

# Dry Bones Come Alive

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] could for a short time this afternoon turn back to the chapter that we read together in Ezekiel chapter 37. Ezekiel 37, and I'd like us to take for our text today the words that we have in verse 3. Ezekiel 37, verse 3. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Can these bones live? What is your life?

As you sit here this afternoon and as you think about who you are, I'd like you to ask yourself that question. What is my life? And as you ask yourself that question, I'd like us together to look at the scene that we have before us here in this chapter. And it is indeed quite a scene, isn't it? It's a scene of devastation. It's a scene of destruction. It's a scene even of death. A scene that we read that comes to the prophet Ezekiel through a supernatural vision.

Now throughout the book of Ezekiel, we see that the term, the hand of the Lord is used quite often. And when this term, the hand of the Lord is used, it's an indication that the prophet prophet is about to receive a revelation from the Lord himself, that God is about to speak to him. And in the text that we have here before us, we read that the hand of the Lord is upon Ezekiel. And so here, the Lord is about to speak to Ezekiel. He's about to give Ezekiel a revelation. And as the hand of the Lord is on Ezekiel, he's brought by the Spirit, once again, as we see in previous chapters, into a valley. And as he's brought into this valley, he's there faced before his very eyes, a reality which all of us, without exception, gathered in here today, we're all going to face. He's faced with that reality of death. And so for a short time this afternoon, I'd like us just to look at this vision in this valley under three headings.

We're going to firstly think about this desperate plight, this plight that is before the eyes of Ezekiel. And then we're going to think briefly about the remarkable process that comes to pass in this chapter. And lastly, and very, very briefly, we're going to think about the resurrection promise that we read of later on in the chapter, the plight, the process, and the promise.

Firstly, then, let's look at this desperate plight. And if we could turn to verse 2. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. What a sight for Ezekiel to behold. Here he is faced with bones, thousands upon thousands of bones, enough bones we learn later on to make up that of a whole army.

[ 3 : 5 6 ] And so he's in a graveyard. And in this vision, Ezekiel finds himself walking through this graveyard. And it's important to bear in mind that this was, in fact, but a vision. In reality, a priest like Ezekiel, he would never have been permitted to have been in contact with the dead in such a way. But this is a visual manifestation that the Lord chose to give him. And as he's walking in the midst of these bones, he could see that this wasn't a recent massacre. All around him weren't people that had been freshly killed, as it were. Here in front of him were dry, bleached bones, indicating that these were people who were long since dead. What a solemn scene. What an apparently a hopeless situation.

And you know, the fact that these bones weren't buried added insult to injury, as it were. In these ancient eastern countries, burial was of paramount importance. And so if someone wasn't buried, they were buried, they were being denied a human right. And not being buried was, in fact, the ultimate humiliation. If you weren't buried, you were thought of as being cursed.

And so these bones aren't just evidence of death, but death under a curse. And the fact is that the people who these bones belonged to, these weren't only victims of battle, but of divine judgment. Now, although this vision here, it symbolizes a 10-year exile of the Israelites, a time of desolation, a time of deadness, I think it's fair to say that in these words there is a clearer, sorry, a wider application, a wider application that can be applied to you and to me this afternoon. And it's this application that I'd like us to consider. Because with this picture that we have before us, this picture of these thousands of dry bones, this picture of death and decay, this is a picture that is so sadly

evident in our midst today. This is a picture that is evident perhaps even in this church building and in other church buildings as people gather and worship the Lord.

You see, what we have here is, and it doesn't matter how we try and gloss over it, what we have here is that if we are not in Christ, if we are not in Christ, yes, it might be you're sitting in that pew and you are physically alive, you're breathing, you're living in your own mind, but friend, if you are not in Christ, you're dead. You are just as dead as these piles of bones that we read of here in the chapter that we have before us. You have no spiritual ears to hear God's voice speak to you.

[ 7 : 13 ] And so perhaps as you sit in God's house, these words are going in one ear and out the other. They mean absolutely nothing to you. You have no spiritual eyes to see the beauty of King Jesus.

And so instead you choose rather to serve the idols of this world. You choose to serve those idols that can give you very little, but those idols who in fact you give your lives to. You can't hear. You can't see.

And you don't have that spiritual voice even to come and to speak and to interact with the Lord himself. Isn't that solemn? You might be sitting and thinking, well, life is for living. And you might even be fooled into thinking that you are actually living it.

