

### **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!'"*

We have spent the last few weeks 'camping out' in this passage attempting to draw out all of the understanding God has for us as it relates to the church universal, Christ United Church in general and each of us as disciples specifically.

As I introduced this subject three weeks ago 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.** I trust we are all still on the same page.

Kyle did an outstanding job last Sunday sharing with us about hope being revived within the local church.

Let's pray and ask God's blessing upon the preaching of His Word this morning please:

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"*

In respect to the context of our discussion this morning concerning the local church we may feel the same way Mr. Ravenhill felt.

I have read a number of perspectives on this passage recently. Pastor Dennis Cocks wrote this from his perspective concerning some of the kinds of bones he sees in the Church today.

1. The Tailbone Christian – Who just sits, and lets everybody else do the ministry in the church. If God had wanted you to sit around and do nothing, He would have taken you on to Glory the minute He saved you.

"Can these bones live?" Yes, as soon as they get off their tailbones!

2. The Finger-bone Christian – Who are always pointing their finger at everybody else, not taking responsibility for their own actions. They blame everybody else for the circumstances they find themselves in.

"Can these bones live?" Yes, as soon as they see that they are reaping what they have sown.

3. The Jawbone Christian – Who runs off at the mouth ... who puts his mouth into motion before his brain is in gear ... who spreads gossip ... who intentionally causes trouble by stirring up strife.

"Can these bones live?" Yes, when they snatch their tongue from the Devil, and give it to the Holy Spirit.

4. The Hipbone Christian – Who sits on his wallet every Sunday when the offering plate is passed.

“Can these bones live?” Yes, when the heart is converted, the wallet will be converted too.

5. The Dry-bone Christian – Whose Christian life has withered up, because he/she isn't in the Word of God.

“Can these bones live?” Yes, when we immerse ourselves into the God's Word, the Water of Life.

6. The Wishbone Christian – Remember when you were a kid, and you got to pull on the wishbone of the Thanksgiving turkey? If you got the bigger piece, your wish was granted (supposedly). For some of us, that describes our prayer life ... gimme, gimme, gimme. We come to God with our “wish list.”

“Can these bones live?” Yes, when we realize that prayer is a relationship with God that involves, not only asking, but thanksgiving, praise, fellowship, and worship.

Lest we get too discouraged he also noticed a few positive bones:

7. The Backbone Christian – Who has convictions ... knows what they are ... and stands on them. The Christian with BACKBONE, won't live his life to please the world ... won't live her life to blend in with the world ... won't live their life to conform to the standards of the world.

“Can these bones live?” Yes, and they do live, as a testimony of the grace of God.

8. The Kneebone Christian – Who realizes that victory in the Christian life, comes only through a life of prayer. “Much prayer, much power ... Little prayer, little power ... No prayer, no power.”

“Can these bones live?” Yes, and the Knee-bone Christian is the one who is living a life of prayer in intimate relationship to the Lord.

From our text I see God has outlined a two-part plan which I believe has implication in our lives as disciples and in the life of any body of disciples that is desirous of becoming a vibrant prevailing church!

Two weeks ago we gleaned from the first few verses of this chapter that God visits us in our places of captivity and speaks possibility and potential, real hope into our lives even from a place of desolation.

Listen to God's instruction 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!'*

I see this as the first part of God's 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!

*'Dry bones; listen to the word of the LORD!'*

If we are going to be the disciples God has called us to be; if we are going to be the prevailing church that God is calling us to be, there must be a renewed focus, intentional observance, and obedient attention given to the Word of God in our lives.

### **Psalm 119:105 NIV**

*'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.'*

### **Psalm 119:10-12 NIV**

*'I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.'*

[Mike Widau has been providing a daily bible study, currently through the book of Nehemiah, to help with our daily bread. See Mike for e-mail address]

It's quite possible to forget the Word of God and its value and importance and be busy kind of doing your own thing!

Forgetting the value of the Word of God is exactly what happened in Judah during the reign of King Josiah who was 8 years old when he became king by the way. Listen to this shocking discovery:

### **2 Kings 22:8-13 NLT**

*8 Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!" Then Hilkiyah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it. 9 Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your officials have turned over the money collected at the Temple of the LORD to the workers and supervisors at the Temple." 10 Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king. 11 When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. 12 Then he gave these orders to Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and Asaiah the king's personal adviser: 13 "Go to the Temple and speak to the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah. Inquire about the words written in this scroll that has been found. For the LORD's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do."*

Read what 26 year old Josiah did in **2 Kings 23**. He initiated phenomenal reforms in the nation that brought great life to the nation after reading in the Word of God the way things should be.

Once again history provides us with a glaring example. Church, this isn't just a history lesson, oftentimes this is us today. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:11 *'These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.'*

Church, if we are ever going to rise up out of our own valley of the dry bones, it will be when we return to the Word of God as our standard, our truth, our eternal trust.

