

“Them Bones, Them Bones, Them Dry Bones”

Ezekiel 37:1-10 by Pastor Don Ginkel, Ascension Lutheran Church, April 19, 2015

The hand of the LORD was upon 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. 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. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, You alone know.”

Then He said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 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.’”

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. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

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

By now you know that I recently didn’t make it as a baby sitter for my 10 month old granddaughter, Finley. In less than an hour little Finley, 10 months old, did me in. You know I imploded. It was so bad that my gracious wife, Nadine, took me on a Caribbean cruise for healing. That was great. But Easter Sunday was horrible. We went to the Easter Service. The preacher talked about looking at a sparrow in England. No Jesus. Not a word. I wanted to stand up and yell, “Shoot the sparrow! Get to Jesus!” I knew I shouldn’t make a scene, so I sat there. They announced that the closing Easter hymn was, “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hands.” Nadine immediately got up and walked out. I followed. It was a bummer. We came back to Ascension last Sunday and Pastor Larson preached a powerful sermon on John 20. What a relief.

Now we come to the next preacher, the prophet Ezekiel. Here’s the question: Can dry, dead bones come back to life? Can a dry bone with no skin, no brains, no sign of life, come back to life? That’s the question God asked Ezekiel. Verse 3, **“The LORD asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’”**

Poor Ezekiel. The Bible says that when he was 30 years old, God came to him and said in Ezekiel 2:4-5, **“The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ And whether they listen or fail to listen — for they are a rebellious house — they will know that a prophet has been among them.”**

Now that’s like God telling you: **This morning I want you to go to a certain house in a bad area in Denver. This house is packed with people. They are still carrying on after an all night party. They are in a rebellious mood. No, they won’t listen to you. They might threaten you. They might even attempt to do you bodily harm, but you go anyway just so they can never say that they didn’t have a chance to hear the Gospel.**” That is your assignment. Would you go?

Could your message bring life back into the people in that house? Well, that was Ezekiel’s predicament. God did not say to Ezekiel, **“Just go to those who will listen.”** He said, **“Go to all the people just so they will have a prophet among them.”** Ezekiel went. They didn’t listen. God said they wouldn’t.

Then the LORD gave Ezekiel another vision. In this vision Ezekiel was carried out to a valley full of old, dry bones, scattered all over. These bones were the people of his congregation. Obviously they were dead. The whole nation of Israel was dead. The people were slaughtered. Their leaders were driven into exile. The streets of their city were filled with their victors, and the bones of the people were left unburied all over the desert, a huge graveyard of dry bones, and that was Ezekiel’s congregation.

It would seem to me that it was time for Ezekiel to turn in his preacher’s robe. It was time for Ezekiel to tear up his ordination papers and throw his evangelism books away. Wouldn’t you, if you had a congregation filled

with dry bones? We read in verse 3, **“He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live again?’ I said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, You alone know.’”**

What was Ezekiel to say to all those dead, dry bones? The folk song we sang earlier – “Them Bones, Them Bones.” Let’s sing the four lines in your bulletin again; Stephen Pruitt will lead us.

Them bones, them bones, them dry bones.
Them bones, them bones, them dry bones.
Them bones, them bones, them dry bones.
Now hear the word of the Lord.

Now hear what? The Word of the Lord. And what is the word of the Lord? Verses 4-6: **“Prophecy to these bones and say to them: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 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.”**

My friends, that is what has happened to you and me. The LORD has given us life and we are saved. There is absolutely no merit or worthiness in us that caused this. We cannot take our dry bones and cover them with flesh and skin and fill ourselves with the breath of life; only God can do that. How terrible a misconception when we think we had something to do with this life-changing process.

St. Paul talks about our condition before conversion in Ephesians 2:1, **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”** What were you before your conversion? Dead! **Three questions: How can a dead man make himself alive?** Answer: He can’t! **How can a reject make himself accepted?** Answer: He can’t! **How can a blind man make himself see again?** Answer: He can’t. Only the author and originator of life, Jesus Christ, can work this transforming miracle.

