Oh These Dry, Dry Bones

This passage sounds like a bit of a nightmare or something out of a horror movie. Bones everywhere from a battle fought long ago that didn’t turn out well for many of the people. Dry, sun-scorched bones all around as far as the eye can see and Ezekiel is walking through them. In fact, the Lord is leading him through this Valley of Dry Bones giving him a vision of things that would happen. This was much the life of a prophet, at least in these times. As a prophet you speak for the Lord, like a watchman waiting for invaders, it was your job to proclaim warnings, judgement and sometimes absolute calamity. This was the life Ezekiel was called to live.

Ezekiel lived in a difficult point of Israel’s history, exile. Well before he was born, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been conquered and dragged into exile and now, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was falling, and eventually would fall during his ministry and life time. He was part of one of the first groups of people to be carried into exile from the Southern Kingdom into Babylon and that is where he would receive his call, by the Kebar River. He was a priest who likely would have served at the temple had it not been for exile. Yet in exile, he was still called and would do God’s work, and proclaim God’s Word to his people.

Ezekiel was asked to do some strange things for the Lord as a prophet. Lay on your side for 390 days, then turn and lay on the other for 40 to symbolize the years of sin each of the Kingdoms have committed. Pack your bags and go dig through the wall. This is to symbolize the exile that is coming to Jerusalem. Proclaim judgement, calamity and hard times to a people who do not want to hear it, oh and by the way, for a good portion of this ministry you will experience long moments where you won’t be able to speak and all you will say are these words of judgement, not able to respond to the people who are asking you about these visions, symbols and calamities…. Sounds like a fun life!!

Ezekiel was called to proclaim these judgements to the Israelites prior to their exile, and then God called him to proclaim judgements the nations around him. Then after the dust had cleared, and the people were in exile, he was called to proclaim redemption to the Israelites. The latter parts of his book is where we find these redemptive messages, and that’s the part we are in today as we look at this vision, this Valley of Dry Bones.

Now, the siege of Jerusalem is over, the aristocrats and other important people have been carried out of the land, the temple lies in ruins. And now this prophet who once showered Israel with calls of judgement and shouts to repent, has now turn to a message of redemption. As you can imagine, this call of redemption was difficult to swallow and believe. Your city has been burnt down, your ability to keep your religious observances destroyed with the temple. Your home has been taken and you sit in shekels. Now along comes the person who told you all this was going to happen, and you ignored him, and now he is telling you God is going to restore you and your people. That might be a message that is hard to hear from him. At least he is not gloating though. When I predict something will happen and it does, I am always quick to say I told you so! *“Kids stop running in the house you’re going to hurt yourself.”* Then someone trips or hits a wall and I am quick to say, “*I told you not to run in the house!”*

Ezekiel’s message is not the “I told you so” message we might give. Instead he is told Israel will receive a new heart and the Spirit of the Lord. They will be God’s people still, cleansed from their sins and resettled in their lands and their towns. All of this for the sake of the Lord’s name. And to cement this in their minds, Ezekiel is given this vision, a vision of renewal and resurrection to the people so they would know he is the Lord. As Ezekiel is walking through this valley looking at all the death and destruction the Lord asks him as simple seemingly obvious question, **“Son of man, can these bones live?”** for you or I, the answer is obvious. No, they cannot live, not according to our wills. Yet according to the Lord nothing is impossible, and that is exactly what Ezekiel points to as he responds to the question, **“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”**

In 2009 Matt Chandler woke up just before Thanksgiving just like he did any other morning. Threw on his coffee, poured a cup, fed his baby girl her bottle and then sat down to read. Next thing he knew; he woke up in a hospital bed. Matt had had a seizure in his living room that morning and had blacked out everything else that happened. He didn’t remember his wife rushing to his aid shielding him while he was convulsing. He didn’t remember ripping his IV out or punching a medic in the face! All he remembered was waking up. “What happened?” “You had a seizure.” His wife explained. Brain cancer the doctors would eventually explain caused the seizure. Surgery and months of chemo therapy would be the solution. On a scale of 1-4, 4 being the worst, Chandler was diagnosed with a grade 3 brain tumor and it would be long uphill battle from hear for Matt and the Chandler family.

