

Worship in the Wilderness Valley of Dry Bones- Ezekiel 37:1-14 House Group Notes- 7 April 2019

The sermon used two contrasting stories to illustrate parts of Ezekiel 37.

- What can you remember of these stories?
- How are they different from each other?
- How do we hold on to both?

Some context...

The temple was destroyed in 586BC. The book of Ezekiel covers time before the destruction of the temple to after. Ezekiel is in exile in Babylon. There were waves of people being taken into exile. People like Daniel and Ezekiel were taken away early. In Babylon Ezekiel has visions of things that are happening back in Jerusalem.

In chapter 24 we hear of Jerusalem under siege then, in chapter 33 news comes to Babylon that Jerusalem has fallen, and we hear that Jerusalem will become a 'desolate waste'.

- What would it have felt like to be an Israelite in Babylon hearing news like this of your homeland?

Read Ezekiel 37:1-3 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**.

² He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many **bones** on the floor of the **valley**, **bones** that were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, **can these bones live?**"

I said, "O Sovereign LORD, **you alone know.**"

"The hand of the LORD was upon me"

- Have you ever felt like 'the hand of the LORD was upon' you? What happened?

"Ezekiel is carried to a valley"

This is possibly the same valley mentioned where Ezekiel experienced the glory of God in chapter 1.

- Why might God, in this vision, take Ezekiel to the same valley?
- Why do you think the scripture points out that the bones were 'very dry'?
- How might this vision be especially difficult for Israelites in Babylon to hear?

And then God asks... **"Can these bones live?"**

- How might we answer this question wrongly? How is Ezekiel's response, **'Lord you know'**, a good one?

When we are desperate, when things are bleak, it is easy to answer wrongly. To respond to our situation without faith, or to respond in our own strength. The challenge is to put our trust in God. **Lord, you know.**

Read Ezekiel 37:4-6 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: **I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.** ⁶ 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.'"

God's solution to the problem doesn't make sense.

Ezekiel, speak to the bones. Here is what you should tell them.

- What examples can you think of in scripture where the solution didn't make sense!? Why are there examples like this in scripture?

Read Ezekiel 37:7-10 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. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, **but there was no breath in them.**

Then he said to me, "**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.' " ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

'but there was no breath in them'

- What do you think God is trying to teach his people through the part of the vision in which these bodies have no breath?

Quote- NT Wright in *Following Jesus*- “We are not to be surprised if living as Christians brings us to the place where we find we are at the end of our own resources, and that we are called to rely on the God who raises the dead.”

- What are you praying for, hoping for, that is beyond your strength? Why is it important to do this?

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14 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.' ¹² 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. ¹³ Then you, my people, **will know that I am the LORD**, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ **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.' "

So now Ezekiel is to apply the vision in this prophesy to the people of Israel.

- What might it have been like for the Israelites to have this vision applied to them?

Notice vs. 13- **‘Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD...’**

This phrase is repeated in the book of Ezekiel again and again.

- What do you see in this phrase, or how do you find it helpful? Why do you think it features so often in the book of Ezekiel?

Things to learn from this trip to the valley...

God doesn't give up on his people. Even after they have sinned... even after he has judged them... he hasn't forgotten them.

God wants us to respond to him with trust and obedience.

We can't do anything significant without the work of the Spirit in and through us.

It is God's desire that people know that he is God.

Maybe you feel dry or lifeless. There is hope. God can rattle and refill us so that we can stand as his army.