We have a tendency to go around patting ourselves on the back even though our hand will not reach back there:

1. **“Wow, isn’t it great that we’re so right and they’re so wrong?”**
2. **“Why can’t all Christians be like me — nice and gentle and peaceful and so loving?”**
3. **“Just why doesn’t everyone have such a nice congregation like ours, especially since I’ve started attending, it’s gotten a lot nicer?”**

Let’s not forget where we were. Let’s not forget that we were at one time out in that desert with all those dry bones. Let’s not forget that everyone one of us deliberately and decisively chose to reject our Creator. Let’s not forget that we were dead until God in His love and mercy said to us, **“I’m going to put my Spirit into you. I’m going to give you life because I love you in spite of your sin.”**

You were fought over in a fierce battle between the evil underworld and the power of God’s Kingdom. It was a horrible battle that took the very Person of God to the cross and demanded His life. You were purchased from the devil, not with dollar bills, but with the precious blood of Jesus.

I believe that God can take anyone of us here this morning who may be spiritually dead and He can make us alive by the end of this service. I believe that whatever is keeping you from a new life in Christ can be changed. What happened when Ezekiel spoke to those dry bones in the desert? We read in verses 9-10: **Then the LORD said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood on their feet — a vast army.**

This prophecy simply says that spiritually dead people from all over the world will be brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ. This includes us today and those people we are privileged to bring the Gospel to and who come to faith. An example. I received a letter from a friend of mine, Rev. Steve Miller (LCMS) of Christ Lutheran Church, Comstock, WI. Listen closely.

Last week I made a quick trip out to Michigan to preach at the funeral of my cousin, Denny. He could be loud, brash and profane. He had anger over hurts experienced as a kid and over his divorce years ago after only a year of marriage. He trampled over most of the 10 Commandments during his lifetime. You never wondered what Denny was thinking because he was always up front with it. He died of cancer at the age of 60.

Denny struggled with what he described as his “doubting faith.” He asked one of the cousins, “Why does faith come so easy to some and so hard to others like me?” But Denny was not alone. Even though the disciples of Jesus witnessed His miracles, they were confused, frightened, forgetful and full of doubt when Jesus died. They forgot He said He would rise, and when He rose, they didn’t believe it. They thought He was a ghost. And when “Doubting Thomas” heard of it, he wouldn’t believe it unless he saw with his own eyes.

The Bible urges us to “seek the Lord” while there’s still time. Seeking the Lord is exactly what Denny did during his last days, and the Lord promises that “If you seek the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, you will find Him” (Deut. 4:9). God was faithful to that promise when Denny got hold of a DVD called, “Jesus: Fact or Fiction — Explore the Evidence.” Denny later said: “Steve, this is exactly what I need!” The Lord answers prayer and keeps His word!

Denny was fully aware of his sin. By his own admission his life was pretty wretched. He even bought a black grave stone because he thought of himself as the black sheep of the family. But thank God for His amazing grace! “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a WRETCH like me.” Denny saw Luther’s seal on his parents’ grave stone, and when he found out that the seal stands for the forgiveness of sins that Jesus earned for us by dying on the cross and the hope of eternal life in heaven that Jesus guaranteed for us by rising from the dead, he had it inscribed on his black tombstone, which goes to show that even BLACK sheep can be saved by the Good Shepherd! Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Permit me to ask you three questions:

- 1. Do you believe that like Denny, in the sight of a holy God, you are by nature a sinner and lost, and that you, too, are a black sheep? If so, say “yes.”**
- 2. Do you believe from the Bible that black sheep can be saved and that dry bones can come back to life? If so, say “yes.”**
- 3. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins on the cross and that He offers you salvation freely by faith in Him? If so, say, “yes.”**

Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, I know that I have broken Your laws, that my sins have separated me from You and I am like dead bones. I am truly sorry. I confess with my mouth and believe in my heart that Your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins upon the cross. Use me to bring Jesus to my lost friends. Thank You that someday soon I will stand in the vast army of the redeemed to worship You and live with You forever and ever. In Jesus’ name. Amen.