

## **Ezekiel 37:1-11 NLT**

*1 The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. 2 He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3 Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that." 4 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! 6 I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" 7 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'" 10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army. 11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.' 12 Therefore, prophesy to them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the LORD. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the LORD has spoken!'"*

Let's pray together:

I trust you have read through Ezekiel 37 a few times this past week as I asked you to and have prayed over these verses and asked God to share His heart with you through these words, His Word.

Would it intimidate you if I asked you to turn to your neighbor and ask them if they indeed did as they were asked to do this past week? I just thought I would ask.

We are camping out in Ezekiel 37 for a brief season as we consider the implications these words might present to us in this day as the church in general, our church specific, Christ United, and to each of us individually.

As I briefly introduced this subject last week I made this bold statement that we all seemed to agree upon: **Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church.**

Are we all still on the same page with that statement?

We seemed to be in agreement that we are living in what the Apostle Paul referred to in 2 Timothy as 'terrible or perilous times.' Things in our society aren't looking too good are they? Don't be surprised. God knew this.

We can draw strength for such a bold statement partly from what Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 16:18** that He would *'build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!'*

We also can draw energy from the Apostle Paul's reference to the church in **Ephesians 5:27** as being presented to the Lord as a *'glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish ... holy and without fault.'*

It doesn't seem to me that we have arrived there yet, does it to you? So what's the problem? Why doesn't the church get its act together?

Maybe it's because before the church can get its act together, we who make up the church must allow our act to get together first, agree? I know, I know. It's a whole lot easier to wait for the church to get it together and then we might follow suit. However, I have news for you: we are the church. The church is us, the called out ones, it's not them.

Somebody once said 'if each one would sweep in front of their own house, the entire street would then be clean.' I like that!

So we in the church are getting our act together by the grace of God. At least let's hope so right? He is awakening and stirring and rattling and joining and reviving and we are happy even if it is causing some discomfort in our comfortable lives, right?

Let's look at these first three verses **Ezekiel 37:1-3 NLT**

*1 The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. 2 He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3 Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that."*

It will help us to familiarize ourselves with the background for this vision God has given Ezekiel:

In 586 BC Jerusalem was totally ruined by Nebuchadnezzar and his great Babylonian army. Solomon's Temple, which had been the pride and glory of Israel for almost 400 years, was reduced to ashes; all the inhabitants of Jerusalem had been taken either to Chaldea or to Babylon in captivity, including Mattaniah, last king of Judah who was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon (present day Iraq). They had been warned repeatedly by God through His prophets, yet they had turned a deaf ear!

Their nation's history had begun by a miraculous delivery by God from the cruel hands of the Egyptian Pharaoh and now because of their disobedience, they are in captivity again. The Psalmist records in **Psalm 137:1** *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea; we wept when we remembered Zion."*

Ezekiel adds his own lament to this bleak situation as he records in **Ezekiel 1:1** that: *'...I was among the captives by the river of Kebar.'*

So just who is this man Ezekiel? Of all the prophets, Ezekiel, whose name meant "God strengthens," was probably the most colorful. He used pantomime, would cry and wail and slap his thighs, ate a scroll, and did many other unusual things to burn his messages into the minds of the people.

Historians tell us that Ezekiel was probably only about 25 years old when taken into captivity. Here was a young man who had been raised literally in the shadow of the great Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. He would follow in the footsteps of his father, a Zadokite priest. He had undoubtedly trained for this his entire life for Jewish law provided for a man to enter into the priesthood at the age of 30.

Yet the first verse of this book, **Ezekiel 1:1** tells us *'...it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month ... I was among the captives by the river of Kebar ...'*

Let's not miss the significance of this; The New Living Translation puts it this way: *'On July 31 of my thirtieth year ...'*

Ezekiel had planned to be ministering in the great Temple of Solomon at the age of thirty. Undoubtedly he had been looking forward to this with great anticipation. He would be revered and respected by an entire nation. Perhaps he would even become one of the chief priests of the Temple.

Surely he must have had grandiose plans and dreams. But now, instead of being in the lofty position of priest of Israel, he finds himself *'among the captives by the river of Kebar.'* Something had gone horribly wrong!

But God had a plan! He had not misplaced Ezekiel. He had not lost track of where he was. Ezekiel was not there because of some strange twist of fate.

Look with me for a moment at **Ezekiel 1:1-3 NLT**

*1 On July 31 of my thirtieth year, while I was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 2 This happened during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. 3 (The Lord gave this message to Ezekiel son of Buzi, a priest, beside the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians, and he felt the hand of the Lord take hold of him.)*

Do you see where he is? The point is that he didn't have to walk the marble steps of Solomon's Temple to minister to God's people. He may have felt he would never again be effective for his God; never again would he experience the glory of God; never again would He see the great power of God. He was, after all, in captivity.

However, scripture records that it was there in captivity by the river Kebar that *'he felt the hand of the Lord take hold of him.'*

What? It was there in Babylonian captivity, while he was with the other Judean exiles that the *'the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.'*

It was there, at perhaps his darkest hour; it was there when all hope seemed gone; it was there in his hour of crisis that *'the word of the Lord came expressly'* or *'the word of the Lord came in reality'* to Ezekiel. Of all the places ...

May I tell you this morning that God knows exactly where you are, even though you may detest the place you are in at this very moment, and He has promised that He will *'never leave nor forsake you!'*

Undoubtedly those who found themselves incarcerated in the land of Babylon felt their life had ended. They felt they had become one of many 'corpses' in the great Babylonian graveyard.

Certainly they felt their lives had been reduced to ashes; maybe you do to, and yet God has promised *'to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.'* **Isaiah 61:2-3 NLT**

How does that even seem possible? 'Lord, don't you see where I am?'