Here is a question that was posed to me this week: what is the last passage of scripture you memorized or 'hid in your heart?'

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.'*

Just a few thoughts concerning the Word of God:

**Don't water it down**

**Don't try to improve upon it**

**Don't try to rationalize it**

**Don't feel you have to apologize for it**  
**Don't philosophize over it**  
**Don't be timid with it**

Simply believe the Word as it is, just as he tells us to! It's not our Word, it's His Word! It didn't originate with us, it originated with Him! It's not called your word or the word of Pastor Brett, it's called the Word of the Lord, God's Word!

God's plan to shake the dry bones and bring His church back to the place where we are prevailing and not dwindling includes His Word! That's one of the reasons beginning this coming Wednesday night we are launching a new Bible study through the Book of Acts which shares the amazing story of the birth of the prevailing church.

I would encourage you to make an adjustment to your schedule and join us from 6:30-7:30 on Wednesdays.

We are also launching a 4 week class entitled Doorway to Spiritual Maturity beginning November 9 @ 9 in the morning during Sunday School time. There is a sign up sheet on the back table. This class gives a practical overview of the basics of maturing in our faith which includes our consistent reading and studying of God's Word.

Jeff Ervin will be the teacher. I am participating in the class and am asking all those who have not been through this class to attend as well. Let's be like King Josiah and initiate reforms in our life concerning the Word of God!

From this passage I also see a second part to God's plan to revive these bones: **The Holy Spirit of God**. Listen to what God has to say 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 in 2 Timothy 3:5 as *'having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.'*

May I tell you that all our efforts in the Kingdom are lifeless and powerless without the touch of the Spirit upon them?

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.

When God formed Adam in the Garden of Eden listen to what He did next:

**Genesis 2:7 NLT**

*'Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.'*

Listen up: In a church by our own strength and wisdom crowds can be gathered -- an advertising and marketing strategy can accomplish this. By our own strength and wisdom we can devise programs that will be enticing to the world. By our own strength and wisdom our church can grow. By our own strength and wisdom we can touch people's minds.

But, make no mistake about it: if our goal is to see the spiritually dead raised to life in Christ, it will take a divine initiative of the Holy Spirit! He must come and 'breathe' on us!

When I read through the book of Acts, the history of the beginning of the church, I read things like **Acts 4:13-14 NLT** which says *'The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say.'*

Boldness in ordinary men?

They recognized they had been with Jesus?

Miraculous interventions of God?

These disciples had the breath of the Holy Spirit of God moving through their lives!

I also read in **Acts 2:42-43** which records this: *'All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.'*

Devotion to the things of God including His Word, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer?  
Deep awe?  
Again, the miraculous signs and wonders?

Once again these disciples had the breath of the Holy Spirit of God moving through their lives!

And one of my favorites found in **Acts 17:6** where the early disciples are referred to as *'these that have turned the world upside down...'*  
**ARE YOU KIDDING ME?**

I tell you once again these disciples had the breath of the Holy Spirit of God moving through their lives!

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!

My prayer this morning is 'would You do it again, Lord? Would do such a thing in my own life? Would you do such a thing in Christ United Church? In this community? In this nation? In the nations o God?'

'Would you touch all of us tailbone, finger-bone, jawbone, hipbone, dry-bone, and wishbone Christians? Would you raise us up with the Word of God and Your precious Holy Spirit and form us into backbone and knee-bone disciples?'

And He says 'yes I will.' Even when it seems there is no hope, God's Word of promise to us is true.

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.'*

Finally let's look again at verse 5: *'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again!'*

In verse 10 we read: *'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.'*

Verse 5 says 'I am going to make you live again' and verse 10 tells us 'they all came to life and stood up on their feet – a great army!'

Church, when God is in it, it will bring testimonies of victory even from a valley full of dried bones; even from you!

Make no mistake about it, if God speaks it, it will come to pass. You see, this is not the only time that a graveyard tried to block and hinder the promise of God. God has a history of resurrection power!

Jesus made a promise in **John 11:23** *"Thy brother shall rise again."*

He fulfilled that promise in **John 11:43-44** *"And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."*

God also made this promise in **John 2:19, 21** *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he spoke of the temple of his body."*

And we certainly know the fulfillment of that promise for in **Matthew 28:5-6** *'The angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'*

What am I trying to tell you this morning? Simply this: When God promises you something, He will bring it to pass! No situation is so bleak that it cannot be changed by His Word and the Holy Spirit of God!

**CONCLUSION:** Return with me to Ezekiel 37, as I close this morning. I want you to notice verses 11-14, for I believe this is a word from God for us.

*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.'*

With God all things are possible!

*13 When this happens, [not if] 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!"*

The worship team is coming and they are going to minister to us as they sing 'Word of God Speak.' As we read earlier in Psalm 32, God will surround us with songs of deliverance as we confess our sinfulness, receive His gracious forgiveness, and seek Him through prayer.

The altars are open. We would like to pray with you.