

The Valley of the Dry Bones

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Date: 31 May 2015

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[0 : 00] Turn back with me to the prophecy of Ezekiel and chapter 37. Ezekiel chapter 37.

And I want to read from the beginning of the chapter once again. The hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me out in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. And he led me around among them and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley and behold, there were very dry.

And he said to me, son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord, God, you know. 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. And I will lay sinews upon you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you and you shall live and you shall know that I am the Lord.

[1 : 17] 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. Ezekiel was born in 622 BC.

He was around at the time of Jeremiah, the prophet. But he was, Ezekiel was around seven years old when Jeremiah was preaching, when he was declaring God's word to Judah.

And that word was a word of warning because God was angry with his people because they had forsaken him. And the warning was that the people of God were going to be taken into captivity. And that is exactly what happened. Because Babylon, the superpower at that time, besieged Jerusalem. And first of all, carried off a large number of people, around about 10,000 people in 597.

[2 : 43] Taken from their homes and from the culture and from the comfort that they knew in their homes in Jerusalem. In and around Jerusalem, they were taken far away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

And shortly after that, there was another rebellion against Babylon. And Nebuchadnezzar unleashed his full force against Jerusalem and destroyed it in 587.

Taking many of the rest of the people away with him. Now, Ezekiel was among those who were in the first consignment who were deported from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Babylon. And his job as a prophet, he was actually a priest at the same time. But he was also a prophet, which meant that his work was to hear God's word, his message for the people of Israel in captivity.

He was no longer able to preach to them in Jerusalem. But he had to nevertheless bring God's word to them where they were in Babylon. And that's what we read throughout the whole of the book.

[3 : 51] The book begins with an extraordinary vision. And I would encourage you to read the vision and to try and picture in your mind what is described in the first few chapters.

Because they describe the glory of God. A vision that pictured the glory of God. And if you have as much difficulty as others, then that should not stop us from trying to close our eyes and to picture what is going on here.

The book of Ezekiel has several visions in it. And this is one of them. This is probably the best known of the vision. It doesn't describe the glory of God in the same way as is described in the first few chapters.

And yet it describes the glory of God in another way. Because that's what lies at the very heart of this chapter.

This is the second time that God had taken Ezekiel into the valley. And so Ezekiel, as he was taken there, he must have wondered what it was he was going to see.

[5 : 05] The first vision of the glory of God had left him so devastated that he wasn't able to come out of his house for five years. It was so awesome.

As was every time God's people. Remember Moses. He was stunned by his vision of the glory of God. His face was radiant.

And yet, the more that God's people saw the glory of God, the more they wanted to see. That's, of course, what the Bible is all about.

How we wandered away from our fellowship with God. And how God has brought us back through the gospel. And so at this time he must have wondered what it was he was going to see.

But this time the vision was completely different. Instead of seeing the spectacle, the light, the color, and the awesome images that God chose to show him in chapter 1.

[6 : 09] This time he sees the very opposite. He sees a valley that is full of thousands and thousands of bones. It's the kind of scene where, if we were going to see it on a news program.

It's the kind of scene that you might see after a battle or after a war in the Middle East or somewhere like that or in Africa. And there would be a warning that some viewers may find this upsetting.

And it's no wonder. Because here are human bones. And they are lying all over the place. And there are thousands of them. Masses of them. This is not just two or three.

There are thousands of people who have died. And the bones are very dry. Which means that they've been there for a long time. It wasn't yesterday or the day before.

But they've been there for a long time. There is no trace of life whatsoever. And there is no way that anyone could recognize the people whose bones they were.

[7 : 14] They lived a long time ago. They probably fought in a battle. They had lost the battle. And they are now lying dead. And they were unburied. They were unburied.

This was an awful thing to the people at that time. The people around at that time. The ancient Near East. Even today. Funerals in the Middle East.

They take place on the day that a person dies. So for the family of the deceased. If it was left any longer than that. It was a disgrace. It was a shame.

But it was more than that. Because when a body was left. Remember the story of Saul. When they killed Saul. They left. They hung his body. And it was hanging for a long, long time.

This was a further disgrace. And a further shame. And that the family must have been. Families of such people must have been absolutely devastated. It was the ultimate degradation.

[8 : 13] To have your loved one unburied. But it was also the ultimate curse. When it came to the Lord as well. It was one of the curses. It was one of the promises.