“**Son of man, can these bones live?” … “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”**

It doesn’t have to be cancer that is causing you to wonder the same thing God asked Ezekiel. In 2016 unemployment in Alberta reached a five year high at 7.9%. Cattle prices dropped over 16%. When times are tough families struggle. More and more businesses are struggle to thrive in an economy that is currently a bit unstable. This leads to more stress on those who are feeling the pinch to get by. More fights over money, depression, anxiety and it hits closer and closer to home. Maybe it is you feeling this way, or maybe the person next to you, your neighbor, your friend. “**Can these bones live?”**

In many ways, it is not a bad thing to ask this question, after all God asked it of Ezekiel. But the question we need to ask is, do we have the boldness to respond like Ezekiel did? **“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”** It seems like Ezekiel is punting a bit in this response, but he is responding in the only way you truly can to a question like this by essentially saying, “Only if you cause it to happen Lord!” Even in the midst of suffering, even in the midst of difficulty, we have to know that God is in control. Sovereign means that God is the supreme ruler of all he is in control. Only when we begin to realize that, only when we begin to understand that, can we find true meaning even in the midst of suffering. And when we find meaning, then we can do what God calls us too.

Look how the Lord responds to Ezekiel, he asks him to do something, to be his vessel:

**“Prophesy to these dry 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.’” (v.4-6)**

As we look at this prophesy Ezekiel is called to give the first thing we notice is how it begins, **“Dry bones,** **hear the word of the Lord.”** The word of God is life! It causes things to happen! This whole reanimation of these bones that happens at the word, echoes of Genesis 2, where God forms the man out of the dust and then breathes life into him. God’s word brings life. But these bones have already lived presumably, here they are being given new life, according to God’s word. If I were to use New Testament language, I might say they are being resurrected.

Flesh, bone, tendons, skins all of these signs of a physical resurrection that has occurred at the Word of the Lord. Resurrection should give us the utmost confidence in the face of difficulties. It should remind us that according to God’s word, even if this body fails and cancer seemingly beats us, the Word of the Lord will raise us again one day. Even if I lose my job tomorrow and cannot provide for my family, the Word of the Lord will sustain me. Even if I cannot feed my family, God’s sovereign grace will pull me through and I will one day be resurrected and return in glory. In the face of these difficulties, this is our hope, this is where we put our trust, our faith and this is where we can rest no matter our circumstances. But even in the midst of this picture of resurrection, something is missing.

Notice the emphasis in this call to prophesy on the breath. This phrase is repeated twice in this short section, v.4-6, and usually if you see that in scripture, it means its important. Breath, flesh, breath. This word for breath can be translated as Spirit as well from the Hebrew. What spirit then is missing? The Holy Spirit. V. 14 confirms this,

**“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live…”**

Ezekiel prophesy to the breath and now as they stand with flesh they come alive with the breath/Spirit and they become a vast army, they become God’s people, marked by his Spirit.

Friends this is the hope of the gospel. This is what we have in Jesus as we put our faith in, and trust in him. Jesus is the Sovereign Lord who speaks life into our dry bones. He forgives us, frees us and took our sins on the cross. Then was resurrected three days later by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that is available to us if we believe.

It has been now, almost six years since Matt Chandler was diagnosed with cancer and went through his treatments. Chandler is grateful that he was counted as worthy to have gone through this experience. That he could suffer for the gospel. Ultimately, he understood that God is in control. "This has not surprised God," Chandler said "He is not in a panic right now trying to figure out what to do with me or this disease.”[[1]](#footnote-1) When we see or hear of someone like this, we so often think, “Wow what extraordinary faith, I wish I could have that kind of faith.” Why can’t you? Why can’t you respond like Ezekiel did, the way you should, by saying, “Sovereign Lord, you along know.” The same Spirit that resides in Matt Chandler, the same Spirit that brought life to these dry bones and resurrected our Lord Jesus is working in you today. This is the same Spirit that prompted you to come and worship this morning, this is the same Spirit that gave you the power to cry out to God to know him and love him, and this is the even same Spirit that is even causing you to ask questions even though you may still have doubts. God is at work in you causing you to believe, causing you to be the person he wants you to be. Jesus’ resurrection is a guarantee that these things are true and that they are promises for each of us today if we believe and trust in him.

Let the economy crash, the cattle market, the stock market and the job market. Jesus Christ is still risen and so will I! Let cancer take my body and sickness over run me, Jesus will give it back at the end of days! Let the world lose hope because our hope is found not in a worldly hope but rather in the Gospel!

I don’t know where your hope lies this morning or what exactly has cause your bones to be dry and for you to feel cut off. But I assure you, this resurrection is real and it is available to you if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior. An everlasting hope is found in his gospel. I implore you this morning, **Hear the word of the Lord!** Receive the Spirit, receive life in him! Then you will know that he is the Lord because that is why he made you!

Let’s Pray.

1. http://www.nbcnews.com/id/35086396/ns/health-cancer# [↑](#footnote-ref-1)