And when this healing and restoration occurs *'they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall rise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.'* **Isaiah 61:4 NLT**

There is purpose which is birthed in the place of brokenness!

Hear me church, and when I say church I mean each of us who make up the body of believers, with a Loving God it is commonplace that testimonies arise from such places as a graveyard, for even from the graveyard of captivity, there is hope!

This passage is not just some history lesson covered with dust; it was life to those Ezekiel was writing to and by God's Holy Spirit it brings life to each of us today who find themselves in captivity or out of place, or not even really sure where in the world we are in this story.

You talk about hopelessness; if ever a man was made to look upon an impossible situation, it was Ezekiel. Scripture records that the hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel, carrying him out and setting him down in the midst of a valley which was full of bones. He was taken to the graveyard! Do you see yourself in such a place?

Regarding this passage of Scripture, revivalist Leonard Ravenhill asks:

"Does history. . .offer a more ridiculous picture than this? Here is hopelessness incarnate. Who ever had such an audience? Preachers deal with possibilities, prophets with impossibilities. Isaiah had seen this nation full of wounds and putrefying sores; but disease had galloped on to death, death to disintegration, and now these disjointed bones spell out despair. Written over the whole situation in large letters is I-M-P-O-S-S-I-B-I-L-I-T-Y" (Why Revival Tarries, p. 45)

Not only was this graveyard filled with bones, it was filled with dry bones. Not only were the bones dry, scripture graphically portrays them as very dry. These corpses had undoubtedly been dead a long time.

If Ezekiel had been taken to a valley filled with people who were dying there would have been a glimmer of hope. Perhaps some would be healed and survive.

If the valley had been filled with the corpses of people who had just died, there would have been the possibility of a mass resurrection.

Even if the valley had been filled with complete skeletons, there would be some hope. But this valley was filled with very dry, scattered bones. This emphasizes the absolute hopelessness of the situation.

We realize that this vision given by God was to show the spiritual state of His people. 19 times the O T tells us that these people had *"gone a whoring after other gods."* That is an extremely strong statement!

Many years before this vision, God had made a promise to these same people found in **Deuteronomy 30:16-19 NIV**

*16 For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, 18 I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.'*

God's people had not chosen life, and the results are seen in this valley of death! Those people, who had once been feared by the nations, now lay in a heap of very dry bones! Those who once had dreams and aspirations were reduced to rubble.

God always gives man a choice. His desire is to be a blessing to mankind, but He does not force His will on anyone. However, there are consequences to our actions.

Choosing God's way brings life and blessing. Choosing to walk away from God brings death and destruction. The man and woman who choose to do 'their own thing' to the exclusion of God will find that they will become, spiritually speaking, a part of the 'valley of very dry bones.' Is this you? Is this the church?

The same could be applied to the Church. That which once marched triumphantly under the leadership of the Holy Spirit can now be seen sitting on the sidelines passively awaiting the end of the battle.

Much of the Church has gone from the overflowing rivers of life in the Spirit to the very dry bone yard of contentment.

Maybe this is exactly how you feel this morning. You remember the refreshing experience you once had with Christ. You remember how you once were consumed with Him. He was your joy, and the Rock of your salvation. But now you feel so very far away from the refreshing waters of His presence.

You are languishing -- dying in a dry valley. You wonder if there will ever be any hope for you!

The answer is yes, God has a plan, and it includes you and it includes Christ United and it includes the church universal.

Look again at Ezekiel 37:3. The Lord asked Ezekiel '*Son of man, can these bones become living people again?*'

God was asking: "What do you think about it, Ezekiel? Is this a hopeless situation?" I believe the very asking of this question brought a glimmer of hope to the prophet.

*'O Sovereign LORD,'* I replied, *"you alone know the answer to that."*

Oh yeah, God did have the answer. Thank God, He has a plan for restoration for scripture reminds us that *'with God all things are possible.'*

Is it possible that the scattered, very dry bones that are in a heap in this valley might really live again? Can these bones live again? Yes, indeed they can.

Is it possible that our lives which are out of place, in captivity, disjointed, broken, scattered, or 'E: all of the above,' can we really 'live again?' Is there any way this is possible?

God outlines a two-fold plan! Listen to God's response to Ezekiel in verse 4 *'Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD!'*

That's part 1 of His plan: **The Word of God**. Life comes through His Word! His Word will bring a change in the life of an individual, a church, a community! His Word is life!

In verses 7-8 we see the results of the Word of God: *'So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. '*

Part 2 of God's plan is this: **The Holy Spirit of God**. Listen to what God say's in verse 9 *'Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'"*

You see, in verses 7-8 we read *'So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.*

They looked alive, but they were not. It reminds me of those the Apostle Paul referred to as *'having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.'*

These were still only bodies, not living beings. There was a multitude there in the valley, but they were still dead! And they stayed that way until touched by the Spirit of God.

The Word of God and the precious Holy Spirit: these two work in tandem to bring life out of death and victory out of defeat! The very dry bones found scattered upon the valley floor have been miraculously returned to life by the Word and the Spirit! And my prayer this morning is 'would You do it again, Lord?'

Listen to the word of the Lord in **Isaiah 46:11 NIV** *'From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.'*

I read this morning in my personal devotion in Genesis 21:1 where I have been following Abram and Sarai's story of a promised son to be born and all of the adversity they encountered over the years as they waited and wondered, even laughed at the promise of God to visit them in their place of 'captivity' called barrenness.

**Genesis 21:1 NKJV**

*'And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.'*

Would you allow the Lord to visit you today and do for you which He has spoken?

What is that you might ask? Jesus said in **John 10:10** *'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.'*

No matter where you are this morning the Lord is there to share His life with you.