That God gave through Jeremiah. Where he says. I will give them into the hand of their enemies. And into the land of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air.

And the beasts of the earth. So that's the scene in front of us then. It's a depressing one. It's an awful one. It's a hideous one. It's one which was fearful. And none of us would choose to look.

At this awful scene. It was a scene of devastation. And it was also of divine judgment.

But this was where the Lord took Ezekiel to. And as he looked over all these thousands of bones. The Lord asked him this question. Son of man.

[9 : 11] He said. Can these bones live? Now. You talk about an impossible question. Ezekiel would have known his Bible.

He would have known that there were one or two occasions in the past. When God had raised the dead. But these were people who had died recently.

He had never ever done it on that scale. These occasions were isolated incidents. For example. The son of the widow. That Elijah raised from the dead.

Just one or two incidents in the past. That had taken place. But nothing on this scale. And certainly nothing. God had never ever raised the dead. From a condition like this.

Where thousands of bones were lying in a valley. And they had been lying in that condition. For many. Many. For a long. Long period of time. And so. Ezekiel answers God.

[10 : 12] In the only way he knows how. Which is to say. Lord God. You know. Lord God. You know. What a wise answer that was. He knew the Lord.

And he knew that God was the God of life. And the God of death. The God who gives. And the God who ultimately takes away. And so God said to him.

Again. Verse 4. Prophecy 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. And I will lay sinews upon you. And you will cause flesh to come. And will cause flesh to come upon you. And cover you with skin.

And put breath in you. And you shall live. And you know what. Ezekiel just did. As God had commanded him. Because he knew that if anything was possibly going to come of this. It had to be. [11:06] And could only come about. By the power of God. And so if God is commanding him to simply. Do what he says. He does what he's told. And he prophesies. There's no procedure.

There's no. There's nothing he has to go through. He just does. He just speaks to the bones. Even although it. It's the most ridiculous thing. Anyone was ever asked to do.

It's the most impossible thing. Anyone can ever contemplate. Speaking to. Not only the dead. But what remains. The little that remains. Of thousands of people. Who once were alive.

But are now. They could not be. In a more hopeless. Condition. And a more irretrievable condition. And so what he hears.

When he commands. He simply commands. The bones. To live. And what happens is. One by one. There is a sound. Of a rattling. And this is one of those chapters.

[12:04] Where you have to read it. And you have to imagine. What is going on. It's a vision. It's one in which God is. Is conveying to the prophet. A message. That is important. For himself.

And for the people. Of Israel. And for us as well. And so we have to absorb this. This is God's word for us. As much. As it was God's word for Ezekiel.

Don't ever think that this is. It only belongs to. To a thousand years before Christ. It doesn't. It belongs to us. And I hope we'll see that. In a few moments time. How relevant it is.

For the gospel. In today's world. And so it's important for us. To absorb. And to take in. What's going on. What's going on. Is nothing short of.

A huge miracle. A spectacular miracle. In which God. Gets to work. And in which the bones. Come together. Each. They find each other.

[12:59] And they become. Skeletons. And then there's the sinews. And then there's the flesh. And the blood vessels. I'm trying to see. If there are any of our doctors. With us this evening. I hope they're not. Because I'm not.

I'm not an expert. On any of this. I hope that. I'm getting all the bits. Together. The sinews. And the flesh. And the nervous system. And the organs. And the heart. And the liver.

And the brain. And the eyes. And the ears. And they all came together. Bit by bit. It all came together. What a marvelous vision. This is. We can only. Close our eyes. And think of. Of this.

All this happening. It was absolutely. Breathtaking. And all by the power. Of God. This is. Death. In reverse. Except that. All of. The. Fleshly parts. Came together. The skin. Everything was complete. Except that.

[13:54] They weren't alive. And even. Even. Although. The flesh. Was all there. And the body. Was all. Reconstructed. Once again.

The bodies. Were all. Reconstructed. Once again. They were. They were. They were. They were. As dead. As they were. Five minutes ago. When they were.

Only dry bones. Then. God said to me. Verse nine. Prophecy. To the breath. Prophecy. 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 live. So I prophesied. As he commanded me.

And the breath. Came into them. And that was the. Moment of completion. They stood up. Alive. Death. Because God. Had reversed.

[14:47] The process. Of death. In them. And he had created. Or recreated. Life. There's something in this. That is reminiscent. Of Genesis chapter. One.

