

November 7, 2021

“Life through the Spirit”
Ezekiel 37:1-14

FCF: Feeling hopeless

PROPOSITION: (anchor) For God’s people to live
(magnet) we must look to His Spirit.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Perhaps you are familiar with the trends. Testimonies of loneliness and cases of isolation are increasing. Due to a rise in premature deaths (suicides), the overall life expectancy in the U.S. is on the decline for the first time since the 1930’s. Depression is the most common serious medical or mental disorder in the nation. And these are trends that were very much in place long before COVID appeared. Studies show there is much more to the reasons than just economics. To really understand what’s going on, we have to talk about our loss of meaning and hope.

Which brings us to our text. As we read it, cue in on two words - “live” and “breath”.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Ezekiel prophesied in the years following the Babylonian exile that began in 597 BC. In fact, he was one of those carried from Jerusalem to Babylon. Ezekiel was an exile speaking to exiles, many of whom were tempted to despair and doubt the power and justice of God. “What has happened to us? Can we trust God’s reign and His purposes?” The answer is a clear “Yes.”

Chapter 37 relays the most famous of the visions in the book, the valley of dry bones. As you read it, you cannot help but note the repetition of two words. To “live” appears six times and “breath” or “Spirit” (it’s the same Hebrew word) appears ten times. The repetition of these two words is significant and gives us a clue as to the theme, the reason and meaning behind Ezekiel’s vision. And that theme is simple and straightforward. For God’s people to live we must look to His Spirit. For God’s people to live - to love, serve, trust, and follow Him, for us to flourish, for us to be who we were created to be and to witness to His ways - we must look to His Spirit.

That is made all the clearer by two contrasts - the before and after portrayed in the vision. On the one hand, we have a sobering confirmation. And on the other, a soaring encouragement.

I. A SOBERING CONFIRMATION

First, a sobering confirmation (**READ Ezekiel 37:11**). This is how the people saw their situation. And the Lord’s response is, “Yes, but it’s actually a whole lot worse than you think.”

A) The Valley of Bones

Which then brings us to the valley of dry bones (**READ Ezekiel 37:1-2**).

1. Utter devastation

This is utter devastation - a valley “full of bones”, “very many bones” we are told. This looks to be the aftermath of a great battle. The bodies of the slain lie everywhere you look. And step.

2. Clearly irreversible

It is utter devastation and clearly irreversible. These bones are “very dry”. The scavengers and sun have done the work of cleaning and bleaching the remains. The bodies were left in the open, unburied - a mark of great shame. (READ Ezekiel 37:3a) The question simply sounds absurd.

B) A Vision of Death

The valley of bones is a vision of death. And, again, this is how they saw the situation.

1. Identity gone

Their identity was gone. Jerusalem had been pillaged. The temple was in ruins. The people were in exile. They were now going through the day dazed and confused, almost concussed.

2. Hope destroyed

Their identity was gone and their hope destroyed. This was beyond a mere bruising. They had been utterly broken, shattered, and scattered to the wind. They had not believed the warnings of judgment. Now they could not believe the promises of renewal. And theirs was beyond just shame. They bore a covenantal curse. They knew themselves to be cut off, cut off from God.

This then is the sobering confirmation. Their hopes were dashed into the ground.

Illustration:

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl reflects on his time as a prisoner in a Nazi death camp. The conditions were horrific. Death was everywhere. Frankl noticed three basic responses. First, there were those who did anything to survive - betray, exploit, inform. Second, there were those who gave up and simply withered away. And the third group were the quietly heroic, showing courage and sacrificing for others. The difference between the three groups? It depended on where their hope was. Those who had a “why” could bear any “how”.

Application:

The point being our hope needs to be in something that holds. Which means our hope must not be in something we can lose - money, power, strength or beauty. Lose it and you lose hope. Our hope must be in Christ. It must be in His life giving work and presence in our lives. We need to ask ourselves, “Where is my hope? Is it in something or someone I can never lose?”

For God's people to live - for these bones to live - we must look to His Spirit.

II. A SOARING ENCOURAGEMENT

Which brings us to the second point - a soaring encouragement. Things were both worse and better than they thought. God spoke into this and gave Ezekiel a vision and a commission.

A) The Breath of Life

We move now from the valley of bones to the breath of life - the two themes together.

1. Speaking to the bones

Ezekiel is told to speak to the bones (READ Ezekiel 37:4-8). Imagine the scene. Ezekiel is to prophesy, to speak these words to whom? To what? To bones. To a valley full of dry bones.

2. Speaking to the breath

Then he is told to speak to the breath ([READ Ezekiel 37:9-10](#)). This is a change beyond our imagining. But the change comes in stages - much as with the creation of Adam. And we learn something. For the word of God to do its work, the Spirit of God must bring life. And He does.

B) A Vision of New Life

So we move from a vision of death to a vision of life. And we're not left to guess the meaning here. For the Lord tells us. The utter devastation proves to be reversible after all.

1. A return to the land

([READ Ezekiel 37:12](#)) A return to the land, a restoration of hopes, the renewal of the nation.

2. A resurrection

And something more - a resurrection ([READ Ezekiel 37:13-14](#)). The imagery of open empty graves is not an accident. It is pointing to something more, to someone more, to One to come who would be cut off for the sake of His people that they (we) might live anew and live again.

This is the soaring encouragement. And it is better than they could have known.

Illustration:

This is a "eucatastrophe" - a word from J. R. R. Tolkien. It means a wonderful turn of events, a good catastrophe. And the Lord is still bringing such turns for and in His people.

Last Sunday was Reformation Sunday. We talked about Francis Schaeffer. Last year, we looked at the history of revival in this country. One of the revivals that often gets overshadowed by the First and Second Great Awakenings took place in Los Angeles - the 1906 Azusa Street Revival. William Seymour was at the center of these events. In this movement of the Spirit of God, amidst a terribly segregated society, the color line was erased. Huge throngs of people from virtually every race, nationality, and class came together. It was an all-inclusive fellowship - a work of the Holy Spirit, an outworking of His intentions for us, a foretaste of what is coming.

Application:

Let's go back to this vision, the sobering confirmation and soaring encouragement. There is a eucatastrophe to Christianity itself, a great turning. It's why this message stands out. For it is not about "what we do" but "what's been done." It's not a "to do" list but a news report. For the bones to live, they simply need to receive the breath. That's it. That's why it's good news.

For God's people to live - for these bones to live - we must look to His Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

And we must keep looking to His Spirit, never forgetting and never thinking we have no need of Him. In *The Silver Chair*, one of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, Aslan calls two children, Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb, into Narnia for a task - to find a lost Prince. The children become separated soon after their arrival, so Aslan presents the task to just Jill. He gives her four signs by which he will guide them in their quest, and he has her repeat them until she knows them perfectly. Just before sending Jill on her way, Aslan exhorts her ([READ](#)):

But, first, remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs. And secondly, I give you a warning. Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia... And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters.

I won't give away the story except to say that there's a good reason Aslan gives her this urging.

Disciples of Jesus have that same sort of dependence. We never outgrow it. We never move beyond our dependence upon God's Spirit. We need Him from the start of the Christian life and every step along the path. We need Him for absolutely everything. We need His breath.

We need His breath upon these bones that we might live, that we might manifest the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5, that we would live out the Beatitudes set forth in Matthew 5. Imagine the change this would make in our relationships or the impact upon our community. How then can these things be? How can they become true of us? (READ Ezekiel 37:3)

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