

Ezekiel 37:1-14

In the Book of Proverbs King Solomon wrote, *“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”* What are **dry bones**? They are bones which are **weak**, and **brittle**, and easily **broken**. It’s interesting that Solomon says a **crushed spirit** results in **dry bones**. A crushed spirit can be the result of many things. In our day it is often caused by **stress**. Undue stress, whether real or merely imagined, is a **powerful** force. It can leave you feeling all dragged out - feeling helpless and useless - searching to find a reason for your existence. Excessive stress has even led some people to the point of **despair**. That’s what can happen when your **spirit** has been **crushed** - and at the time of our text, God’s **people** were having some severe **spiritual** problems - problems which could easily have led them to **despair**. But today, we will see how God led His people **From Death To Life**, through the power of His **Word**.

Allow me to give you a little background. At the time of our text, God’s people (including Ezekiel himself) were in **exile** in the land of **Babylon**. Over 100 years earlier, the Ten Northern Tribes of the Children of Israel had been carried off to **Assyria**, never to return. But now **Babylon** had taken over the military supremacy of the world. It started in 612 BC, when King Nebuchadnezzar had **defeated** the Assyrians in battle. Seven years later, he destroyed the last real **threat** to his world supremacy when he defeated the Pharaoh of **Egypt**. It was at that time, as Nebuchadnezzar was on his way back home, that he deported to Babylon the **brightest** and the **best** of God’s people from the land of **Judah**.

A **second** deportation would take place just eight years later - a deportation which would include the Prophet **Ezekiel**. Now, as bad as all this may sound, the people of Judah still remained **hopeful**. After all, their capital city, **Jerusalem**, was still intact. Since Jerusalem was located on high almost **unapproachable** ground, and since it was surrounded by a series of strong **walls**, the people were confident that it would certainly stand **forever**. They continued to **cling** to that hope until that dreaded day when the **impossible** actually **happened**. Jerusalem had **fallen** - and even the LORD’s **temple** itself lay in **ruins**! At that point, the **spirit** of God’s people had been utterly **crushed**.

Such was the situation when the LORD came to Ezekiel and showed him the vision of the valley of **dry bones**. God would use this visual story to bring **encouragement** to His despairing people. Ezekiel began with these words, *“The hand of the LORD was upon me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley, which was full of bones. He had me pass*

*through them and go all over among them. There were very many on the valley floor, and they were very **dry**. He said to me, 'Son of man, can these dry bones **live**?' I answered, 'LORD God, **you know**.'*"

God was calling on Ezekiel to use his powers of **observation**, and to study **closely** a **valley** filled with bones. As he did so, two things became **obvious** to Ezekiel. The first problem was that the bones were **scattered** all over, with absolutely **no order** to them. The second problem was that the bones were very **dry** - lifeless and brittle. After noting these problems the LORD asked him, "*Son of man, can these dry bones **live**?*" What would **you** have answered? Regardless of how much or how little you know about human anatomy, is there any way to make a pile of dried up bones come to **life**? If there **is**, only **God** knows what it is - and that's exactly what **Ezekiel** said.

It was at that time that the LORD proceeded to show Ezekiel **how** it could be done. He said, "*Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' This is what the LORD God says to these bones. **I am about to make breath enter you so that you will live. I will attach tendons to you. I will put flesh back on you. I will cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD.***" Ezekiel was to **prophesy** - to **preach** to the bones! Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "What **good** was it going to do to preach to a pile of dry old **bones**?" - and perhaps Ezekiel himself was wondering the same thing. From a strictly **human** perspective, preaching to **dry bones** would be about as effective as **watering a broomstick** to make it grow. It would achieve the same results as **talking to a brick wall**. But from a **Christian** perspective, **God** and His **Word** offer the **only** possible solution. The Bible tells us that, "*With God, all things are possible.*"

Now before we look at the **results** of Ezekiel's preaching, I'd like you to think about the fact that God had not required **any** results from him. God had not said, "Ezekiel, **you** try to put these bones together - **you** try to assemble them into a mighty, living **army** for Me." Instead God had said, "You **prophesy** ... and **I** will do the **rest**." Sometimes - perhaps all too often - we put the **cart** before the **horse**. **We** try to comfort the sick, or convert the unbeliever, or regain the straying Christian. **We** try, with our caring, and knowledge, and experience, and ability. But we must remember that if we don't use **God's Word**, there is no **guarantee** that the results we **desire** will actually **occur** - no matter **how** hard we try.

