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"Speaking Life" – Ezek 37:1-10

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○ We're going to look this morning at Ezekiel 37 and the vision of the valley of dry bones. But first, a little history.

Sennacherib was the king of Assyria, living in the Capital of Nineveh, when the Northern kingdom of Israel fell, ○ and the people were taken off by the Assyrians into exile in 721BC. It was probably around 100 years previous to this event, that Jonah was sent to Nineveh. The Assyrian empire was developing, and Nineveh was described as an "exceedingly great city of more than 120,000." Jonah was sent to this wicked city worthy of destruction, but upon their repentance, God spares the city. And it is then, Assyria that God uses to bring down Israel in 721BC, and the people carted off to Nineveh.

Who would have thought? God saves an evil city, who He later uses to bring down His beloved chosen people. Why? Because the Hebrew people had rejected Him as their one and only God. And so the northern kingdom has fallen.

Approx. 130 years later, the Southern kingdom of Judah also falls, ○ and this time the people were taken off; 3000km away to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. Many were imprisoned, and many more treated as slaves. The nation of Israel was dead. All hope is gone. Their homeland overrun by enemies; cities destroyed; city walls and temple demolished; and the people scattered; imprisoned and enslaved in foreign lands. The destruction of the nation was complete. A people dead and buried – end of story.

But, can God bring life to these dry bones? Ezekiel was in his mid twenties and he was training to be a priest like His father before him. He was serving God in the Temple in Jerusalem. Prior to the final siege that led to the fall of Jerusalem, there were a couple of occasions when some of the city's leaders were carted off to Babylon. Ezekiel was exiled during one of these. ○

These must have been such turbulent times. He would have heard the prophecies of Jeremiah, and now more likely to believe them. But was he one who firmly held to the position that the Temple was the place where God lived and so God would keep Jerusalem safe - regardless of how terrible the outlook was? Was he being tossed to and fro as he tried to understand the times, and tried to hold onto his faith in God? Maybe as you try to understand our times, and as you hear and read conflicting information regarding our times, are you standing firm in your faith in God, regardless of what happens around you?

And so, eventually the city falls and it appeared that God was no longer in control; God was not all powerful; God had failed him and his people. They'd been forcibly taken into a place and a situation where they didn't want to be. And all of his past training that had taught him that God had led the Hebrew people into the Promised Land was now being questioned.

Now, really, we don't have a clue what this must have been like; because for so long we Aussies have enjoyed freedom, and peace, and security. But, when your world is turned upside down through the death of a loved one, illness, financial ruin, or relationship breakdown – when we're taken into a place where we don't want to be, we can struggle. Rather than question God, we may be forced to rely upon Him more.

And maybe this is where Ezekiel found himself. Still questioning, but at the same time, trying to trust in God that he will come through. It was 5 years later that Ezekiel has a dream or a vision. It was a long time to be waiting on God; a long time when God seemed to be silent. If God seems distant for you or silent at the moment – that doesn't mean that He's absent nor uncaring. Keep trusting. Keep believing. 5 years of feeling abandoned. 5 years of waiting. 5 years of wasted time. 5 years of wondering or questioning.

Ezekiel was now 30 and sitting by the Kebar River when God showed up. I encourage you to read Ezekiel 1. Such is this incredible vision of God that Ezekiel lists the day and the place where he was when God showed up, and then he attempts to describe the indescribable. Such is the impact of this revelation of God that he cannot help but fall face down in worship and wonder, and it is this vision of God that transforms him and motivates him and leads him into faithful ministry for the rest of his life. He'll not doubt God again!

Most of us have never had this kind of experience as Ezekiel or Isaiah did; seeing God in all of His indescribable glory, but we need only keep coming back to the Cross of Christ, and that is more than enough for us. If you're struggling in your faith at the moment can I encourage you to come back to the Cross. Read the gospel accounts; meditate upon them. Get some books that reflect just on the Cross. Seeing Christ; His love, grace and mercy transforms us, and reinvigorates the soul.

Ezekiel then hears the voice of God calling him into a prophetic ministry; to be prepared to be God's spokesman, and prepared to speak even when the people will not respond to him.

Ezekiel says, **“Then I looked and saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll of lament and mourning and woe... and then God said to me, eat this scroll. So I ate and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”** (Ezek 2:9 – 3:2)

Some people are hesitant as they come to God's word, because they don't want to be reminded of their sin and the need to repent, or turn away from it. But God's Word always brings life – even when there is cause for mourning and grief. Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life.” God's words always bring life – in fact words that can be so confronting are also so sweet to taste. They're sweet because they bring life; they bring comfort, peace, encouragement, guidance, freedom, reconciliation with God; they remove guilt and shame. When God speaks, he always speaks words of life.

