

Can these bones live?

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[0 : 00] This then is the famous vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones, probably the most well-known section in the whole book of Ezekiel.

And we read at verse 11, Then he said unto me, So a man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, our bones are dried and our hope is lost.

We are cut off for our hearts. Now it's important for us to recognize the context in which this is happening. Ezekiel is a prophet of exile, and the Israelites are a people in exile.

We don't know exactly which valley it is that he is seeing himself in vision, transported to. It is probably one of the valleys, I'll say the river of Kibar, in what is now Syria, in those days that have been part of the Babylonian Empire, but that doesn't really matter.

It's not a physical field full of skeletons that he is seeing, remember. This is a vision. It is a vision which the Lord is showing him, and how he is illustrating his power to bring the dead to life, and to bring the spiritually dead to spiritual life, and to restore those who are scattered and sent into exile, as Ezekiel was, back to their own land of Israel.

[1 : 23] And by extension, if he is able to bring the physical Israelites back into the physical promised land, he is able to bring us in exile in this fallen world into our ultimate inheritance, the true promised land.

So this is a vision. The hand of the Lord was upon me, carried me out in the spirit, and set me down in the midst of the valley. It is a vision of the valley of dry bones.

It's not literal skeletons, with literal physical sinews, and flesh, and blood, and then breath, although the Lord could easily do that too. But this is to demonstrate his total power with his people, and his desire to do them good.

So this verse 11 perhaps describes or sums it up. Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say our bones are dried, and our hope is lost. We are cut off for our parts. Here they are scattered, exiled, helpless, hopeless. I wonder if this perhaps may be how we sometimes feel ourselves. As though we are not at home in this world, as though we ourselves are just dead.

[2 : 39] We are as dead as can be. We may have been alive once, whether in the Lord, or with our lives going well, but now we are just dead. We are dried up, and we feel hopeless.

We may feel weary physically, or just hopeless physically, or it may be inside. It may not be so much on the outside. Perhaps it's really our soul that is causing this weariness, this dryness in our heart, and perhaps with having physical symptoms too.

Is it our body that's in that condition? Maybe. Or is it really our soul, which of course is more lasting, and of more ultimate importance?

I would suggest to you that if this is how we view ourselves, and most of us probably will view ourselves like that at some point. You know, we may have got you today on a good day.

When things are on the up, when things are going well, and maybe I've had a bad day for a while, well, that's great, that's wonderful, and I'm delighted for you, but rest assured that if you haven't had them in the past, there will be bad days, there will be difficult days.

[3 : 51] Just like, you know, when a couple are sitting out on their wedding day or their marriage bows or whatever, it's a great day, it's a happy day, it's a joyful day, but they're not stupid, hopefully. They will know there will be difficult days.

They will know there will be times whether through pressure of work or pressure of work or little children or family illness, they can't get sleep or they're under pressure or difficulty or they have arguments or whatever may be the case.

There will be difficult days. And I'm sure all of us here know what dark, difficult, dried up days are like and dried up stages in our lives are like.

If this is you or has been you or if it's going to be you in the days or in the months ahead, this is a chapter, I would suggest, that speaks to us.

If this is how we view or recognize ourselves, then verse 3 in particular is a very pertinent question to ask of us. He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?

[4 : 52] And I answered, O Lord God, I know us. As he goes and says, Yes, of course they can. Lord, just send the breath and the spirit and so on. He doesn't know what God's plan is.

He doesn't know whether he plans to revive them, whether he intends to do it. So he knows he can't fit them together. He can't give them life. He can't do anything. So when the Lord says, Son of man, can these bones live?

Is there hope for you or for Israel? He says, Well, Lord, you know me. I answered, O Lord God, can it be possible for me, new beginning, new birth, to be rejuvenated at my stage in life, at my age?

Am I too young in my own eyes? Am I too old? Neither one nor the other, perhaps. I'm not too old. I'm not too young. I'm just somewhere in the middle. So, you know, plenty of time I have for the enthusiasm of youth, which I'm past now, or for the old age and sort of quietness, which I haven't had yet.

So this isn't really for me. At my stage, at my age in life, can this be for me? Well, perhaps you are already born again as you're listening to this.

[6 : 02] And if you are, then you know well enough the truth of what the angel Gabriel said to Mary in Luke chapter 1 verse 37 where he said, for with God nothing shall be impossible.

And others who are old now might look around at those of their contemporaries who are believing Christian and say, ah yes, but these people, though they are old now, were younger when they were converted.

But what hope can I have now at this stage when I have left it so long, you know, like the milk and the porridge banana, maybe just left it, you know. If you're younger, the devil will whisper in your ear that you don't have to do this yet.

You don't have to worry about being brought to life, worrying yet. Plenty of time for that, time enough for Christ and the business of your soul when you are yourself old, like so many of the Christians, you know.

how do you know you'll ever be old? How do you know how many days there are to your life? How do you know whether you'll still have your mind? How do you know what is around the corner?

[7 : 09] This is an opportunity the Lord gives each of us to receive his blessing, his grace. We can never say, ah, I'm too young or I'm not old enough yet. Maybe I'm not young anymore but I'm not old enough yet.

And if you are old, if you are yourself old then he will whisper in your other ear that you are too old, that you have left it too long.

You can't change your habits now. You can't change your life. You're too late to a new beginning. All these other people around you, if they're old, mature Christians, they started earlier.

You've left it too long. You can't go now. Well, there's the question again. Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, oh Lord God, I'm honest.

The people in this vision weren't just old. They were dead. You know, they were just bones, skeletons. Nobody here is quite at that stage, I think, at least not physically.

[8 : 11] Only you and the Lord know what you're like spiritually on the inside. The people in this vision were as dead as dead could be.

Son of man, can these bones live? Oh Lord, I'm honest. So Ezekiel gets his instructions. And he doesn't spend time arguing with the Lord and saying, oh come on Lord, this is a bit silly.

Why would I do this? But yes, we read in verse 7, I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a noise and behold, a shaking and the bones came together.

Bone to this bone. Ezekiel doesn't spend time arguing with the Lord. God tells him to prophesy, to act in faith of what he has been told.

And when he does so, the impossible begins to happen. And just like in our lives, if we are seeking to obey the Lord by faith, just as Ezekiel does here, then little by little, faith will step over obedience followed by little, faithful step of obedience.

[9 : 19] However small the steps or increments, little by little, God blesses each little step of faithful obedience in our lives just as Ezekiel follows through and does what God tells him.

Though he has no reason to think that anything should happen, it's not logical that just by speaking over a bunch of dead bones that something will happen to them.

He has no reason to think that anything should happen save for his faith in God. And that is what Jesus, of course, tells us to have. It's in Mark 11, verse 22, he says these very things, have faith in God.

Have faith in God. Did the prophet feel silly? Speaking and prophesying to a bunch of dry bones? Well, maybe. But still, he doesn't. God blesses Ezekiel's faith-filled obedience and he brings his own word to pass.

Remember how Jesus says to Peter, you know, cast your net out on the other side of the boat, don't shout it in the deep and cast your net on the other side. Peter says, look, you know, Lord, you're a carpenter, I'm a fisherman, I've been doing this all my life, we've been working all night, you fish at night, Lord, not during the day, it's better for the fish, we've been fishing all night, we've got nothing, but for your sake, I'll go out, throw him out the next time.

[10 : 42] And this time he couldn't drag it in and the nets began to break because of the power of the Lord when Peter did what Jesus said. Even though he had no reason to think anything was going to happen, he obeyed in faith and Ezekiel obeys in faith and when we obey in faith, the impossible begins to happen.

Have you felt silly in the past perhaps, talking to a God you cannot see? But then I think it would be less believable somehow, you know, if we could see and all these gods and images and idols that other religions make with statues and everything, it's less believable, it's more kind of tied down that way.

I think that's one reason why the Lord forbids the making of images that are meant to purporting to be of him because he can't be tied down. If he wasn't invisible it would be harder to imagine when he fills the heavens and the earth as he does but still, we cannot see him but we accept pretty much that God is invisible, okay, otherwise we say he couldn't fill the heavens and the earth so we can't see him with our eyes but as Psalm 93 says his works do show him clothed and girt about with light.

You can't see the wind. Our island is full of these turbines, sometimes turning, sometimes not and what turns the term? I should say well it's a wind. You can't see the wind.

You can't touch the wind. You can't taste the wind. You can feel its presence. You can see its effects when the leaves move on the tree, when the waves move on the water. That's the wind doing it.

[12 : 18] You see its effects. His works do show him clothed and girt about with light. It is the evidence of what God does that shows in this world how real he is.

would you feel uneasy about giving your life over to him now? It will always seem to us this late stage of our lives. It doesn't matter what age we are.

We think we're quite mature. I remember when I was just before I was converted I was 20 and I thought I was aging. I thought I'd seen all I was to see in the world. I'd done it all.

I was pretty mature from my ages I thought then. I didn't know how naive I was but I thought I was the finished product the total grown up I thought my life was practically over at 20.

So it doesn't matter what age you are at you think it's always a late stage in your life because everything you've had up until then is all of your life. It's your whole life. So at this late stage if you have spent a lifetime keeping him at arm's length do you fear that God might retaliate for all the years of unbelief or non-commitment by simply leaving you high and dry the equivalent of God's sake that Ezekiel prophesied the bones and he does it nothing happens.

[13 : 38] God's not going to leave you high and dry. He will never be guilty of having frozen out those who come to him by faith. However blatantly Jesus says in John 6 37 it's one of my favourite verses in all the Bible all that the Father give with me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no words cast out.

When a soul is finally brought to the Lord there is an element of dying involved. The old self has to admit that it was wrong not to have believed not to have accepted not to have trusted the Lord before this.

The old pride in the person I may have thought I was has to die and pride is such a hard thing to let go and to let die.

We don't think of ourselves as proud people. We think I need to be humble I'm not too bad I'm pretty ordinary and yet touch something that is part of our very identity and say you've got to let that go you've got to stop being that person you've got to admit that was wrong that was a mistake oh that's hard to do because pride is right in there like the milk in the cottage maybe you can't see it as it's working away there but if it's going sour then it ruins the whole product and pride is that which will sour our whole relationship with the Lord it has to die it has to admit that it has no place it has to let go it's hold on our own self and pride is such a hard thing to let go and to let die it is so so hard for our old self to admit that we were wrong because to do so means we are questioning undermining our whole life up to that point what has it all been for if I have been wrong all these years what does that say about me where does that lead me now if I have been wrong all these years but what it means is that you have been given by grace the courage to recognize not the life before was so long and bad but the life ahead can be so much better can be so much more if only you will let go of the leg weight of pride and sin the Lord knows that faith takes courage and God honors such courage such obedience faith which is after all the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen we cannot say to God right we'll make a dime payment first and when I see the evidence then I'll act on it that's not faith that's not the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen we have to take it on trust this is where faith really hits the cutting edge do we trust that when we step out into the nothing the Lord will catch us that underneath are the everlasting arms when we let go of the pride there may have been a sort of prop or support to us that the

Lord will be there to sustain us can we believe what he says in his word can we trust that's where we have to go and the old self is what has to die son of man these bones are the whole house of Israel verse 11 behold they say our bones are dried and our hope is lost we are cut off for our parts these bones are the whole house of Israel they represent the entirety of every last member of the redeemed people of God this means that every saved soul who has ever lived or shall ever live is in this vision represented there in these dead dry bones at one time all of us were dead to Christ but by his spirit by his word by his grace his people have been made new creations and brought from death to life what is possible for them is possible for all who will put their faith in Christ whatever stage in life they are at son of man can these bones live yes they can yes you can but only through faith in Christ and having the obedience to do as he commands which is to repent and believe the gospel you see all religions are not the same all religions are not equal there is one

[18:51] God and one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus and all the other imitations that men invent creating idols and false gods that they have invented out their own heads or a pale shadow of the true God and call it something else give them a different profit give them a different set of laws something more compatible with man's fallen nature something that appeals to the pride and the violence and the unpleasantness of an unsaved human soul all of that false religion can appeal to and there is any number of false religions but there is only one true God and it is to him that we must look and it is in him that we must trust but trust means faith stepping out where there is nothing under your feet save the promise that the Lord will catch you and bear you up in his hands son of man can these bones live yes they can yes you can but only through faith in Christ and having the obedience to do as he commands to repent and to believe the gospel as

Jesus commands himself at the beginning of his own gospel account therefore prophesy verse 12 and say unto them thus saith the Lord God behold O my people I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel he'll cause them to come out the graves now at one level this is a prophecy of the resurrection of the last day and we read 1st Corinthians chapter 15 verse 52 in a moment in a moment the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed those who are still alive when Christ comes back they will be changed they will be given resurrection bodies new bodies and yet the same but with different qualities those who are dead will be raised up out of the graves with resurrection bodies the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed so in one sense it's a vision of the resurrection of the last day bringing them into their own land bringing them into their inheritance but leave that aside for a moment the grave is the place of the dead and as long as we continue in a state of unbelief we continue to be dead in trespasses and sins we continue to be the dead in the place of the dead a state of unbelief now we'll look a wee bit more about that again this

evening in the evening service but for now let us recognise that the place of the dead the grave is where we are in our unbelief because we have no life outside of Christ no true life we have existence we're like a breathing corpse but we are not the humanity not the men of God the women of God the fullness of human beings that we were designed to be in his image until we are made new in Christ until that time we are just as it were free among the dead the place of the dead the place of unbelief but with faith in Christ and obedience to his call things change we are changed life into sin and he the Lord takes us out and away from this place and state of bondage to our own land to our own inheritance which he has prepared for us therefore prophesy and send and thus said the Lord God behold my people I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel and ye shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves so my people and brought you up out of your graves and shall put my spirit in you and ye shall live and I shall place you in your own land then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it and performed it said the

Lord now when it says you'll know that I am the Lord it doesn't just mean you'll be able to identify me it doesn't mean you'll say oh yeah look that's the Lord that's Jehovah fair enough you'll know that I am the Lord it means you will understand me you will get who I am that God is a God of mercy we find that so hard to actually put in place for ourselves we think well yeah he's going to catch me out when I do things wrong he's going to judge me when I'm bad he's going to point out my sins and he's going to say yep you need to repent right enough but to actually have this self giving initiated love that the Lord gives to us when he does good things for us when he freely gives us life in all its fullness when he freely forgives our sins when he blesses when he desires to bless when he pours out his goodness upon him that's what breaks our hearts that's what brings the tears of gratitude and love and amazement to our eyes we're not used to people being kind to us we're not used to God showing such love to us because until we come into this relationship with him until we close in with Christ we are at enmity with him we are dead to him that's why all we know of him is at a distance is at enmity is in coldness is in darkness is in the seeming harshness of the law we don't know him as he is but he says when I brought you out of your graves when I brought you to life when I given you my spirit you shall know that I am the Lord you know my nature you know my character that God is love that he is justice that he is mercy that he is goodness and truth that he desires to save he's only going to save through his son Jesus Christ no other means that is the only way we shall be redeemed now Jesus said pretty much the same thing about preparing an inheritance for us

[25 : 34] John 14 verses 2 and 3 remember he says in my father's house are many mansions if it were not so I would have told you I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also then he said unto me son of man these bones are the whole house of Israel behold they say our bones are dried our hope is lost we are cut off for our parts therefore prophesy and say unto them thus saith the Lord God behold O my people I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel he shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves O my people you won't know who he is or what he's like until he's done it you'll always have wrong ideas about the Lord wrong ideas about so called religion wrong ideas about what we think

God is like you won't know him until he has done it until I have opened your graves O my people and brought you up out of your graves and you'll put my spirit that is the Holy Spirit in you and ye shall live as your place from your own land then shall be over I the Lord have spoken and performed it saith the Lord you see this is part of the picture part of the illustration the Lord gives Ezekiel with this vision because in Greek in the New Testament to an extent in Hebrew there's a similarity there where the word spirit and the word wind are either the same word as they are in Greek or very similar as they are in Hebrew so there's a certain play on words there was no breath in that so then he said prophesy unto the wind prophesy son of man say to the wind thus saith the Lord God come from the four winds O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live so I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them and they lived and stood up upon their feet an exceeding great army now wind itself doesn't bring us to life breath doesn't of itself bring us to life people can still when they're dead have breath inside their lungs sometimes you know you see on TV reports of that sort of this concerning thing when somebody's already dead but maybe they get moved and they sort of because the breath is coming out of their lungs when

they're already dead so breath itself doesn't bring you alive what is it that's being alive it's not wind in the sense of blowing in the trees it's the spirit wind and spirit there's a play on words just as when Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 he says you know the wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound that all but canst not tell once it cometh and whether it goeth so is every one that is born of the spirit because the Greek words for spirit and wind are the same word that they're being used in a different sense here it is the spirit that quicken it that brings alive flesh profit of nothing so when Ezekiel is to call for the wind he is being told to call for the spirit of God to be put in them to bring them alive and it is the spirit of the Lord the spirit of Christ which alone brings us alive he is saying I the Lord have spoken it and performed it saith the Lord I've spoken it and therefore it must be true because God cannot lie he is the truth the way the truth and the life God and this is what we are taught to do believe obey and rejoice God is meant to be rejoiced in he is meant to be a source of great joy he desires his people to joy in him the joy of the Lord is your strength it says in the Bible the Lord desires his people to joy in him if you're already believing and some of you today yes will be then rejoice that now is our salvation nearer than when we believed our time of meeting the Lord Jesus Christ face to face is nearer this Sabbath day than it was last Sabbath it's nearer than it was yesterday now is our salvation nearer than when we believe if on the other hand our bones are dry if our soul and our spirit seem dead without hope and without God then you can still rejoice you can rejoice that there is yet hope for there is yet God whilst there is the Lord there is the life and there is hope there is yet hope for there is yet God was promised that he will never leave us nor forsake us we may let the opportunity pass but it will be we who have walked away from him not him who has left us so man can these bones live and I answered oh Lord God thou know us and we know the answer to that too yes they can for with God nothing shall be impossible whatever our age whatever our condition he has given us this day of grace this infallible word this invitation to repent and believe and obey and rejoice rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice Paul writes to the Philippians why yes he writes to the Corinthians also but behold now is the accepted time behold now is the day of salvation as the psalmist said long ago this is the day the Lord made we will rejoice and be glad let us pray