

Sermon for 9th August 2020

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Introduction: Ezekiel means 'God strengthens'. Ezekiel was deported from Judah to Babylon in 597 BC, received his call from God in 592 BC and was in a prophetic ministry for about 22 years. The theme of this prophet and book is the restoration of Israel – a message of hope in a hopeless situation. So, what did Ezekiel do in this chapter? We can see a strategy of how prophecy can work.

- 'The hand of the Lord' was upon Ezekiel. This really means 'an overpowering experience of divine revelation'. Ezekiel was really aware of the presence of God as he spoke. In passing, Ezekiel spoke to inanimate objects, and yet this produced results. There is a real need in our day for prophets (and all who speak in the Lord's name) to have this experience, however it may be felt. When Ezekiel was under the 'hand of the Lord' he was easily led to where God wanted him to be – in a desolate situation. Some would say that is where the UK is now – but has God left us in a hopeless situation? No! We shall hear stories of people coming to the end of their resources and crying out to God for help. These situations help people to think about what is reality and what is the most important aspect of their lives. We have also heard about a number of people listening to online services, who would never normally go to church. This has to be good news!

What would you feel if you were faced with a whole load of dry bones? I think that I would scratch my head and think 'what good can be done here!'. The desolate situation is used by God to cause Ezekiel to know that he, of himself, is powerless. When we are aware of that, God can, and does step in. All he requires of us is to trust, and we won't do that unless we know we are weak and in need of help. These times we are in can put forward the question 'Can God do the impossible?' For an answer, look no further than this chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy – God may well be saying 'I can do this, so nothing is impossible for me to do'. This is why we all need to be praying for revival, which includes reformation and repentance. God is doing at least two things – putting His Spirit into people, and, in doing so, calling people back to Himself. When the hand of the Lord is upon us, we will be thinking such thoughts, praying through such thoughts and **acting** on such thoughts.

- The Lord spoke to Ezekiel (verses 3, 4, 9 and 11). God asks the all-important question – 'Can these bones live?' The prophet was passing the question back to God by saying 'O Lord God, you know' – inferring that he, the prophet, was unsure. God knew that Ezekiel needed to have his faith bolstered and enlarged. Then God begins to give directions. This is where the situation gets interesting. If God gives directions, they are appropriate and will succeed. This is a stepping stone for faith. If God says something, **He will make it happen**. Faith is, after all, taking God at His word and acting on it. God is saying in part, even if you have doubts, the bones don't - for they will hear and obey! Verses 5 and 6 spell out what God is going to do. Notice the three 'I will's' put there for emphasis. It is interesting to note, that the first thing God says He will do ('I will cause breath to come into you') becomes the last in actuality, linking this passage to Genesis 2:7.

At creation, man was formed of the clay, and, only when God breathed into the man's nostrils, with the breath of life, did the man become a living being. It is no coincidence, that when 999 is called, the first thing that is asked for after the situation is explained, is **'is the patient breathing?'** Without breath there is no life, and it is exactly the same in the spiritual realm. If the Spirit of God or the breath of God is not in us, we are not alive spiritually. This is why so many people are spiritually dead when they think they are alive. No wonder that people will know that the Lord is alive, when they become alive. (verse 6)

- Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded. (verse 7). One obvious element of a prophet's ministry is that he/she has to be obedient to the instructions that are given. We may get it wrong, but if we are really listening, we will become better listeners and be able to better discern the clear voice of God. If we are hearing God's voice, several things come out of this logically. A voice is part of a relationship, and a relationship is formed through love. If love is the motivation, then there will be an upbuilding for the body of Christ – the people who seek His face, week by week. We need to realise that the moment Ezekiel began to prophesy, God acted. Notice Ezekiel wasn't asked to do anything, simply to speak out the words and instructions that God gave him. Prophets can sometimes be obedient onlookers!

Notice also, that Ezekiel's prophecy was in two sections, and sometimes we need to wait for further instructions to complete the task. What was missing? You guessed it – it was that breath again! Ezekiel prophesied in the name of the Lord God – a point that is worth making. A prophet relies on Another's authority; in our age it is the name of Jesus – the God made flesh. As at creation, the breath came into these bones and the bodies lived. Whether or not the experience was one based on reality or a vision is not clear – scholars are divided on this. However, one thing is clear – a resurrection is meant. It is felt by some that this is the first instance of resurrection thought in the Bible. The interpretation given is that the nation of Israel will come into existence again, like a resurrection, emphatically so, see verse 12. God is thorough in His dealings with His people – hence the idea of opening up graves, which could have a link to Matthew 27:52-53

'the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep in death were raised to life and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.'

- So, what can we learn from this famous passage for our practical application?
 - Are we prepared for the supernatural God to act in supernatural ways? If we aren't, why aren't we prepared?
 - Have we experienced our own spiritual resurrection?
 - Do we believe in a God who can deal with impossibilities?
 - Do we believe that God can, and does, use anyone and anything to promote His Kingdom?
 - How do we feel about a God who is concerned throughout the Bible to advertise Himself, e.g. 'that they may know there is a God in Israel'?
 - Is God calling us to speak prophetically or at least to live prophetically?
 - Am I relying on God's authority or mine?

- When we are in a valley which has so many seeming impossibilities, we can learn a lot, not least of which is to know that we are being held by the One who gives us breath. I have been through similar situations, such as two financial crises, a severe accident and various persecutions. What has brought me through these situations? God, through His Spirit, His breath, kept me going by His faithfulness. I was, in a sense, His responsibility. He gave me instructions, like Ezekiel, and led me out of the valley into a land of hope and perspective. In words given to me in some music I wrote '**Then Your promise sank into my spirit. Your faithfulness became the Purpose of my life.**'

To encourage us and stir us up, here is a quote from Dr. A.W. Tozer 'The Christian Church is helpless and hopeless if it is stripped of the reality and historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

To sum up: We need God's authority and we are powerless by ourselves. When we act on God's word **it is faith**, and finally we need to be obedient to the Maker's instructions. May God bless us all as we think about and re-read this passage. Amen.