But what do you mean by that? What do we mean by saying life is for living? Well, it might be that things are going well in your life.

You've got a good career. You've got a loving family. You've got materially everything that you could possibly want in this world. And so things are going well.

[ 8 : 30 ] But yet you're dead. Dry, lifeless bones detached from the realities of eternity. I read a story of a man who was 70 years old before he became a Christian. Never ever think that you're too old to be saved.

And on his 73rd birthday, his family had a party for him where his grandson asked him, what age are you? And he said to his grandson, well, I'm 73 years old, but I've only really lived for three of these years.

I wish I had lived more. You see, friends, a life without Christ is no life at all. One of the effects of being dead in our trespasses and sins is that we have lost the image of God.

The fact is we've all been created in the image of God. All of us without exception. But as we seek to live our lives without Christ sitting upon the throne of our hearts, what happens?

Well, that image is marred. That image is distorted. That image is even defaced. And so we don't live for Christ.

[ 9 : 54 ] But then we read in verse 3 that God asks Ezekiel a question. And he said to me, son of man, can these bones live?

And of course, looking at these bones, the answer to the question would have seemed obvious. Humanly speaking, there was absolutely no way that this pile of thousands of bones could ever live again.

So Ezekiel cautiously bounces the question back to the Lord. Oh, Lord God, you know. You know. Ezekiel would perhaps have known of other rare occasions in the Old Testament when resurrection took place. You remember that example in 1 Kings 17 when Elijah revives the widow's son.

And also that startling account in 2 Kings 13 when we see a man's corpse when it comes in contact with the bones of Elisha. We read that this corpse is revived.

[ 10 : 57 ] That this man stands on his feet. That he's able to walk again. But what Ezekiel has before him here wasn't an army of people, as I said, who've just passed away.

This is a pile of barely recognizable bones. And so in the eyes of Ezekiel, it would have seemed so unlikely, even impossible, that these bones could ever live.

You know, that's so like us, isn't it? Isn't it? Even as the Lord's people, we can look around us in this community. And we can think of people who are dead in their trespasses and their sins.

People who are not Christians. And we can think that there's no way that they can ever be saved. They're simply too far from the Lord. And so we ask ourselves, can these bones live?

Or perhaps you're in here today. You're not a Christian. You've perhaps been deciding to be one of the Lords for many years, but still nothing. Day after day goes by, year after year goes by, and still you're not saved.

[ 12 : 06 ] And so you say to yourself, can these bones live? You maybe know that something's not right with you, but you know that you're not living in Christ. Yet although Ezekiel didn't know, or

perhaps even believed, humanly speaking, that these bones could live, he believed in the power of the sovereign God.

Oh Lord God, you know. In order not to be so with us, friends, that we ought to believe in the power of the sovereign God, even in a day when things seem so unlikely, even in a day where we see the name of Jesus trampled underfoot, even in our communities, he knows.

The Lord knows the end from the beginning. He's never out of control. He's never lost sight of his great plan of redemption, and not one of his will be lost.

And so we two, friends, ought to be the same. We ought always to remember that he knows better than us, that his ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts than our thoughts.

Why? Because he is God. He is God. And it's only when we lose sight of who God is, that we lose confidence in what God can do.

[13:40] And we start thinking, can these bones live? But friends, I ask you the question also, if you're not a Christian here today, do you want to live?

Do you really want to live? Are you happy to carry on as a pile of dead bones, or do you desire, as I prayed in my prayer, to know these things that go beyond the here and now?

How depressing it is to think that this is your life and you have nothing else to live for but the here and now. Friends, don't you want these bones to live?

I may be sitting here thoroughly depressed by what I'm saying. I came to church this morning to perhaps be uplifted and even feel good about myself, but what you're saying is about death and about dry bones is thoroughly depressing.

Friends, you should be depressed. That's a fact. That's a reality. If you're here without Christ, you ought to be the most depressed person that is alive in this world.

[14:58] And the fact is, the most depressing negative thing about all of this, perhaps, is the fact that you continue to bury your head in the sand.

You keep telling yourself that you are alive, that you are living life, when in fact you are as dead as these bones. You keep turning your back on that life-giving gospel message that is to be found here in Jesus Christ.

Friends, nothing else matters. Absolutely nothing. But I come not only with this negative, bad news this morning, friends, because if I left you with that, that would not be the gospel.

