back and the kingdom of Christ established.

Let me read that again. A sovereign movement of the Holy Spirit around and within the body of Christ by which the forces of darkness are increasingly driven back and the kingdom of Christ established.

[17:29] Can it happen in our day? Can it happen in this troubled part of the world? not if it is up to me. Not if it's up to you. Not if it's up to the combined you and me.

Dry bones cannot make themselves live but the speech and breath of Jesus Christ can. Isn't that the meaning of Pentecost? The Holy Spirit came upon those thousands of believers ordinary believers and renewed Jews and Gentiles infiltrated and transformed the Roman Empire. did you know that the American experiment began in the midst of the so-called First Great Awakening when the Spirit moved through the 13 colonies and the British Isles in a powerful way? I know it can happen. I know it can happen because it is happening in South Korea, in Brazil, in Kenya, in China, in the old Soviet Union. What's that sound I hear?

That rattling sound. Now, the question is, what might such an awakening look like? What are the unmistakable marks that dry bones are coming to life?

[18:40] What I want to now do is briefly, very briefly, sketch something of the multifaceted spiritual renewal that the Holy Spirit wants to create. I'm going to break all the rules of preaching.

You may as well know that up front. I do that regularly. Break all the rules of preaching, and I'm going to give you ten signs that the Holy Spirit has brought dry bones to life.

One for each finger of the hands. Here we go. First, when God speaks to and breathes upon human beings, there is a hunger and thirst to know God.

To know God as God really is, not just as we think God is or as we want God to be, which means that this hunger and this thirst will turn towards knowing God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul calls him the visible expression of the invisible God, God with a face, if you will. Dry bones brought to life want to know their Creator and their Redeemer.

[19:41] By necessity, this hunger and thirst will be concretely manifested in a hunger and thirst for the book and the closet. Redeemed people long to be in the record of God's self-revelation.

They'll do anything to get into the book and redeemed people want to be alone in communion and communication in a life of prayer. Hunger and thirst for God. Second, when the breath of God breathes upon us, we come to a fresh awareness of the essence of God's being.

Holy, holy, holy, sing the angelic choir. We come to a depth realization that our Creator and Redeemer is absolutely pure. our God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all, which means that we will come to a fresh awareness of the depth of our sin.

We will come to see the dark side of the species. Before the Holy One we become aware of how unholy we are. It just happens. Nobody needs to tell it to happen. In the light we are brought face to face with all those things that are ruining our lives and then, in the light, a miracle happens. For in that same holy light we come to a fresh awareness of the heart of the gospel. We rediscover grace. We discover that the Holy One pardons us, justifies us, reconciles us, cleanses us by a free act of His grace in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 03] We come to realize that we stand before the Holy God as unholy people, not on the basis of anything we have done with our lives, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done with His life, which is why the cross is always at the center of any spiritual movement.

Third, when the Spirit blows, we are led to the center. We are led to the very center of life, to God incarnate, to Mary's Son, to Jesus.

And we come to see Jesus as Lord over every sector of life, not just the church, but every single arena of life. We discover the Holy Spirit's great passion to exalt Jesus Christ until He is preeminent in every sphere of human existence.

Fourth, when the Spirit of the Lord breathes on us, there is a renewal of worship. We long to lift our hearts in adoration and in praise.

Worship services are like this morning, shot through with awe and wonder and with joy and freedom. I see this happening all over the world today. It seems to me the greatest movement of the Spirit.

[22 : 08] And of course, it should be. Paul told the Ephesians, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks.

Dry bones that have been brought to life simply have to praise their Redeemer and do it with singing. Singing is the primary verb of Christian worship. And every major spiritual awakening in history has produced a flood of new music.

For instance, most of the hymns we Protestants sing in the 20th century come out of the first great awakening of the latter 17th and early 18th century. And the person through whom the Holy Spirit sang most of God's songs during that time was Isaac Watts.

I can't imagine worshiping very long without something from Isaac Watts. Oh God, our help in ages past, I sing the mighty power of God, join all the glorious names, joy to the world, not written for Christmas by the way, but for every Sunday.

When I survey the wondrous cross, alas, and did my Savior bleed, my shepherd will supply my need, Jesus shall reign. And many of the hymns we sing in the 20th century came out of the so-called second great awakening of the latter 18th and early 19th century.

[23 : 21] Hymns like Just As I Am, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Jesus Loves Me, Blessed Assurance, My Jesus I Love Thee, written by a 16-year-old boy on his conversion. The person through whom the Spirit sang most of God's new songs in that era was Charles Wesley, and I can't imagine singing without Charles Wesley.