Where God. Makes the first man. And he gets the dust. Of the ground. And he brings it all together. And then. What do we read? We read that he breathes. The breath of life. Into Adam.

And he became. A living being. God does this. And here is God. Doing it again. Except he's not doing it. For the first time. He's doing it. For the second time. This is a renewal.

Of life. It's new life. And it's done. By the power. And the direct intervention. And the miracle. Of God. And so this army.

That five minutes ago. Were nothing more. Than dead bones. Unburied. They were now. A living force. Standing on their feet.

[15:42] An exceeding. Great army. There is. A new. Beginning. So what did all this mean then? What are we to make.

Of all of this? Well this was first of all. A prophecy to the people. Of Israel. It's impossible for us. To. To appreciate.

How they felt. As they. As they tried to. Make a life. A new life. For themselves. In. In. In Babylon. Remember. In Psalm. One hundred and thirty seven. We sing it often. By Babel streams. We sat. And. Wept.

When Zion. We thought on. In midst thereof. We hanged our hearts. The willow trees. Upon. For there. A song. Required. They. Who did.

[16:39] As captive. Bring. Our spoilers. Called for mirth. And said. A song. Of Zion. Sing. They were. Devastated. When. The people. Of Judah. Were brought.

Into. Captivity. By Nebuchadnezzar. In 587. They were. Absolutely. Devastated. For them. Their. Life. In Babylon. Was. A living.

Death. Because. They were. They had. Been. Relocated. They had. Been. Decanted. From. The home. That God. Had. Provided. For them. And they knew.

That this was. Because. Of their own. Sinfulness. And because. God. Was judging. His. People. And yet. Even. In their. Captivity. Even.

In. Their. Hopelessness. God. Had. A promise. For them. And that. Promise. Was. That one day. They would. Be. Restored. And that. They would. Return. And they. Needed.

[17:32] To hear. That promise. That's what. That was. Ezekiel's. Work. To go. And tell. Them. That God. Had. Not. Abandoned. His. People. But that. One day. That they. Would. Return. To.

Jerusalem. Once again. And that's. Exactly. What. Happened. God. Is. Always. True. To. His. Word. On the day. Of. Cyrus. Seventy. Years. After. Nebuchadnezzar. Taking. His. People. Into. Babylon. Cyrus. Came.

To. The. Throne. And he. Allowed. The. Israelites. To. Come. Back. To. Jerusalem. And there. They. Started. The. Rebuilding. Process. Through. Ezra. And. Nehemiah. And all. The rest. Of it. So. God's.

Promise. To. His. People. Was. That. They. Would. Be. Restored. And. That. They. Would. Return. To. Their. Land. Again. Was.

Only. A. Small. Part. Of. God's. Greater. Plan. And. You. And. I. Know. What. That. Greater. Plan. Was. It. Was. So. That. One.

[18:31] Day. In. The. Future. Then. He. Would. Send. His. Own. Son. Into. The. World. And. He. Did. That. Through. Israel. Through. His. People. His. Redeemed.

People. And. So. It. Was. Important. Send. His. Son. Jesus.

Into. The. World. And. The. Death. That. We're. Reading. About. Here. It. Not. Only. Reflects. The. Condition. Of. Israel. In. Captivity. But. It. Also. Reflects. The.

Death. Of. The. Whole. World. This. Whole. World. Is. Dead. In. Trespasses. And. Sins. And. Far. Removed. From. Where. God. Created.

It. To. Be. In. The. First. Place. That's. Why. He. Said. To. Adam. And. Eve. And. The. Day. You. Eat. Thereof. You. Shall. Surely. Die. What. Did. They. Do. They. Did. Exactly. What. God. Forbad. Them. To. Do. And.

[19:23] What. And. What. Happened. Was. That. Them. And. The. Whole. World. After. Them. Fell. Away. From. God. And. Became. Separated. By. Sin. Because.

Of. Sin. They. Became. Separated. And. They. Became. Condemned. But. God. Had. A. Plan. For. The. World. And. This. Is.

Part. Of. That. Plan. The. Whole. Theme. In. This. Chapter. Is. Death. In. Reverse. Which. Not. Only. Meant. That. God's. People. Israel. Were. To. Be.

Restored. To. Jerusalem. Once. Again. But. It. It. Reflected. God's. Greater. Plan. Death. In. Reverse. Think. About. It. This. Way. If.

