

## Sermon: Dry Bones

### Intro/

Whenever I read or hear that passage on dry bones I think of that old Gospel Song – them bones them dry bones now hear the Word of the Lord – and it goes on to say about the different bones connecting with each other as it works it's way up through the skeleton.

Well anyway, here we see God is showing Ezekiel this valley of dry bones – and it's a vision of how God is seeing His people.

In the other reading, we heard how Paul describes the church as being like a body, with all its different parts working together to support the rest of the body.

And it seems to me that both of these passages may have something to say to us today.

So we're gonna have a little mini-series – we'll look at Ezekiel today and then in a couple of weeks' time perhaps we'll look at what Paul has to say.

I wonder have any of you seen the Lion King? Either the stage play or the film?

If you haven't, I can thoroughly recommend it. I'm not sure how long it's been running for now but it must be around 25 years because I took Laura to see it when she was little. Anyway for those of you who don't know the story, Simba, the lion cub, ends up running away and then when he's grown up he returns to the Pridelands and he's faced with a land that's completely desolate-and dead and there seems no hope for the few animals that have so far survived.

Well Simba eventually steps up and takes charge – and bit by bit the Pridelands are restored.

A bit like this Valley of Dry Bones really.

God has given Ezekiel this vision of dry bones filling the valley – they're not just dry, dead bones – they're very old dry, dead bones –

But do you know what? – They had once been alive and kicking and flourishing –

Once upon a time there had been life in that place – but that was a very long time ago. And as Ezekiel looked, he could see that humanly speaking, there was nothing that could be done to bring life back into that valley.

But what about if God were to be part of the equation? What if together Ezekiel and God could do something?

Well the Bible tells us that nothing is impossible for God doesn't it? And as God leads Ezekiel through that valley, He asks Ezekiel if these bones could live?

1/

Ezekiel has a sudden burst of faith at this point, and he says, 'Sovereign Lord, You alone know.' –

Ezekiel was acknowledging that God is Sovereign over it all – over everything! And that in reality only God could do what seemed to be the impossible.

And so instead of looking in despair at the dry bones – Ezekiel shifts his perspective – he looks up – and he sees the Sovereignty of God – that God is supreme – that God is King – that anything is possible – absolutely anything is possible when God is allowed to be God!

However, Ezekiel learnt that there's more to it than allowing God to be God in these dead-end situations – Ezekiel learnt that he had to be part of the answer – that God was calling him and commissioning him to work together with God in bringing about the changes that were necessary.

And so Ezekiel was called into action – and the first thing he had to do was that he had to speak out to these dead, dry bones – he had to speak a prophetic message – a message that was from God Himself! These dry bones were to hear the Word of the Lord!

And this is what Ezekiel had to say to say them v 4-6 –

'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.'

Ezekiel was called to speak life into what was dead – and as he spoke the words that God gave him, the change was immediate – the bones came together – and tendons and flesh appeared – and skin covered them – what a sight that must have been!

Ezekiel had just spoken to a pile of old bones when suddenly it started moving – joining together – and growing flesh again – until they became tall, proper bodies!

But there was still no real life there! They certainly looked the part but something was still missing – because there was no breath in the bodies! They looked alive but they weren't really.

So Ezekiel was told to speak again – to prophecy again – and he had to call upon the Breath of God to make them live! V9.

'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.'

And as Ezekiel spoke the Word of God – His breath, His Holy Spirit came and filled those bodies and they came alive and stood up – a vast army!

And then Ezekiel was given another message – because that vast army was saying it had lost hope!

You see the people of Israel were in Exile and they couldn't see how things were going to work out and they had lost hope – and so this 3<sup>rd</sup> message is a message of hope!

'This is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'O 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. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them, 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,' v12b-14.

God will continue working in the situations, bringing life to what seems to be dead – putting His Spirit into individuals and into communities, until everyone knows that this was a move of God – that God had done all this –

2/

I wonder what God thinks when He looks at His people today? When He looks at His church?

