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[0 : 00] Good evening, 5pm. Are we well? Cold? No? No? Some people are warm? That's good to hear.

Well, my name is James, I'm a student minister here at St. Paul's, and it's a joy to be bringing the word of God tonight to you all. So how about I pray for us as we begin. Please join me in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we can come to you tonight, we can gather as your people, even on this cold night, and we pray, Father, that you would work in us tonight through your word, that you would change us, that you would warm our hearts with the joy of the gospel, of what you've done through your son Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen. Hopelessness is not a feeling any of us enjoy. It is something we dread feeling when things go wrong, sometimes even in the most smallest of ways, like last year's AFL Grand Final. I had made sure I had the whole day off so I could watch my mates, see the Swans get up and win the AFL Grand Final, to see a great battle between the Hawks and the Swans, and hoping to see the Swans go away with the flag. Boy, oh boy, was I disappointed.

Weren't we all? If you're a Swans fan, especially, I mean, as the game went on, it was just dreadful to watch. The Hawks kept extending their lead out, walking all over the Swans. It was as if the Swans didn't turn up to play the match. My hope felt the whole game just dwindled, and by the time the siren of the fourth quarter sounded, all hope was gone. Swans had lost terribly. And it was just depressing, sitting there watching the whole game unfold, knowing it was just hopeless. There was no hope of winning. The Hawks were just too good for us.

Sometimes hopelessness can affect us in much more serious ways. I remember getting a phone call from my father, and he was telling me that my uncle had just been diagnosed with lung cancer, and they had caught it in a very late stage, a bit too late. It was only a number of months after I received that call, I got another call, and he had passed away. Those months were difficult.

I felt helpless. I felt hopeless. My uncle was dying. I couldn't do anything to stop it. I had this feeling of inadequacy. I could do nothing. I just had to accept it, and sit there, and just wait. But such a conclusion is not one we like, nor is it one we accept. We are creatures of hope. Our world is obsessed with hope. All over Facebook, we are bombarded with stories of hope that always ends. You've good news. Our movies and TV shows tap into our felt need for hope, to see the hero overcome obstacles, holding on to hope for a good outcome. We are people of hope, and even in death, we hope. At the funeral of Philip Hughes, Michael Clark spoke very passionately and lovingly towards his friend and fellow teammate. He finished by stating that Hughesy would always be present with him on the cricket field when he went out to bat. The way Clark dealt with the seemingly hopelessness of the situation was to ignore the reality of death itself and somehow justify his ongoing presence through some sort of spiritual or ethereal presence on the cricket field.

[3 : 51] Hopelessness is not something we enjoy, so even in the face of death, we choose to hope. Hopelessness is not something we enjoy, whether it's by ignoring the reality of our pain or by explaining it away, we choose to hope. However, this is not a description of the Israelite people in Ezekiel.

They were a people who did have much hope to begin with, but now they were a people of utter despair and hopelessness. Why? Because they were under the complete judgment of the Lord God. And by the time we get to chapter 37, they are in a pitiful state as a people. They're not trying to look for hope in the midst of hopelessness, trying to explain it away. They describe themselves in verse 11 as dry bones.

They're in a death-like state, a hopeless state, and any chance to find hope was gone. All because they felt and experienced and knew that they were under the terrible judgment of God.

One cannot simply explain away God's terrible judgment. To think so many today are living hopeful lives, looking forward to the future, looking forward to tomorrow, with hope, and yet at the same time, ignorant that they live under the very same judgment of God as the Israelites did.

In the end, blind to the hopelessness that sums up their true reality. Is this the end of Israel? Is this death-like state forever their reality?

[5 : 37] And what about us? Us, who Ephesians 2.1 describes as dead in our sin. Is there any way out of this hopeless, death-like state for us?

Is there any way out of this hopelessness?

Live again. The amazing truth, the incredible miracle of this passage is that the answer is yes. Yes, dead, dry bones can live again.

And this passage will tell us how. Indeed, verses 1 to 14 tell us how dry bones can live again. And verses 15 to 28 will tell us what this new life looks like now as the people of God.

So firstly, how can dry bones live again? How can these bones have new life? Look at verse 3. He asked me, Son of man, can these bones live? I said, Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

[7 : 01] Then he said to me, Prophecy to these bones and say to them, Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. God asked Ezekiel here, after showing him the valley of the dry bones, can these bones live again?

It's a bit of an unfair question, don't you think? The obvious answer is no. Of course not. These bones are dead. They're so dead, they're dry. They've been dead for so long.

There's no way these bones could live. But the one asking the question is not anyone. It's God. He is the creator of all life.

The one in control of life and death. So Ezekiel answers wisely. Only you know God. A wise answer, indeed, which acknowledges that God is the one who says who lives and who dies.

Ezekiel is then told in verse 4 how these bones are going to live. He is going to prophesy to these dead bones. Saying to them, Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord God.

[8 : 08] That is how God is going to give life to these bones. He's going to speak to them. Now he didn't already think the idea of dead bones living again was a bit far-fetched.

Surely now you think his method is. I mean, he's going to speak to bones. I have a dog. That's a Shih Tzu cross poodle named Mr. Bingley.

And if you're wondering, yes, it's from *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Bingley from *Pride and Prejudice*. If you've seen or read the book. Now Mr. Bingley always, I kid you not, he always poos in my room. Whenever I go to college for a week and I come back, there's always a little gift in my room waiting for me. And it's very, very frustrating.

It's very annoying. And I get really upset about it. All I want to do is when I get home is just relax and sit down and put my feet up. But then the first thing I've got to do is clean up a little dog poo from my room.

[9 : 09] And it gets very frustrating. I remember one time I was so fed up. I was so angry at my dog for doing this that I had to do something. Now I don't believe in hurting animals.

But I had to do something. So I went downstairs. I found the dog. I picked him up. And I carried him to my room. And I made him look at the turd. I made him look at it for some time.

Now I made him look at me. And I said to Mr. Bingley, this is not acceptable. You can't do this. This is wrong.

And it went on for about a minute and a half. And I realized at that point, this is ridiculous. This is not going to work. He's a dog. And I'm trying to communicate with a dog and tell him not to do that. That is, this is not working.

And I felt pretty dumb and pretty stupid for doing that. And I feel like it's the same here. How does speaking to dry bones and telling them to live again going to work?

[10 : 11] At least my dog was alive. And I could pick him up and I could show him. These are dead, dry bones. They are lifeless. Whilst I might have thought in a moment that my words had some sort of power over my dog, my words are nothing compared to God's words.

When God speaks, powerful things happen. It was through his word that everything came into being, that God created the world.

God said, let there be, and there was. The psalmist says in chapter 33, for he spoke and it came into being. He commanded and it came into existence.

When God creates, he does so by speaking. When he gives life, he does so by speaking it. And so when, through the prophet Ezekiel, he commands the bones to live, they will live. Because these are the words of the almighty God. They're not my words or anyone else's words. They are God's words. And we see this take place in verse 7. So I prophesied as I was commanded.

[11 : 22] And as I was prophesying, that is telling these bones to live, there was a noise, a rattling sound. And the bones came together. Bone to bone, I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them.

And skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. As Ezekiel spoke to the bones to hear their Lord God, new life began to come upon these bones to form bodies.

Now we are told at this point there was no breath in them. That these bodies were formed, but they had no life just yet. Now this word breath comes from the Hebrew word ruach.

Can you say ruach? Ruach. Don't be afraid to use spitball. Ruach. Come on. Ruach. Yeah, that's good. That's good. It can mean breath or wind.

But it can also mean spirit. And it's difficult to work out how we should read this word here. Ruach. Is it breath or is it spirit?

[12 : 22] I think in this chapter it means both. I mean, it has to mean breath. Because how would these bodies become alive? Indeed we see in verse 9, Such a picture of this breath, breathing into the slain, into the bodies, is reminiscent of God breathing life into Adam.

Which makes me think, since it is God who gives life, that this breath must be also referring to the spirit. Indeed, when God is interpreting the prophecy in the vision to Ezekiel, he says in verse 14, I will put my spirit in you, and you will live.

God's spirit, his ruach, gives life. And it does so in the command of his word. Indeed, his word is enacted and carried out by the spirit.

And so as we read on the result, they all arose, all these bodies, as they were breathed life into him, they all arose like an army. The interpretation of this vision and prophecy is that all the house of Israel made up these dry bones.

They were in a death-like state, saying to themselves, we are dry bones. Our hope is no more. We are cut off. But then God says to him in verse 12, interpreting the prophecy, this is what the sovereign Lord says, my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them.

[13 : 59] I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my spirit in you and you will live.

And I will settle you in your own lands. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken. And I have done it, declares the Lord.

God's word is Israel's salvation. Although they were dead, although they were hopeless, under God's terrible judgment, through the word spoken by the grace of God, Israel is given new life by his spirit.

God's word is our salvation. And although we were dead in our sins, hopeless, helpless, to do anything about our sin, under God's terrible judgment, ignorant that we were so, God, through his word, indeed the word that became flesh, gave us new life by his spirit.

Indeed, Ezekiel is looking forward to the salvation that we enjoy now, to the word of God that would become incarnate in flesh to save us from our deathly state, to give life to these dry bones.

[15 : 24] Jesus, the word of God, the fullest and final revelation of God, who takes away the sin of the world and makes his sacrifice effective for us by his spirit, giving us new life.

I wonder if there's any of us here who haven't accepted God's word, who are living lives ignorant that you are under God's terrible judgment.

We heard last week from Steve that we ought not to harden ourselves to God's word as it's revealed to us. God's word gives life, life that saves us from our sins, from our death-like state.

And so tonight, if you haven't heard the great news that we are saved from our death-like state, then I encourage you to listen, to hear what God has to say to you.

The words of the gospel are powerful. They are words that bring life. And it's why Paul is so bold to say in Romans 1.16, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

[16:49] Is it not incredible that we, as we have been made alive by God's word, given new life? And now the very words that brought life to us and to Israel have now been given to us in the gospel.

That as we go out and speak to dry bones, they might hear God speak to them and speak of the one who died for them.

That they might have new life by the Spirit. Is that not just incredible? We, who were once dead in our sins but now made alive by God's Spirit, we now have the opportunity to go tell others, to other dry bones, God's word, God's redeeming word in the gospel and be conduits of this new life.

How does one have new life? By the very grace of God who gives us life through his word by the power of the Spirit.

All for the glory of his name. This is where we get to our second point. What does this new life look like as the people of God?

[18:12] We learn that although we were dead in our sins, we were in a hopeless, death-like state. God, through his word, by his Spirit, has given us new life.

But what does this new life look like? How does it shape the way we live today? What does it mean for us? Well, look at verse 15. The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.

Then take another stick of wood and write on it, belonging to Joseph, that is to Ephraim, and all the Israelites associated with him. Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

These sticks represent two kingdoms of Israel before the exile, the northern kingdom of Joseph and the southern kingdom of Judah. And Ezekiel is told to bring these sticks together and make them one.

When the people of God wonder why exactly this is and what this all means, Ezekiel is told to tell them, verse 21, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

[19:22] I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel.

There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. For Israel, new life meant that they would no longer be scattered like the exile had made them scattered.

They would no longer be divided amongst each other, separated into the north and to the south, but God was going to make them one nation once again. They would enjoy being brought back into the one land as one people under one Lord and King.

Never again to be divided. Never again to be scattered. Never again to become dry bones. to be in this death-like state.

Because intrinsic to this new life was the gathering of God's people. Was God's people becoming one?

[20:33] That is the shape of the new life that we have in Jesus. Now the people were originally scattered because of their disobedience and unwillingness to turn to God, to listen to his word.

Deuteronomy 28, 64 warns them as such. To give you some context though, verse 54 of 28 says this, If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law which are written in this book and do not revere this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, verse 64, then the Lord will scatter you among all the nations from one end of the earth to another.

There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. The scattering was a curse on God's people because they did not heed and follow his word.

They did not listen. God cursed them and scattered them. And so they could not enjoy the blessings and the promises that came being a unified people under God.

But here in Ezekiel 37, we see that new life for God's people means being brought together in the land as one people. Indeed, whilst the scattering of God's people was always seen as a curse, the gathering of God's people has always been seen as a blessing.

[21:56] Deuteronomy 12, verse 5 says this, But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling.

To the place you must go. There, bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

When God's people live faithfully in the land, obeying his word and worshipping him rightly, they enjoy unity as the people of God.

Verse 18 goes on, Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose. You, your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants and the Levites from your towns, and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God in everything you put your hand to.

[23 : 00] True and proper worship of God is when the people of God are gathered together as one, not scattered, but together as one to rejoice and be thankful for what the Lord has done.

And it's with this in mind, Ezekiel 37 wants us to land, that as God gives us new life to our dry bones, he restores, his people to the oneness that they used to enjoy.

However, Ezekiel 37 is pointing forward to so much more than just Israel's restoration, but to what this new life looks like for all people, all of God's people, looking towards eternity.

Verses 24 to 28 give us a picture of God's people enjoying everlasting peace. with a king that is of like David, who will rule forever in a place that we will be in forever.

With a God, with God himself, who promises to dwell with us forever. The purpose of this new life that God has given to us, dry bones, is to enjoy his presence forever.

[24 : 14] forever. That we will live in community together under one Lord and Saviour and King Jesus. And to never, ever again be separated from him or from one another.

Ephesians captures this central theme of oneness quite well in this chapter. Verse 4 of chapter 4 in Ephesians says, there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The great hope of our new life is that we don't do this new life alone, but in community with believers. Right now, under the lordship of Jesus, we get to enjoy community with the promise that as God's people, we have peace with him now, that he dwells with us.

We get to do as the Israelites did in Deuteronomy 12, gather together for worship, our families, our friends, to rejoice what the lord has done for us, experiencing his blessing as we meet together, encouraging each other and strengthening each other, reminding each other of the hope that we now have in Jesus, that we are no longer dead in our sin, that we are no longer dry bones and we get the promise that never again will we be separated from God or from his people, never again will we be in this death-like state, like dry bones.

As verse 24 says, they will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. this new life is different to before.

[26 : 13] It is guaranteed and sustained by God himself. So God gives us new life by his word and the shape of this new life is this oneness intrinsic to this new life is that God's people are brought together to be one, to enjoy and worship God as one people.

However, we're in an interesting time. We enjoy this new life now since in Christ we've been made alive. We enjoy the presence of God in life now through the Spirit.

We enjoy new life, but there's still a sense that we are still scattered. Christians are all over the world. We're not all in one place at the one time, worshipping and enjoying God's presence.

We do enjoy God's presence as God's people, but we are still persecuted by those who are not God's people, burdened by the sinfulness of the world, indeed, burdened by our own sinfulness.

And so it can be confusing. It can feel like we're stuck in between this now and not yet, waiting for this to all be fulfilled, but also knowing and enjoying the benefits that we already have.

[27 : 32] But something has definitively changed. We have hope. We have hope. We are no longer dry bones.

We are no longer under God's judgment. We have new life. And with new life comes new hope. Hope for the future.

For us here who struggle in the present, who feel the weight of sin, who experience the burden of sin, pain, and suffering, who feel hopeless, we must look forward in hope.

For what God has started, he finished at the cross, and it will come to its completion and to its perfection soon. As Romans 5 reminds us, not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This hope did not come from us.

[28 : 47] It's not an artificial hope. It's not something we conjured up to dull our pain and suffering. It's not a hope like Michael Clark based on nothing.

This hope comes from the one who loved us. It comes from God who poured out his love for us by his Spirit and gave us new life.

When life is hard, when we go through struggle, when we stumble in our sins and fall, we must look forward to that hope and remember the new life and the promise that God has given us, that he will never separate from us.

But also, we should look around us, look around here, for what we experience here is a taste of what is to come. This is what Ezekiel 37 envisioned right here.

New life, as the people of God, in the community of God, worshipping God and rejoicing with each other about what God has done, being thankful together.

[30 : 05] That is what's going on in Ezekiel 37. And we get to partake in this right now. To be one people under one Lord Jesus, this is the tangible expression of our hope for future today.

I wonder, how urgent are we to gather here as a community? Do we come here realising that intrinsic to the new life that God has won for us is gathering as one people?

Or do we come here when it suits us, when it's not cold? Our weekly gathering, as I said, is a tangible expression of what our hope is for the future.

When we are gathered here as one, with the new life that God has given us, we do so in hope, in anticipation of what is coming.

We're all of God's people from all over the world, from all times, will be gathered together at the one time and at the one place, worshipping the one Lord Jesus.

[31 : 20] Indeed, the place called the Lord is there. Amen. Amen. Let's take a moment to let those words cement themselves in our hearts, in our minds, whatever it is that God was challenging or encouraging you, just take a moment to reflect on it now.