God. Had. Wanted. To. Condemn. The. World. When. Adam. And. Eve. Sin. He. Could. Have. Easily. Done. So. That. Way. Genesis. Three. Would. Be. The. End. Of. The. Bible. And.

[20:17] He. Would. Have. Had. Every. Right. To. Do. So. Can. You. Imagine. That. Genesis.

Three. When. Adam. And. Eve. Were. Rightly. When. They. Were. Evicted. From. The. Garden. Of.

Eden. Because.

They. Had. Disobeyed. God. God. Could. Have. Said. That's. It. The. Story. Is. Finished. The. End.
But. The. Story. Is. Not. Finished. Even. Although. On.

He. Would. Renew. Humankind. Through. The. Gospel. So. That's. Why. He. Said. To. The.
Promise. Was. To. The. Woman. And. To. The. Serpent. That. One. Day.

That. There. Would. Be. Enmity. Between. Her. Seed. And. The. Serpent. Seed. And. That.

Though. He. Would. Bruise. His. He. Would. Bruise. His. Head. And.

So. The. God. Being. Brought.

[21 : 19] Into. Fellowship. And. Into. Friendship. With. God. Again. Being. Restored. And. Being.
Renewed. But. You. Notice. That. This. Process.

Of. Renewal. It's. Not. Just. About. Patching. Up. What. Is. Wrong. It's. About. Newness. Of. Life.
It's. About. God. Breathing. New. Life. Into. People.

Who. Were. Dead. And. That's. What. Happens. In. The. Gospel. And. That's. What. This. Chapter.
Looked. Forward. To. This. Chapter. Is. A. Promise. Of.

What. God. Was. Going. To. Do. In. The. Lord. Jesus. Christ. Through. Israel. And. In. A. Sense. It.
Was. Fulfilled. In. A. Very. Real. Sense.

It. Was. Fulfilled. In. That. Second. Chapter. That. We. Read. Together. In. John. Chapter. 20.

Where. Jesus. On. The. Night. That. He. Rose. From. The. Dead.

[22 : 13] When. He. Met. With. His. Disciples. He. Said. To. Them. Peace. Be. With. You. As. The.
Father. Has. Sent. Me. Even. So. I. Am. Sending. You. And. When. He. Had. Said.

This. He. Breathed. On. Them. And. He. Said. To. Them. Receive. The.

Holy. Spirit. The. Holy. Spirit. Is. Present. In. Ezekiel. Chapter. Thirty. Seven. It's. Through. The.
Holy. Spirit. That. These. Bones. Come. To. Life. By. The. Power. Of.

God. Spirit. And. God. Spirit. On. The. Basis. Of. What. Jesus. Had. Just. Done. Was. Going. To.
Now. Send. The. Disciples. Into. The. World.

To. Bring. To. The. World. The. Message. Of. Jesus. Death. And. His. Resurrection. So. That.
There. Would. Be. New. Life. So. That. People. Would.

[23 : 05] Come. To. Know. Him. And. Their. Lives. Would. Be. Changed. And. That. They. Would.
Be. Born. Again. And. So. That. God. Would. Fulfill. His. Purpose. Through. The. Lord. Jesus.
Christ. Here's.

What. The. Commentator. Chris. Wright. Says. I'll. Just. Read. This. To. You. Just. A. Couple. Of.
Sentences. It's. Not. Long. But. I. Just. Think. It's. Such. A. Marvellous. Quotation. He. Says. The.

Lord. Of. Life. Himself. Freshly. Risen. To. His. Feet. From. Where. He. Had. Lain. Of.

God. And. The. Posture. Of. God. Himself. In. Commanding. The. Breath. Of. The. Spirit. To. Come.
Upon. The. Disciples. And.

So. Jesus. Empowers. Them. On. The. Basis. Of. His. Death. And. On. The. Basis. Of. His.
Resurrection. They. Were. The. New.

[24 : 04] And. The. Renewed. Israel. Into. Whom. God. Was. Now. Breathing. An. Eternal. Life.
Which. Christ. Had. Purchased. For. Them. But. Their. Life. Was. A. Preambulation.

Of. What. Christ. Was. Going. To. Do. In. In. In. In. Bringing. The. Gospel. To. The. Whole. World.
It. Was. The. First. Stage. The. Very. Beginning. That. Night. That.