Well, Ezekiel did as he had been commanded by the LORD - and the **results** were **astounding**! He continues, "*As I was prophesying there was a **noise**, a*

*rattling, as the bones came together, one bone connecting to another. As I watched, tendons were attached to them, then flesh grew over them, and skin covered them. But there was **no breath** in them”* Ezekiel’s account is reminiscent of God’s creation of **Adam** back in Genesis, Chapter 2. There God took the **dust** of the ground and shaped it into a human **form**. But there was no **breath** in **that** form either - not until **God** had breathed into him the breath of **life** - then and **only** then, did man become a **living** being. It is through the **breath** of God - the **Spirit** of God - that we truly become **alive**. Ezekiel tells us that those dry bones became a powerful **army** - an army which was fully **equipped** to do the LORD’s will.

But what about the **Israelites**? In the previous chapter, God had assured the Israelites that even though they were in exile **now**, their situation was about to **change**. He said, *“But you, O mountains of Israel, will shoot forth your **branches** and bear your **fruit** for my people Israel, because they will **soon come back**.”* Nevertheless, because of all the things I mentioned **earlier** - including the fall of **Jerusalem** and the destruction of God’s **temple** - the Israelites were finding it hard to **believe** God’s promise. In our text they cried out, *“Our bones are **dried up**. Our hope is **lost**. We have been completely **cut off**.”* So what did God do to pull them **out** of their despair? He sent them **prophets** like **Ezekiel**, to keep **repeating** God’s messages until they **finally** sunk in. At the conclusion of our text Ezekiel told the people, *“This is what the **LORD God** says. My people, I am going to **open** your graves and **raise** you up from your graves and bring you **back** to the soil of Israel. Then you will know that I am the **LORD**, when I **open** your graves and **raise** you up from your graves, O my people. I will put **my Spirit** in you, and you will **live**. I will **settle** you on your own land, and you will know that I, the **LORD**, have spoken, and I have **done** it, declares the **LORD**.”*

The LORD **did** exactly what He **promised** to do for the Israelites. It was roughly 35 years later, under the rule of Cyrus the Persian, that God enabled the Israelites to **return** to their homeland - the **Promised** Land. They **returned** in order to **serve** the LORD - by rebuilding the **walls** of Jerusalem, and more importantly, by rebuilding the LORD’s **temple** and reestablishing **worship** in the land.

The only thing which is remaining for us to look at this morning is how the vision of the valley of **dry bones** applies to **us**. Perhaps the Apostle Paul had this vision in mind when he wrote these words to the **Ephesians**, *“You were **dead** in your trespasses and sins.”* Those bones in Ezekiel’s vision were **dead** - dried out - completely without **life**. They were incapable of doing **anything** for the LORD. The Israelites, whom the bones **represented**, were in **captivity**, far removed from their homeland. Jerusalem had been **destroyed**, and even God’s **temple** lay in ruins. Their

spirit had been utterly **crushed**. And **sin** has left **us** in the same condition. We were just a bunch of hopeless, helpless, **dry bones**.

But God took those dry bones in the **vision**, and He brought them back to **life**, fashioning them into a vast **army**. God also took those despondent **Israelites**, and sent them prophets like **Ezekiel**, to revive their **hope**, and to prepare them for their **return** to the Promised Land. God has also taken **us** in our sinful condition, and has given us **new life** through His Word and Sacraments. Again Paul told the Ephesians, *“He made us **alive** with Christ ... So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household. You have been built on the foundation of the **apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him **you too** are being built together into a dwelling place for **God** by the Spirit.”* Dear friends, the Holy Spirit **lives** in **us**. He has already taken us **From Death To Life** through the power of God’s Word. May He **continue** to revive our **dry bones** - keeping our **faith** from becoming weak and brittle - and fully equipping us to live our lives for the **LORD**. Amen.