Love divine, all love's excelling, O for a thousand tongues to sing, Come thou long-expected Jesus, Hark the herald angels sing, Christ the Lord is risen today, Rejoice the Lord is King, Depth of mercy can there be, Jesus lover of my soul, and my favorite hymn, And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood, Died he for me who caused his pain, For me, who him to death pursued, Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me.

Those hymns still live because they were not simply the product of human genius, they were the product of the breath and speech of Jesus Christ. And as you are joyfully aware, the Holy Spirit is singing new songs in our day.

Since the Jesus People movement of the early 70s, there has been a torrent of new music. The Spirit is singing deeply moving pieces through people like Jack Hayford, Majesty, and John Wimber, Isn't He Beautiful, and Oh, let the Son of God enfold you, and Melody Green, there is a Redeemer, and Graham Kendrick of England, for this purpose, Jesus shall shine.

We believe meekness and majesty. When the Spirit of the Lord moves, dry bones brought to life, simply have to sing to their Savior. Maybe we ought to stop and sing again.

[24 : 56] Have to go on. Fifth, when the performative word of the Lord is spoken, our lifestyles change. Many of the things that once held attraction to us, which were much more important to us, now seem trivial.

The gospel of the kingdom becomes the determining factor of how we use our time and talent and treasure. We want to do that which draws us closer to the king, and we want to do that which advances the king's reign in the world.

We want to use our time and money for eternal purposes. Many find themselves actually changing careers so that they can sail with the Spirit better. Sixth, when the Spirit of the Lord breathes on us, we rediscover the nature of the church.

We realize that we are the body of Christ. Ah, we throw that word around so casually. We are the body of Jesus Christ. We are His hands and His feet and His eyes and ears and mouth.

And we discover that in this body, each of us has been gifted in unique ways to minister to the body and to the world. We realize that we are all ministers of grace and truth. We are all ambassadors for Christ, and we are all priests.

[26 : 09] Every one of us gets to go into the Holy of Holies and emerge from there with a blessing for other people, which means that as the Spirit moves, we discover that we need each other. Not like we need Christ, but we need each other.

We know we cannot make it without each other's gifts and each other's faith. It's bone to bone, see? Bone to bone. By the way, it's a multicultural body. We need multiculturalism.

We need to see Jesus Christ through other cultures. Sometime, if you vote right, I will tell you about my experience. What did I say?

I said that wrong. Tell you about our experience in Manila, where I came to see Jesus Christ in a whole new way.

I am forever grateful to the Filipino for teaching me something new about Jesus. The body is multicultural. Revelation 5, worthy is the Lamb. Why? Because He was slain and He purchased for God people from every tongue and tribe and nation under the earth.

[27 : 20] Oh, how beautiful is the body of Christ. Seventh, when the Spirit of the Lord moves, there is a holistic healing ministry. The great physician and soul doctor raises up people with gifts for healing of memories, for healing of diseases and sickness, for healing of marriages and families, for healing of sexuality, for liberation from demonic forces.

Oh, Spirit, breathe on us. Eighth, when the Spirit moves, there is a new movement toward Christian unity. We find ourselves wanting to tear down all the walls and build bridges.

We find ourselves setting aside our pet agenda so we can work together to exalt Jesus Christ, which means there is a passion for reconciliation, a desire to work through the conflict.

Nothing grieves the Holy Spirit more than believers not willing to deal with the conflict. conflict.

We're broken people, so there's going to be conflict, but the life-giving breath comes and enables us to bring the conflict out into the open where it can be healed.

Ninth, when the Spirit of the Lord breathes on the church, the laity create new ministries. And I know this is one of the major emphasis of Jack Chisholm's ministry, that the ministry belongs to the whole people of God.

[28 : 40] God gives the laity new dreams for advancing the kingdom. Did you know that the first Christian sermon was preached by a fisherman, Simon Peter? Did you know that the most significant person in the Protestant missionary movement of the 18th century was a shoemaker, William Carey?

And did you know that the leader of the reform movement in 19th century England was a lawyer, William Wilberforce? Most mission societies, most new missions that were formed over the last two centuries were created by turned-on lay people.

The Salvation Army, the China Inland Mission, were all started by the laity. Let the Spirit dream His dreams in you. That is what changes the face of the city. The Spirit takes the salt shaker, shakes us out into all the different aspects of the city where we bring zest and flavor and where we check the tendency toward decay.

