

The situation was grim. It was a valley of death. The Lord had taken Ezekiel to a place of utter desolation and showed him an expanse full of the dead. Not dying but in need of medical assistance. Not breathing last. Not even freshly dead. Dead and gone so long that every measure of flesh had been picked and rotted away, even drop of moisture evaporated out of the bones. Even any remaining color bleached out by the scorching sun. You don't get further away from life than this. Dry bones piled in the dirt as far as the eye could see.

"Why God? Why show me this? Aren't things bad enough already? My people have rejected you. They worshipped false gods and defiled your temple. And for that you allowed the pagan nations to overrun them. They have been slaughtered by the enemy armies and carried off to foreign lands. You promised that Israel was special and that this land would be ours. And more importantly you promised the Messiah from this people and this land. How will that ever happen now? Our people are dead and scattered to the wind, the land isn't ours anymore. How will the Messiah come now? What is there left to hope for?"

Here Ezekiel stands with the Lord, looking out over this valley of dead. The Lord turns and asks him a question, "**Son of man, can these bones live?**" (v3).

The situation was starting to look grim. Not quite as grim as it had a few months ago, but the fire was dying and you could feel a sense of hopelessness creep back into the group. They tried to hold on to the thrill and the joy they had known recently at seeing their Lord and teacher back from the dead. After the utter despair of seeing him executed, they saw him alive only three days later. And this message he brought, that his death had saved them, it was amazing. And over the next forty days he had been with them and shown himself to a great number of witnesses. The fire of joy that burned in them was powerful after all these events.

But now, it was over a week since he left. He told them to stay, and wait, that something else was coming. And yet each day went by like the one before it, and nothing had happened. Sure, they understood a little better than they had. And sure, Jesus had always kept his promises. But, they were stuck in a holding pattern now, running out of things to talk about each day as they sat together and waited. Would today be the day? Each day that passed with nothing happening sucked a little of the anticipation out of the group. And now it was ten days since they'd seen or heard from Jesus. How much longer until they could get back to their lives?

The situation was grim. A new soul had been born into this world, but there was something wrong with it. It was corrupted. It was deformed. It was evil and selfish. It was dead. It was the opposite of God and his holiness. It was the opposite of how God created this world. God created the world in beauty and perfection. This soul was vile and broken. It was horrific to even look at. It should be destroyed. It should be cast away from God forever, so disgusting it was. But God, in his love and mercy, did not do this immediately. He decided to give the soul time. For no reason than undeserved kindness, God fed and clothed the soul and allowed it to grow.

It did not get better. It grew in selfishness. It found new ways to lash out and offend the Lord. On some level it understood right from wrong. Even occasionally, it would try to do right. But every effort toward good only erupted in more selfishness and evil. The weight of the conscience started to bear down. At first, it seemed like it just had to try harder to do better, balance out the good with the bad. But over time, with failure after failure piled on, the soul itself began to realize that it couldn't even do enough good to balance out the bad. That every good deed was corrupted because of the corruption within. Despair and hopelessness started to set in.

And then it learned of God. That God didn't demand even a balanced life, he demanded a perfect life. That God would not allow any sin in his presence. That anyone and anything tainted by sin would be cut off from him forever. And apart from God there is no hope, there is only eternal death and destruction. The soul could not flee itself, could not rid itself of the deformity within. The hope was gone, the despair was complete. It was dead, both in fact and in fate. "O God," it cried out, "How can I possibly live?"

**"O Sovereign Lord, you alone know,"** Ezekiel said (v3).

If there was any power that could reverse this kind of death, this valley of dry bones, it belonged to the Lord. Nothing else in heaven or on earth could accomplish it, and so if it were even possible, God alone would be the one to know it. The Lord does not directly answer Ezekiel's implied question. Instead he simply commands Ezekiel to prophecy to the bones. In other words, speak the word of God to them. God gave Ezekiel the words to say. And God's word to the bones

of the dead was very simple, very straightforward. He would bring them back to life. He would bring bone to bone, cover them with flesh and bring the spirit of life back into them. The power of God would go out from the words and do exactly what it said. It would take this scene of devastation and transform it into a valley full of life.

