

37 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. **3** He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! **5** This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life. **6** I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8** I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **14** I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”

God, You Know

All is lost. The devil has won. We might as well give up and go home because God has met his match. This world is too wicked to redeem. There is no hope, no chance at all, might as well invest in guns and gold and build a tree fort in Montana.

You know better than and so do God’s people Israel. They know God was in control of all things. They know that God is in control of those who are in control but it doesn’t always feel like it and we don’t always act like it. In the Gospel Mary knows that Jesus is the Christ. In our lesson Ezekiel knows that God is Almighty and can do whatever he wants. But our lessons seem as if they know but they don’t act like it. When God pushes

the point and questions they respond instead to the question they wish he had asked. They sound more like politicians dodging questions, refusing to give a clear answer, and even acting as if they don't know.

Do we know and act like it? Because sometimes we too act as if God has lost and there is no hope. Sometimes that is how we feel. But God wants us to know without a doubt that, "He is *the Lord your God*." And to be absolutely certain that victory is assured and even if there are short term losses along the way and Christianity loses ground the war is won. And while fear, pessimism, anger, and depression make their way into life of a Christian God still wants his people, Mary, Ezekiel and even us to know the Lord is God. God knows and he wants you to know as well.

But Israel feels like dry bones. *They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.* They are like dry bones, dead and beyond revival. Israel has lost everything. They've been carried off into captivity. The temple has been destroyed. The sacrificial system has come to a halt. There is no means to make amends with the Almighty. There is nothing they can do. They had always assumed that because they had the temple, because they had God's Word, because God was with them nothing bad could ever happen. The land was permanent, they were invincible. But Babylon has captured the city of God and his people are carted off. Is God powerless? Has he forgotten? Has God finally given up on us? They were disillusioned and maybe even a cynical. Does God even care? Does God even know?

Ezekiel along with them. He was a priest at the temple. He had a family, home, a career but all that was taken away when they were carted off. If that wasn't enough his wife died and once again he is called to preach to a people who didn't listen to him in Jerusalem. In the face of a futile ministry God doesn't give up.

God came to Ezekiel and carried him back in a vision. He takes Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. Ezekiel records two superlatives. There were very many bones, and they were very dry. But then there was a very odd question, "*Can these bones live?*" Is there any hope? Ezekiel doesn't answer. He knows how crazy it is. Of course they can't live. The presence of very dry bones serves only as a sign of past life. Not wanting to fail his exam, he answers, "*God, You know.*" I'm just a washed up priest. This is above my pay I don't know. God, You know.

We may feel the same way. We may feel as if we are living in a valley of dry bones among a godless society where a godless lifestyle is the model. Christianity is ridiculed, biblical values are criminalized as hate speech. And California is more interested in

prosecuting investigators who exposed an abortion provider's trade in baby body parts. It's not just the people. Pastors can become depressed and question, "Is it worth it?" Sometimes we respond a little more than dry bones. How will we ever move from maintenance to mission?

The lessons can be difficult but the worst part is that we haven't been carried off. We haven't seen our God defeated on the battlefield. We have however seen our friends and family defeated by death. It hurts. In such situations it's easy for us to question if God cares or even knows what is happening to his people.

A just then God takes us home to a cemetery full of bones and asks us, "*Can these bones live?*" Jesus joins in, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" Can this world be redeemed? Can people believe. We look around at the obvious and may answer, "Not a chance. God, You know."

Yet like Ezekiel we have been called to speak to these bones. We don't need a gimmick. We don't need a garden but it sure is nice. We don't need invitations but they too are nice. We don't need to get with the times. We do, however, need to faithfully proclaim the Word of God, be reminded that the Lord is God, and trust him and his promises rather than what we are doing.

It may not make sense but neither did God's command to preach to the bones. Instead of turning to the bones and bringing them to life like he did at creation, God instructs Ezekiel to speak. God not only tells Ezekiel to speak he even tells him what to say. Say, "*Oh dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.*" There was not an ear among them. He's preaching to bones!

But did you hear the promise of God, "*I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.*" If God can create new life out of dirt, I'm certain he can repurpose these bones for life. And then it happened. Bones snapped together, muscles formed, skin covered the body but Ezekiel wasn't done just yet. "*Preach to the breath... say to it, 'Come from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'*" *They stood up on their feet - a vast army.*

Ezekiel is playing with a word which is translated as breath, wind, or Spirit. The Spirit works through God's Word even when spoken by his servant. The Spirit is at work so that, "*You will know that I am the Lord.*" That is the central theme of Ezekiel. That purpose is stated 50 times throughout his book. That is the central theme of the Bible, "*These words are written that you may know that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you might have life in his name*" (John 20:31) Who is the Lord? He is the God of

the living. He is the God of the Resurrection. The Old Testament clearly teaches a resurrection from the dead. Jesus speaks, "*I am going to open your graves and bring you up out of the graves.* That is what Jesus did for Lazarus. This is what he proclaimed to Mary, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die.*" Jesus demonstrates his power over life and death. As Lazarus comes out of his tomb Jesus is on his way into another. But this holy one would not see decay. Can these bones live? They still do.

But what about us? What about these bones? "Can these bones live?" - Everyone of us is born in sin, unable to believe, or even accept God into their hearts "*We are dead in sin*" (Ephesians 2:8). God's promise to us, "*I am going to open your graves... I will put my spirit in you; you will live.*" At the command of God they can, by God's power, and the Spirit working through that Word. God has called us to speak. He even gives us the words to speak. God instructs us to speak of his sons work - so that you may know that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing you might have life - not temporal but eternal.

God works through us. His word works even when spoken through us. Your time isn't a waste. God's Word works in fact his kingdom is still growing even in the harshest climates. There is hope for Americans. There is hope for us. God is with us. God knows what we are going through. Psalm 116:15 - *Precious in his sight are the death of his faithful servants.* No matter what happens in this world we know. God will bring us back. We may see ourselves as dry bones, without hope, and as good as dead but God restores us not only spiritually but physically as well. We will be raised and our flesh restored.

On this fifth Sunday in Lent as Easter is in sight we hear the word of God and though we started Lent confessing that we are dust and ashes we realize what God has made us. As the Holy Spirit is poured out on all people a vast army comes to life. These are the saints militant - you and I and the saints triumphant standing before the throne. Nothing is lost. All will be restored. We are not on the defensive. The gates of hell cannot stand against us. The devil is losing ground. The Kingdom of God continues to grow even with the apparent short-term battles lost. The War is won even when we don't feel or act like it. Rejoice, be glad, yours is the kingdom of God.

These bones live and will live even after I die. Investing in guns and gold won't hurt and you don't need to go to montana to find a fort (we have one). Armed with the Word of God and powered by the Spirit who works faith through that word we are vast army (one that cannot be counted) conquering nations and capturing souls for Christ. Make use of the most powerful weapon you have, the Word of God which brings even the dead to life. Can these bones live? God, you and I know that because of Christ, they can.