I think some churches might be like these old, dry bones – places that have been stuck in the past – stuck in their traditions – and as their congregations have dwindled, they've become unviable and they've been closed. There was a Methodist church in Chelmsford quite recently, that closed down and I think there was another one a while ago which had closed. And then some time ago David read out an article of statistics on church closures, didn't he? so some churches are definitely like those dry bones.

Again, I think some churches might be like the bodies that Ezekiel saw, but which had no real life in them – no breath in them – no real activity and presence of the Holy Spirit – they look as if they're alive and thriving but in reality they're not – they might be doing a lot but there's no real life and growth.

Someone called A.W. Towzer said this, 'If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no-one would know the difference.'

Did you realise that most of what we do can be done without Holy Spirit?

Then he went on to say, 'If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament Church, 95% of what they did would have stopped and everyone would have known the difference.'

The early church couldn't function without the Holy Spirit.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? That 95% of what we do as church could be done without Holy Spirit? it could be run as a business with various clubs and groups meeting, couldn't it?

But this is not what God has planned for His church – God wants every part of the church and everything that it does – to be filled with His Holy Spirit. God wants His Spirit to be alive and active today, in the same way that He was in the early church.

Ezekiel recognised that he had to let God be God before anything could happen – Ezekiel then had to prophecy to those dry bones – speak the Word of the Lord – and things started to happen –

But that wasn't enough – Ezekiel then had to call up the Spirit to bring lifegiving breath into the situation -- to bring real life in.

If our churches are to be more than business centres with various groups and clubs that meet there then we need the Holy Spirit – We need the Holy Spirit to lead and guide and direct every aspect of church life – and for that matter, we need the Holy Spirit to lead and guide and direct every aspect of our individual lives too!

I wonder what would happen if, before anything that happened here, if we stopped for a minute to hear the Word of God for that situation and to invite Holy Spirit into whatever was to take place?

We hear the Word of God before the Elders' Meetings, and before the Church Meetings, and we hear the Word of God during our Sunday services – but by looking at what Ezekiel had to do we would also need to call on the Holy Spirit to come and breath life into the meeting or into the groups –

I wonder what would happen if we did that? If we did that before Coffee Morning for instance, or before Tots Groups, or before Lunch Club or Craft Club, or before Accord or the Worship Group practice and then lead on a Sunday? Even the Tech team, and the Property Team and the Finance Team –

In fact before everything!

What would happen if we always heard the Word of God and called on His Holy Spirit to breath life into what we were doing?

When Ezekiel did it those dry bones stood up and became a vast army didn't they? They weren't just a group of people but a vast army!

That's a huge challenge, isn't it? To do that before everything that happens here?

I can just hear people saying, 'Oh we haven't got time for all that! Well, if that's the case, perhaps we need to make time! Get here 5 minutes or so earlier than usual – to read a verse of scripture and to pray specifically for God to breathe life into what we're about to do.

Something I read a little while ago said that if Jesus isn't Lord of everything – then He isn't Lord at all! – that's another sobering thought, isn't it? That if Jesus isn't Lord of everything then He isn't Lord at all!

End/

I feel that God's given us a lot to think about today – but I feel that it's encouraging too – because Ezekiel found that when he acknowledged that God is God and when he spoke the Word of God into what seemed to be a hopeless situation – that things began to change – he also found that when he called upon the breath of God – the Holy Spirit – to breathe life into the situation – he saw that situation change completely, and rise up as a vast army –

God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and what He did then, He can still do today –

But here's the thing – He won't do it on His own – He wants us to partner with Him and to play our part, just like Ezekiel did.

The power of God can transform what seems to be a group of dead, lifeless purposeless people to be a group of people who are full of purpose – a group of people who are following God's leading – a group of people where Jesus really is Lord because He's Lord of everything.

I wonder if God is showing us a dry-bone situation that needs His life breathing into it?

I wonder if He's showing us His Sovereignty over it all – and saying that He needs to be God in it?

I wonder if He's showing us that only He can do it – but that He wants us to partner with Him?