And exactly as God said, exactly as he promised, is exactly what happened when Ezekiel spoke those words. The bones came together. Flesh and skin came out and covered them. They were made whole, though they lacked breath; they lacked spirit. It's the same word in the Hebrew language; breath, spirit, wind. An invisible force. So God tells Ezekiel to speak again about the spirit, and it comes, it fills them with life. And they stand, a vast army. But being made alive in the flesh, they still have a complaint. This host of people stand for the house of Israel and they say, "**Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.**" (v11). They may be alive, but that doesn't change the fallen state of Israel. That doesn't change the despair of feeling that the promise of the Messiah is cut off as their land is devastated and occupied by a foreign nation.

But God makes a promise with his word, the word that was powerful enough to bring these people to life. He says that he will send his Spirit and by the power of that Spirit the house of Israel would live. By the power of that Spirit they would be brought out of the grave and made alive. And in that new life God would provide them their own land, their own nation. They would be restored to their land, and the promise of the Messiah would not be broken. The Lord knew it would happen, and the Lord made it happen.

God keeps his promises. In the short-term, the Jewish nation eventually returned from the death of exile to the land of their fathers. Jerusalem was rebuilt, the nation endured and the line of the Savior remained unbroken. Hundreds of years later a baby was born, lived, died, and lived again. He was Christ the Lord. He made a promise to his followers that after he left, the Spirit would come down to them and equip them for the new task ahead. Their new task of teaching the world what he had done for them by his death and resurrection. Teaching the promise of sins forgiven by payment in his blood. And when the time was exactly right, Jesus kept his promise. He sent the breath, the wind, the Spirit to them in a visible way so that those around would know something special was happening. And the disciples were equipped for God's work. They had a new life. Their faith was strengthened, they were given the tools they needed and they had the purpose Jesus had given them. The Lord knew them, the Lord planned this new life for them. And by the power of his word he made it happen.

The disciples did their work. The word of God spread. The same word that brought life to the valley of dry bones spread throughout the world. It brought that most important message; the promise of sins forgiven by the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. And through that message that same breath, same wind, same Spirit continues to work today. That Spirit blows on the dead heart of the soul trapped in sin, full of despair and it brings life. The soul cries out; how can there be any hope after so much sin? How can there be enough forgiveness for all I have done? How can I live under your judgment, Lord? But the Lord knows how. He knows that you will live, because he has the power to make it possible. He lived and he died and he lived again to make it possible.

The word of God teaches us this truth. The Holy Spirit comes by the power of the word and brings death to life. The word came to the soul born in corruption and death and by its power it returned it to life. The corruption was contained and a new life came forth. A life that would endure, a life that was holy and blameless before the Father. One that he looked at and could draw close to. A soul that there was no need to punish. God had waited, he had been patient to give this soul a chance to hear his word spoken from the mouth of his prophets. And that word spoken to dry bones, dead and wasted away, had brought life where there never had been.

Death is a separation. Your soul had been born separated from God because of its sin. And the life it lived on earth had not changed that. But God changed it. God took away the sin, reversed the condition of death, and made you alive again. Only God knew if it could be done. Only God could do it. And by the power of his mighty word, he did. God knew this. He knew you. He knew that by his word your dead soul could be healed, could be made alive and pure in him. The word came to you, the Spirit came to you and made you live. Your sin is removed. That which kept you from God is gone. There is not just a ray of hope, there is only hope left. There is no more reason for despair. God's almighty power in his word was enough to raise the dry bones to life and it was enough to make your dead soul alive in him. That life will go on forever with him.

You were born dead with no power to change that. But the Lord knew that you could live. He knew that you would live, and by his power and Spirit, you are alive forever. Amen.