What is the gospel? What does the word gospel mean? Well, it means good news. And you know, that's a wonderful thing about the gospel. It never leaves us hopeless or helpless.

And although we see a desperate plight in our text this afternoon, although you might find yourself in that desperate plight as you live your life without Christ, all is not lost.

[16:17] It brings us to our second point, a remarkable process. We can turn to verse 4. Then he said to me, Prophecy over these bones and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

This is the turning point for these bones. This command from God to Ezekiel is the catalyst for what will be the most remarkable of process.

What does it begin with? Preaching. The preaching of the word of God. Ezekiel had previously prophesied to the mountains and to the forests, and now he's commanded to prophesy to a pile of dead bones.

Nothing magical, just preaching. Hebrews 4.12 reminds us the word of God is living and powerful. Let's never lose sight of this.

It's sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

[17:31] The Lord knew this. Ezekiel knew that there's power in the word, and so we ought never to downplay or underestimate the power that is to be found in the preaching of the word of the Lord.

This is life-changing power. John 6 reminds us that it's not only a living word, but that it is a word that gives life. And so we may be tempted to add to the word.

We may be tempted to make church an experience where the word is sidelined to one corner and where other activities take precedence.

Friends, that's never going to work. The only thing that will give life to these dead bones is the word of God. Do you believe that?

Do you believe it in your heart? Do you pay lip service to believing that, but really you think there needs in our day and age to be something more?

[ 18 : 39 ] Friends, this is life-changing stuff. And of course the apostle Paul didn't call it the foolishness of preaching for nothing. For those who are dead in trespasses and sins, of course it makes no sense.

It perhaps makes no sense to you as you sit here this afternoon. You're thinking of anything else apart from what I'm saying, because it's foolishness to you. You can't hear it.

These are just words on a page. They don't affect you. They don't speak to you. They don't even change you. But yet they can. They can.

And that's the wonder of the gospel. They can change you because they are the words of the almighty God himself. So we must never be afraid to invite people in our community to church.

Oh, but they won't understand, you see. Perhaps they will. Perhaps they won't. But are you honestly telling me that the word of God is not powerful enough to reach even the hardest of hearts in this community, are you?

[ 19 : 53 ] Or does there need to be something else? You see the answer so clearly here in verse 4.

Then 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, and you shall live.

Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. God promises to breathe on these dry, dead bones.

You know, the Hebrew word that's used here, I think I've mentioned this in this congregation before, but the Hebrew word used here for the word breath is ruach, which is the same word for the word spirit.

And so what he's saying here is that it's a spirit that's going to be breathed upon these bones, this life-giving spirit of God.

[ 20 : 59 ] And so, friends, along with the preaching of the word, what else do we need? We need the spirit of the Lord. We need the breath of God to apply his word to sinners such as you and me, to bring life to these dead bones.

We can't go it alone. We can't save anyone. We can't bring life to any bones, but he can. His spirit can.

The same spirit that has transformed many lives in here. The same spirit that has revived communities such as this in days gone by, where men and women, boys and girls, are longing to meet together and to praise the great and glorious name of the Lord.

There's power in that spirit. And as Ezekiel begins to preach to these bones, the miraculous begins to occur.

So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone, things began to move.

[ 22 : 15 ] There was a noise. There was a rattling as one by one, each and every one of these very bones thrown all over the ground. They began to come together.

What a sin. Just imagine Ezekiel's complete astonishment as to what's unfolding before his very eyes. You know, it's interesting to note that this word, rattling, in the Hebrew, it's the same as the word that we would use for the word earthquake.

And it's as if the whole ground was shaking as these bones that had lain untouched for years, they began to come together as the work of the Lord began to take place.

And that's what happens in your life when the spirit begins to blow upon your dry bones. Things begin to shake. You begin to become a little bit uncomfortable.

Perhaps you don't even know what's happening as you're shaken to the very core of your being. At first you might try and cover it up. You might try and hide it from a loved one that the Lord is working in your life.

[ 23 : 27 ] You might try and hide that spirit blowing upon your corpse. But friends, you can't hide it for long. Because as this rattling continues, we read here that these bare bones are fleshed out, that sinews, that ligaments and flesh come upon them, and that the skin covers each and every one of them.

Bit by bit, Ezekiel is seeing something that is starting to look like a human being. Of course, that in and of itself was miraculous, but not enough.