He. Was. Raised. From. The. Dead. In. Which. The. Disciples. Would. Thereafter. Go. Into. The.
World. And. Two. Thousand. Years. Later. Here. We. Are. Evidence. Of.

That. New. Life. What. Are. We. Tonight. You. And. I. Who. Have. Been. Born. Again. By. God's.
Spirit. But. Death. In. Reverse. Bible.

Calls. Says. That. A. Person. Without. Christ. Is. Dead. In. Trespasses. And. Sins. That's. What.
Paul. Tells. The. Ephesians. That. They. Once. Were. And. Now. We. Have. Been. Brought. To.

Life.

[24 : 57] By. God's. Spirit. In. The. Gospel. And. Through. The. Message. Of. The. Gospel.
Through. The. Lord. Jesus. Christ. Others. Too. Can. Have. That. New. Life. You.

Can. Have. It. If. You. Come. To. Jesus. You. Can. Have. That. Life. By. Listening. To. His. Word.
And.

By. Coming. To. Faith. In. Jesus. Christ. You. Can. Have. That. New. Beginning. That. Work. That.
Miracle. Work. In. You. In. Which.

You. Become. A. New. Creation. And. In. Which. You. Know. Life. As. You've. Never. Known. It.
Before. Because. God. Takes. His. Central.

Place. In. You. And. Gives. You. The. Power. And. The. Newness. Of. Life. To. Live. With. Him.
And. To. Live. For.

[25 : 49] Him. In. This. World. And. On. To. The. Next. I'm. Going. To. Close. It. There. My. Throat.
Is. Giving. Up. I'm. Just. Going. To. We're. Going. To. Bow. Our. Heads. In.

Prayer. Our. Father. In. Heaven. We. Give. Thanks. Lord. For. The. Wonder. Of. That. That. Image.
That. We've. Just. Been. Reading. About.

The. Horror. Of. It. Lord. That. Describes. A. Horrific. World. A. World. That. We. Are. Part. Of. And.
We. Confess. Lord. That. That. That. That. That. We. Once. Were. Dead. And. Trespasses.

And. Sins. Hopeless. And. Helpless. Until. That. Moment. That. The. Spirit. Of. God. Breathed. Life.
Into. Us. And. That. We. Became. New.

A. New. Creation. And. That's. What. We. Want. For. Other. People. We. Want. Anyone. Who.
Who. Is. Here. Tonight. Who. Doesn't. Have. That. New. Life. In. Himself. Or. Herself. We. So.

[26 : 50] Real. About. This. So. Powerful. So. Marvelous. About. Knowing. God. Lord. God. We.
Pray. That. You. Make. Yourself. Known. To.

All. Of. Us. This. Evening. And. Open. Hearts. For. We. Ask. In. Jesus. Name. Amen. We're. Going.
To. Sing. Together. In. Psalm. 34. The. Sing.

Psalms. Version. Psalm. Number. 34. I'm. Going. To. Sing. From. Verse. Five. To. Verse. Ten. It's.
On. Page. Forty.

From. Verse. Five. To. Verse. Ten. The. Tunis. Saint. Stephen. They. Look. To. Him. And. Shine.
With. Joy. They. Are. Not. Put. To. Shame. The. Suffering. Man. Cried. To. The. Lord. From. Him.
Deliverance.

Came. Psalm. 34. And. It's. On. Page. Forty. To. Sing. Psalms. Version. The. Tunis. Saint.
Stephen. Verse. Five. They. Look. To. Him. And. Shine. With. Joy. We'll. Stand. To. Sing. They.

[27 : 48] Look. To. Him. And. Shine. With. Joy. They. Are. Not. Put.

To. Shame. This. Suffering. Man. Cried. To. The. Lord. From.
Him. Deliverance. Came. The. Angel. Of. The.

Lord. Surround. And. Guards. Continually. All.

Those. Who. Fear. And. Honor. Him. He. Set. His. People.

[28 : 40] Free. Come. Taste. And. See. The. Lord. Is. Good.

Who. Trust. In. Him. Is. Blessed. Oh. Fear. The. Lord. You.
Who. Sit. With. Need. You. Will. Not. Be. Oppressed. Young.
Lions. May. Who. Weak. And. Pain. And. Hunger. For. Their.
Food. But. Those. Who. Wait. Upon. The. Lord. Will.

[29 : 33] Not. Lack. Any. Good. Now. May the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The love
of God the Father and the communion fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with each one
of us both now and always.

Amen.