And so we come to the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Verse 1, **“The Spirit of God took a hold of me and set me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them—a lot of bones! There were bones all over the plain—dry bones, bleached by the sun.**

3 He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Master God, only you know that.”

Imagine yourself in Ezekiel's shoes; standing in a vast paddock with the ground covered in dry bones; hundreds of thousands of bones; leg bones, ribs, spine and skull; everywhere. And they've been there for a long time for they a dry and bleached by the sun. And God asks you, “can these bones live?”

☹️ “Nope! They’ve been dead a long, long time.” From a human perspective, there’s no life here. Standing in a valley of white bleached, brittle human bones, there is an audible sense of empty nothingness. A white bland canvass of despair, fills the scene. For where there is death, there is nothing. There is no smell, no colour, no movement and no breeze in this place of hopelessness.

For many people, the loss of a loved one can bring a similar scene. It seems that all the life has been sucked out since their loved one has gone. During our times of pain, loss, brokenness and death, we may feel that there is no God, or that He has abandoned us. But I think God asks the same question, “Can these bones live?” Whatever you’re facing, can life come into your emptiness?

And in answer to His question, Ezekiel rightly says, **“Master God, only you know that.”**

It’s not until the end of the vision that God explains the scene that’s before him. And He says that these bones represent the house of Israel, and they are dry, white bones because all hope is gone. For the Hebrew people, the possibility of being a nation again is dead a buried; all hope of that is gone. In fact, no-one even thinks or suggests that such an idea is possible; they’re scattered everywhere; no leaders; they’re slaves and subject to oppression.

And so God directs Ezekiel to speak life into these bones. ○ V.4, **“He said to me, ‘Prophecy over these bones: ‘Dry bones, listen to the Message of God!’”**

God, the Master, told the dry bones, “Watch this: I’m bringing the breath of life to you and you’ll come to life. I’ll attach sinews to you, put meat on your bones, cover you with skin, and breathe life into you. You’ll come alive and you’ll realize that I am God!”

○ **I prophesied just as I’d been commanded. As I prophesied, there was a sound and, oh, rustling! The bones moved and came together, bone to bone. I kept watching. Sinews formed, then muscles on the bones, then skin stretched over them. But they had no breath in them.**

○ **He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man. Tell the breath, ‘God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!’”**

So I prophesied, just as he commanded me. The breath entered them and they came alive! They stood up on their feet, a huge army.”(4-10)

We mustn’t miss the process here. God spoke to the bones and told them what He was about to do – and they remained as they were. Then He asked Ezekiel to speak to the bones – it was then that they came together and were formed into bodies – still lifeless on the ground. Then the breathe of God entered into them and they became alive and stood up.

The Hebrew people were scattered about the plains, and although God had revealed what He was about to do, the prophets were asked to be involved and speak as God directed them. There would be some movement toward them becoming a nation once again – they

might move together. They might look like a people, but like all of us, they're spiritually dead without the breath of God within them. ○

You know, there are dead people all around us. They might look like they're altogether, but until we speak the gospel message to them, then they'll remain spiritually dead - until the life giving breathe of God comes into them – until they receive the Holy Spirit.

There was a time when Jesus walked into a similar valley as Ezekiel; when Mary and Martha were overcome by the loss of their brother Lazarus. Death seems so powerful and permanent when you find yourself hopelessly touched by its cold hand. When Jesus arrived, both sisters posed the same notion to Jesus, "Had you been here Lord, our brother would not have died." They recognised that life was at Jesus command, but death had convinced them that where death is, there is no life.

However, these stories reveal otherwise. As Ezekiel prophesied to the winds, the breath of God entered the bodies and they came to life. As Jesus, God's Son spoke, the Spirit of God re-entered in Lazarus and he came forth from the tomb.

You see, death is the absence of life, and Jesus said that He is the way the truth and the life. We cannot experience life in all its abundance – eternal life – without faith in Jesus.

Paul wrote, ○ **"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."** (Romans 8:11). For whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life. ○

Jesus also said to Martha, **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** (Jn 11:25-26) Do you believe this? Most of you do. But until you acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you're a dead man walking. You have not life.

As God has declared that the wages of sin is death, then we all deserve to die. But the sinless, spotless Son of God who could have been transported directly into heaven, was caused to depart this way of righteousness through His death, in order that we might be declared right with God. Do you believe this? If you have not declared your faith in Jesus, you're a dead man walking. You can declare you faith in Him as we sing our closing song.

If you're struggling in your faith at the moment – be encouraged to get back into God's Word and centre your thoughts upon the Cross of Christ.

God's Word is alive and active and always brings life. And remember to take every opportunity the Lord presents you with to share your faith; praying for the life stirring Holy Spirit work in their lives.