Not enough. Why? Well, we read in verse 8 that there was no breath in them. Although these bones had come together, although they'd been filled out with flesh, although they were now beginning to

look a lot more alive than they once did, they still had no breath in them.

They were dead. You know, I believe there's a warning to us here. Because you might be here and you might say, well, no, I'm not a Christian, but I'm certainly not as bad as this person or that person.

And I don't come anywhere close to being as bad as that person who I live nearby. I've got far more flesh on my bones, as it were. But friends, that's not enough.

[ 24 : 58 ] You might say, well, I'm a good person. I'm a good member of this community. I do good things for people around me. Friends, that's not enough. You see, if you do not have the breath of the Lord blowing upon your soul, you're dead.

No matter how upstanding you are in this community, you're dead. But yet, and this is encouraging, the fact is that if the Lord is truly working in your heart, he's not going to leave you in such a state. You might be toiling. You might be pleading with the Lord. You may have been seeking the Lord many, many years. You wonder if you will ever, ever be alive.

Friends, Paul reminds us in Philippians that being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it till the day of Jesus Christ.

What a promise. And I wonder if he's begun doing a good work in your soul. We see here the wonder and the evidence of this work in verse 9.

[ 26 : 15 ] A work that had to, absolutely had to be accompanied by the breath of the Spirit. 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 breathe, and breathe on those slain, that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army.

What a picture. What a picture. No longer do we have a pile of dry and dead bones. No longer do we have cold, lifeless corpses here.

But when the breath of God breathes upon them, they stand on their feet, alive, an exceedingly great army, ready to do battle.

What a joy would have been in the heart of Ezekiel as he felt, as he saw these thousands around him, ready to do battle.

[ 27 : 23 ] And you know, there's nothing that gives the Lord's people greater joy than seeing dry bones being given, life ready to do battle, ready to fight on the side of the Lord.

There's nothing that stirs us from within than to see someone who was dead becoming alive. And you know, it's possible that you could be brought alive, even today.

This takes us very briefly to our final point. It's possible because of that resurrection promise that we read off later in the chapter, later in the chapter, the metaphor does change slightly, but the theme is the same.

We read in verse 12, Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel.

This is the resurrection promise. God has enabled this remarkable process of regeneration to take place by not only opening our graves, but by entering our graves for us so that we can be brought from them.

[ 28 : 48 ] What love! What sacrificial love! And so if you're in Christ this afternoon, he said to you, as he said to Lazarus, he has said to you, Come forth.

Come out of the grave. Come out of that place of death and of darkness. And because you've heard his voice by his spirit, death can no longer have power and dominion over you.

Why? Because Jesus took your place. He took your place by dying that cursed death on that cross. He took that hell upon himself that should have been yours, should have been mine, releasing us from the bondage of the spiritual grave.

Nobody or nothing in this world can ever do that for you, dear friend. Nothing. No matter how attractive it is. No matter how much pleasure it may give you for a time, it can never release you from that bondage of sin that you need to be released from.

[ 29 : 59 ] That is your greatest need. But friends, no one is too far gone. Just look at these dry bones.

You might think, well, if only you knew what's in my heart. If only you knew what I did even last night, you wouldn't be giving this offer of the gospel to me. I'm not worthy.

It's true. You're not worthy. I'm not worthy. None of us gathered here are worthy. But the fact is, Christ died for the dead. Won't you believe that? Won't you ask yourself, unconverted friend, won't you ask yourself that searching question, what then is my life? What's this all about? Why am I here? Why am I going to face tomorrow? Why am I going to face tomorrow without Christ?

[ 31 : 05 ] Looking forward to the next thing. And that thing comes, and then you're looking forward to the next thing and the next thing. And so it goes on. And still you're empty.

Still you're longing for that something. That's something that will fill that void in your heart. Well, friends, it wouldn't be wonderful if you would realize how perilous your state is. that you would act, that you would pray to the Lord, that he would breathe his spirit onto your dead bones, that he would breathe life into your soul so that you truly can be brought, as it were, into the land of the living, a land that goes way beyond the few short years that we have here, a land that stretches into the endless ages of eternity, where there will be no more death, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more darkness.

Friends, it's my prayer that if you are in that desperate plight of spiritual death this afternoon, that you wouldn't waste another day, but that you would cry to God for that remarkable, miraculous process of being taken from death to life, so that in doing so, that you for yourself would know that resurrection promise on that great resurrection day, and what a day that will be.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen.