

Can These Bones Live?

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.**

Today we are going on a tour of the **Valley of Dry Bones**.

You have probably heard this story or read through it a number of times,
and, like me, wondered
“What has that got to do with me?”

The Valley of Dry Bones is so strange that it has been **the source of
jokes and songs**.

Did you know that **church people** can be **categorized as bones**?

1. **Dry Bones** – Humorless legalists who enjoy telling others what they can't do.
2. **Wishbones**—Folks always wishing for better things, but never willing to work and pray for them.
3. **Jawbones**—The gossiping kind that keep the church in turmoil.
4. **Lazybones**—Rarely attend, never willing to work
5. **Funnybones**—those who never seem to take God and His Word seriously.
6. **Backbones**—The spiritual support of the church that keeps the body standing.

The song that comes from this chapter in Ezekiel
was first performed in 1928.

It is a catchy tune and it has become popular in
children's Sunday School.

Here is a video clip from the **Cathedrals** featuring the song. **Show Video**

Remember? I am sure some of the older folks do.

Perhaps, like me, you sang the song as a kid at Sunday School . . .

The song makes **this passage memorable**,
but it does little to help us get to the **seriousness of our passage**
or to **understand how it impacts us here this morning**.

The **Prophet Ezekiel** was a Hebrew priest **taken into exile**
by the Babylonians around **600BC**.

Chapter One of Ezekiel records his first vision
which occurred five years after he was captured.

In his first vision he saw the Glory of God moving in a extraordinary flying chariot
with four odd wheels and flashing fire.

And this chariot was accompanied by
four very unusual living creatures.

This vision was so overwhelming,
that after it, Ezekiel was unable to speak **for seven years!**

Much of Ezekiel's ministry was taken up with describing the utter sinfulness of
humans and predicting the final fall of Jerusalem.

Later in his ministry Ezekiel began to preach
a message of hope for the Babylonian captives.

We see this change towards hopefulness in our passage this morning.

Ezekiel describes a prophetic vision beginning in Verse one.

Ezekiel 37:1

"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.

I seriously doubt that many of us here this morning have had **prophetic visions**.

I have often wondered **how realistic** they are.

Are they **dreamlike and a bit fuzzy?**

Are **they photo-realistic?** Are they in color? Black and white?

Is a vision something that you believe **is really happening**

Or perhaps you are kind of a **detached observer taking notes?**

Perhaps you remember the incident when Peter was freed from prison by an Angel.

In Acts 12:9 we read,

Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. (Ac 12:9)

Peter experienced confusion between reality and vision.

When we dream, don't we think the **dream is really happening?**

I know I do.

Isn't it reasonable that Ezekiel also experienced confusion and believed his **visions was really happening?**

If that is true, then Ezekiel,

an experienced prophet of the living God,

was without doubt, **totally unnerved** at being plopped down in a valley, **full of human bones.**

Can you imagine it?

Really, think about this a minute;

pretend it is happening to you.

You are suddenly in a dry desert valley.

As you look about you there are thousands and thousands of bones bleached white by the sun;

human bones, the bones of long dead people all jumbled up, randomly scattered around.

Now that is a **very disturbing scene.**

Seriously, **have you ever seen a human bone lying around?**

How about a **pile of human bones?**

Ezekiel 37:2: "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. (Eze 37:2)

God made Ezekiel walk all around and through these bones.

It must have been **incredibly difficult** for Ezekiel to walk around the bones.

Ezekiel was a priest and he knew the bones were unclean.

Numbers 19:16 says:

"anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days."

What happened here? Was there a **battle**? A **massacre**?

Did a **plague** sweep through an encampment?

Drought? Famine?

How did these people die?

Why haven't they been buried?

This was not good. . .

Here is a hopeless scene.

God is graphically demonstrating to Ezekiel how hopeless
the Babylonian exiles had become.

This is a vision of the house of Israel under the Covenant curse
hopeless and helpless – dead, dry bones with no life in them.

After walking among these bones, Ezekiel was definitely unclean,
but that didn't stop God from quizzing him.

Verse Three: “Son of man, can these bones live?”

Ezekiel obviously knew that this was impossible,
but with God??

Let's give Ezekiel some credit;
he was a Hebrew priest during the years of exile
and a prophet on top of that.

He was **completely aware of God's power.**

So instead of saying “No,”

Ezekiel **weasel-worded** his answer,

I said, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”” (Eze 37:3)

Ezekiel knew God's power and he knew that if these bones could live
it would **only be through God's action** in bringing them back to life.

Only God can give life to the dead.

God spoke again in **Verse Four:**

*“Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them,
‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’” (Eze37:4)*

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’

Alright, let’s **flesh this out!**

Here is Ezekiel a priest and a Hebrew prophet in exile
and the Lord God Almighty the Creator of the Universe
orders him **do his job**; to **start preaching**.

Can’t you just sense the questions forming in Ezekiel’s mind?

What? Prophecy to these dead bones? But I am unclean!

What can I possibly say to them?

Am I to prophecy **with no one to hear**
but a pile of dead bones?

Can **anything** I say or do **make any difference at all?**

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

Good question!

Imagine for a moment **Pastor Kynes** giving **Stephen Simmons**,
a lesson on preaching.

Bill takes Stephen in the car to **Fairfax Memorial Park**.

They park the car and walk to the center of the cemetery.

“Okay Stephen,” Bill says **“start preaching.”**

What! **Are you kidding?**

Can you imagine a more unresponsive congregation?

I’ve seen people **texting** during sermons,

I’ve seen them **reading** their bulletins or **doodling** on them,
and many times, I’ve seen people so deeply asleep

I thought they would get a **nose bleed**.

But dead?

Not just dead;

decayed, decomposed, dried out old bones!

This was the last stop before dust!

These dry bones can’t even hear the preacher preaching?

They weren’t **just mostly dead!**

They were **dead dead**.

But God had further instructions for Ezekiel

In **Verses 5 and 6** God told Ezekiel **exactly what to preach.**

“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.”” (Eze 37:5–6)

God has ordered Ezekiel to prophesy to these dry bones.

Ezekiel was to tell them that they are going to be put back together and have life breathed into them.

So Ezekiel did what he was told –

he faithfully and obediently did his job.

He knew firsthand **the power of the Word of the Lord.**

He preached the word of the Lord to a pile of dry bones.

He preached with **power and authority**

knowing he was preaching the **very word of God.**

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’

Ezekiel described the scene in **Verses 7 and 8.**

“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.” (Eze 37:7–8)

Ezekiel obeyed God and **he preached.**

He prophesied to the bones.

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’

He began to notice movement in the valley, **the bones were moving!**

They were slowly knitting together.

He preached on *‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says:*

and something began to grow on the bones – **flesh and sinews and skin.**

The Valley of dry Bones was no longer full of dry bones but dead bodies.

While Ezekiel was prophesying, **God worked a miracle.**

God transformed those bones, **he had changed them completely.**
Ezekiel was now standing in a desert valley now completely surrounded,
not by bones or even skeletons,
he was surrounded by dead bodies.

The bones have taken on **tendons and flesh and skin**, but they are not alive.

This is a gruesome **vision isn't it?**

This is serious stuff!

Not the stuff of jokes and children's songs.

But **God is not done.**

Ezekiel was standing among thousands of bodies,
bodies with bones, tendons and flesh,
but there was no breath in them.

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

God had more work for Ezekiel. **Verses 9-10.**

“Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, 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.’ ”

Let's let that marinate a minute.

When Ezekiel's vision started,

he was taken to a desert valley full of dry human bones.

Following instructions,

**he preached to an audience that had
no capacity to hear, understand,
believe or act on his message.**

What a **hopeless task!**

God commanded Ezekiel:

“Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man.

Ezekiel was an Old Testament Prophet of the Lord God,
so he did as he was told.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.” (Eze37:9–10)

Breath entered these lifeless bodies

and they came to life and stood up – a vast army.

Are you seeing this happen?

Are you imagining all the cool computer-aided graphics in the movie?

**Are you not blown away by the of the power of the living God
 in this vision?**

This is big! This is serious!

“Son of man, can these bones live?” YES!

Throughout the Bible, **“breath,” “wind,” and “spirit”** are all different translations of the same words,

Ruah in Hebrew and *Pneuma* in Greek.

I missed the importance of this until I did a word study on the breath of God.

In the Bible, the breath of God:

- is **used to bring life;**
“Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7)
- is **enlightening;**
“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16)
- is **creative;**
By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. (Psalm 33:6)
- it is **regenerative;**
You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:7–8)

In that last example, the same word, *pneuma*, is translated as “wind” in verse 7 and “Spirit” in verse 8.

In Ezekiel’s **vision the four winds provide the breath, the Spirit of God**, to bring life into these dead dry bones.

It never ceases to amaze me how consistent the Bible is.

Whether it is the creation account in Genesis,
a Psalm of praise,

Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus,

or our passage in Ezekiel – **the message is the same.**

**The breath of God, the Spirit of God, has the power
to create life and bring new life to the hopelessly dead.**

In the Valley of Dry Bones, God has just worked a miracle.

Do you know the best part of the whole thing?

It isn’t that God brings the dead back to life.

It is how God brings them to life that is so amazing.

God didn’t snap his fingers and say abracadabra.

He didn’t zap the bones with blue healing rays.

God didn’t say “Let there be life!”

No! He commanded Ezekiel

to prophecy to the bones and to the breath.

He allowed Ezekiel to participate in a powerful life-giving event.

Not just participate, God empowered Ezekiel to make it happen!

Have you ever considered that **the words spoken by a prophet of God
have a causative effect?**

God attached tendons and flesh only **after** Ezekiel prophesied to the bones

And God put breath into them **only after** Ezekiel prophesied to the breath

In Ezekiel’s case, speaking the word of God clearly invoked the power of God

Sometimes words have **“Performative power.”**

To speak a word amounts to creating the thing said.

For example when Pastor Kynes says

“I now pronounce you man and wife” at a wedding,
the marriage is created.

The man and woman are, in fact, husband and wife.

Or how about when a policeman says

“You are under arrest?”

By saying the words, the arrest itself is created.

Performative words have even more power

when spoken by God. **Let there be light . . .**

In **Isaiah 55:11** God says: *‘my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.’ (Isaiah 55:11)*

The performative power of God’s Word.

In the case of prophets, by definition, the words they speak come true.

If this were not so, they would not be prophets of the Lord.

We know this from **Deuteronomy 18:22:**

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:22)

But, are **the prophets just predicting the future,**

or are they invoking the power of God to cause it?

God commanded Ezekiel to prophecy;

Ezekiel obeyed God and his words had **performative power.**

As he was speaking, his words took effect

– cause and effect.

Clearly God worked thorough the words of the prophet Ezekiel

to bring about his will.

Now here is an interesting question:

What happens when we speak the words of the Lord?

Do we all share at least a little bit of the gift of prophecy?

Can our words have performative power?

How would it feel to speak the words of God

and watch them happen before your very eyes?

'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'

I simply cannot imagine the power coursing through Ezekiel at that moment.

Whew! It gives me the chills just thinking about it.

**What would it be like if we could speak the words of God
to dead lifeless people and watch them come to life?**

Now I am not a prophet of God

and I doubt that anyone else in the room is a prophet of God.

But **I have spoken the word of God** to unsaved people
and felt just a little bit of the power of those words.

I have seen the **Holy Spirit** using God's words as **spoken by me**
to bring salvation to the lost.

But I never looked at witnessing **in the light of our text here.**

I never imagined that perhaps **by speaking Gods words to the lost**
that God would use those words to actually
kindle life in their dead souls;

that God's word had performative power for the unsaved.

What if "*Friend, let me share what I know about Jesus*"

had the same effect as

'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'

I would want to jump all over that. **That would just be so much fun!**

This is the first point I want to make from our text.

The word of the Lord has power to bring life to the dead;

- **to dry bones in the desert:** (Dry bones hear the word of the Lord)
- **to Lazarus in the tomb:** (Lazarus, come out!)
- **to Jairus' daughter:** (Little girl, I say to you, get up!)

- **to the son of the widow of Nain:** (Young man, I say to you, get up)
- **and to Tabitha:** (Tabitha, get up.)

How much easier is it for the word of the Lord to bring life
to a **living human being with a dead soul?**

Neither you nor I have the power to perform this miracle,
we are not prophets of the Lord, but there is power in the word of the Lord.
“Son of man, can these bones live?”

The answer is here: *‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’*

In our text, God provided Ezekiel with the meaning of the vision in **Verses 11-14.**

It might be a good idea to see if I have stretched the passage too far.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘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, declares the LORD.’” (Ezekiel 37:11–14)

We see here that the dry bones of the vision represent the **exiled nation of Israel** –
Captives in Babylon— people who feel like **homeless vagrants,**
hopelessly lost and mourning their former homes.

Up until Ezekiel’s vision of the **Glory of God moving in a chariot**

The exiles didn’t even know that God could be found anywhere
other than in the **Temple in Jerusalem.**

They were dead as far as their faith in God existed.

And if they thought of God at all,
they thought of his as **far, far removed**
from their current situation.

But, through Ezekiel's vision and prophetic preaching,
 God assured his people of his power and promised to give them life
 and settle them in their own land.

Words they desperately needed to hear.

One commentary writer tells us:

There is the same command for us as there was for Ezekiel. He was to prophesy to those dry bones, and we are to go to men and women around us and we are to preach the gospel. God's answer is for the dry bones to hear his Word.¹

'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!

Now, maybe we can find another **take away**.

Here is a passage from the New Testament: **John 5:25**

"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." (John 5:25)

We see that:

- this passage is reminiscent of our text, **Ezekiel 37:1-14**,
- the ability to give life to the dead is now **delegated to Jesus**, and
- we are not talking exclusively about the end times, but about **today as well**.

When we talk of the end times we can refer to the apocalyptic books of the Bible
 Like Daniel, or Revelation

There we can gain an understanding of how the dead will be
 raised from their graves.

But the point I am raising has its roots **in today's reality**.

a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. (Jn 5:25)

Who are these dead that are now hearing the voice of the Son of God?

The **Expositor's Bible Commentary** says:

¹ Peter Jeffery, [*Opening up Ezekiel's Visions*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 119.

The phrase “**and has now come**” may refer to

- the present era that will terminate in the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, or
- the power Jesus had to raise the dead during his lifetime, as in the case of Lazarus, **or,**
- “**There is another sense in which our Lord’s words are true. As the source of life, he was promising to those who were spiritually dead, like the woman at the well, a new and eternal life if they would listen to his voice.**”²”

This third meaning is the interpretation where we want to focus.

This **can change our lives completely.**

Now, isn’t it possible that we can be Christian and know we are saved,
that we can be assured in our faith,
but still suffer from **guilt and remorse**
for sins and transgressions **of the past.**

I believe that a proper understanding of Jesus Christ’s ability
to give life to the dead today
can offer us **a life of freedom from this debilitating sense of guilt.**

To review then:

1. We see from the Valley of Dry Bones that **the word of God is powerful** and can give life to the deadest of the dead.
2. We also learned from Ezekiel’s preaching that **God uses his people as causative agents in this process.**
3. Now in the New Testament, we see that Jesus has the power to use his voice to raise the dead.
4. The word of the Lord brings life to the **physically dead** at the end of history and **the spiritually dead** right now.

To affirm the truth of this fourth point, look at **Romans 1:16**

² Merrill C. Tenney, “[John](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 65.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1:16a)

**The word of the Lord, the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
can bring eternal life to the spiritually dead.**

This power is available to us today to use to further the Kingdom of God!

**Speaking God’s words to the lost
is a means of bringing grace and salvation into their lives.**

Again;

- **The work of God is powerful,**
- **God uses his people as causative agents,**
- **Jesus has the power raise the dead, and**
- **The Gospel can bring life to the spiritually dead.**

Now comes the **surprise ending**,

This isn’t **just** about witnessing to lost souls anymore.

This is about **preaching the word of the Lord to ourselves!**

If we are still plagued by guilt and remorse for old sins, or even new sins
then perhaps we have **forgotten** that at some point in time
we were spiritually dead, and were given new life by Jesus Christ.

The Bible repeats this over and over:

- *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,” Eph 2:1*
- *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Pet 2:24*
- *“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” Col 3:3*
- *“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” Rom 6:6*

The list of Bible references attesting to the fact of our deaths goes on.

The point is, **we were dead** and now we are alive.

We are free from **the bondage and guilt** of sin in our lives.

Hallelujah! Praise God!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17)

What does it all mean sitting here this morning?

- In the eyes of God, **our old nature is dead**, crucified with Christ.
- We are **free from the guilt of sin!**
- When he looks at us, God sees the righteousness of Christ.
- We are able to **not sin!**

I think this last point **is incredible important.**

We are able to not sin.

We are no longer mastered by our **desires, addictions, wants and so called needs.**

We died to all that. We Are Free.

If we can accept that fact of the Bible,
then we can begin to live a life of joy in Jesus Christ.

To wrap this up . . .

This morning we have stood with Ezekiel, the prophet of the Lord God,
in the Valley of Dry Bones and considered the question:

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

and then we saw the powerful word of the Lord in action.

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’

In Ezekiel’s vision, we saw **impossibly dead dry bones given life** and we learned;

- that the word of the Lord has unimaginable power to bring both the **physically dead** and the **spiritually dead** to life.
- that we have something of this power at our disposal and, like Ezekiel, we are actually called to go and **speak with this power** to our friends.
- that by **preaching the word of the Lord to ourselves** we can open our own lives up to lives of freedom in the grace of Jesus Christ no longer burdened by guilt and shame.

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

The answer is here:

‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’

Prayer:

This is the air I breathe

This is the air I breathe

Your holy presence living in me

Father, we humbly pray

for you to breathe new life into our dead dry bones.

Renew us each day.

Refresh our spirits.

Make us new creations free from slavery to sin and guilt.

And send us out from this place

knowing for certain the answer to the question:

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

Amen

**Can These Bones Live?
(Ezekiel 37:1-14)**

- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14
- When you dream, do you believe that events are really happening? When you awaken, do you remember your dreams in detail? Have you ever awoken in the night with a strong desire to pray for a particular individual? Have you ever experienced or talked to someone who experienced a “vision.”
- Read John 3:7-8. How is the Spirit of God like the wind? Read Genesis 2:7. How does God’s breathing life into Adam recall our passage from Ezekiel? Describe the differences and similarities between physical human life and spiritual life.
- Paul describes Scripture as “God breathed” in 2 Timothy 2:16. How is this an appropriate description?
- Do you know anyone who seems to be in exile? Anyone who is living a hopeless and helpless life? How could speaking the Word of the Lord to such a person provide hope?
- Much has been said in recent years about the value of preaching the Gospel to ourselves. What exactly is meant by this? What does it look like in your life to preach the Gospel to yourself?