Makes sense, doesn't it? Jesus says, the Spirit of the Lord was upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives the recovery of sight to the blind. It is Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered people who are the real change agents in our society. In our nation's history, prison reform, work among prostitutes, working for the rights of children and women were all led by disciples of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 06] That's true in India and Thailand and in the Philippines. Did you know that America's hospitals and public schools were first started by Spirit-infused people? What if Glendale Presbyterian Church, what if this church were to adopt the Glendale Unified School District and

guarantee, and guarantee that every administrator was prayed for every day, every teacher was prayed for every day, every student prayed for every day by name, this city would be transformed.

It doesn't have to be this way. So too with the crisis of alcohol and drug abuse. Dr. J. Edwin Orr, a great church historian, says that every genuine spiritual awakening has made an impact on addiction.

Oh, Spirit, breathe on America and set us free. And tenth, when the Spirit of the Lord moves, there is opposition. Opposition from the flesh, from sin, from the principalities and powers in the heavenly places who are bent on destroying everything Jesus Christ does.

There may be even opposition from the sociopolitical realm. Some societies can't handle the presence of an army following a different leader and marching to the drumbeat of a different drummer. And, ironically, there is opposition from institutionalized religion.

Did you know in our nation's history that the only opposition to the two great awakenings came from the entrenched institutionalized church that could not deal with God's new work of grace?

[31 : 47] But never fear. Nothing will finally stop at divine awakening. Nothing. For we are talking about the one who called the universe out of nothing.

We are talking about the one who called Jesus of Nazareth from the grave. There's one more thing I need to tell you about these ten signs. Within each of them there is a deep groaning.

A groaning. Yes, there is rejoicing in what the Spirit has already done, but there's this agonizing over what is not yet done. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8 that creation groans as if in childbirth.

And I think that what Paul is doing is almost personifying nature. And I think Paul sees floods and hurricanes and volcanoes as nature crying out for release from its captivity to corruption.

And Paul in that same chapter then speaks of humanity groaning, especially Christian humanity, groaning to have their new bodies and be completely healed. And then in that chapter he speaks of the Holy Spirit groaning.

[32 : 51] Groaning with a groaning that is too deep for words. I think what Paul is saying is that behind the groaning of creation and behind the groaning of humanity is the groaning of the Spirit who groans with the hope that one day everything is going to be restored to God's original creative intent.

As I flew into Burbank that day on May 27th and as I heard that phrase, it doesn't have to be this way, I know that I felt the groaning of the Spirit.

I knew that I was feeling the groaning of the people of the Los Angeles basin and I could feel the groaning of the land itself but I know that I was feeling the groaning of the Spirit who will not be satisfied until all things are made new.

Son of man, yes Lord, prophesy. Prophesy to the bones. Me? You want me to prophesy Lord? Yes. You. Okay Lord. Thus says the Lord, dry bones. Hear the word of the Lord, Glendale and La Crescenta.

[34 : 08] Hear the word of the Lord, La Cunada and Pasadena. Hear the word of the Lord, Eagle Rock and Echo Park and Silver Lake. Hear the word of the Lord, Los Angeles and Hollywood.

Hear the word of the Lord, Burbank and Sunline and Tunga. It doesn't have to be this way. I will put my breath in you and you will live. I will breathe my spirit into you and you will come to life.

I hear a rattling sound. Bones coming to bones. But there's no breath in you. Son of man, yes Lord, prophesy again.

Only this time prophesy to the breath. Me, Lord? You want me to speak the performative word to your breath, to your wind, to your spirit?

Yes. Me, Lord? Me? Me? Yes. Now? Yes. Do it. O breath of God, come from the four corners of the earth and breathe on these slain that they may live.

[35 : 24] Come as holy fire and purify us. Come as holy truth and help us see as you see. Come as holy love and heal our relationships.

Come as holy power and break the chains that bind us. Come as holy light and move into all the dark corners of our lives. Come as living water and flow through us to the nations.

Come, very life of God and set us alive in your passion. Come as holy joy and make us dance. And the breath came into them and they stood up an exceedingly great army.

C.S. Lewis captures for me the hope that is ignited by these two texts of scripture. Lewis writes, this world is a sculptor shop.

We are the statues and there's a rumor going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come to life. Yes!

[36 : 28] And those Bones them Bones them Dry bones them Bones them Bones them Dry bones them Bones them Bones them Dry bones Now hear the word of the Lord.

Thank you.