

Coming To Life

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Well, it is our Fall kick-off season here at the church...and next week we'll have a great time of prayer over our students and teachers and administrators as schools are starting back up. We'll also begin a new preaching series next week in the book of Daniel we're calling *Unshakeable*, and I am looking forward to spending seven weeks in the first six chapters of Daniel with you. I've been reading and studying all summer and am locked and loaded!

I also want to remind you via the introduction today that we have our annual *Summit Leadership* training this evening. It's NOT too late to join in if you are interested in serving in any type of volunteer, servant leadership role in our Life Group ministry OR just want to know more and explore what your options are, text the word "SUMMIT" to 77069 and we'll get you signed up.

Would love to see you this evening starting at 4:30...we already have over 1200 leaders that will be here and it'll be a GREAT time as we prepare for next week, our official Fall kick-off day!

Our Fall kick-off is important because it represents a new season for us here at the church and with it is the hope of reaching new people, starting new ministries, and beginning new initiatives.

I don't know about you, but I love new seasons of ministry and of life in general,

Many of us are preparing to drop students off at college in the next couple of weeks and while it will be a transition and change, and it will be sad in many ways it's also new season...and new seasons bring hope of having new experiences and making new friends and figuring out new ways to move forward.

The Fall brings the hope of cooler weather...now that weather may still be a month or so away for us in Houston, but it's coming! It's the hope of no more 100-degree days, just 90 or 91 degrees...can't wait! It's HOPE!

We've got college football season and the hope of A&M doing something this year (and all the Aggies said?) Texas and Oklahoma both full of hope going into the SEC. We've got the hope of the Astros continuing to make this run and this being the Texans year.

Hope is a good thing...and today, I want to bring a message of hope as we move into this Fall season. It's been said that "man can live 40 days without food, about three days without water, and four minutes without air. But we cannot live for four seconds without hope."

illus. Skelator – Now, helping me preach this message today is my friend, "Skelator". And his presence on this stage may speak louder and more effectively than I do today.

Ezekiel 37. Allow me to set some context for you in a message I'm calling: **Coming to Life**

The picture we see painted for us in this text today was given to the nation of Israel at a time and in a season of their existence when they were the most hopeless. You may think you have fallen on hard times, and perhaps you have, but just listen to what Israel was going through at the time in which this is written:

- Their nation had been ransacked...
- Their ability to worship in the Temple – gone. It had been destroyed by the Babylonians...
- They lost their land, and the holy city (Jerusalem) which they loved was desecrated...
- They had false prophets, making false predictions...
- Their freedom had been taken away and here they are a people in slavery and captivity...

They were hopeless and helpless...a people in deep despair. And this sense of desperation is captured when Israel collectively says in **Ez. 37:11c** – “...**our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.**”

? - Have you ever felt this way? You don't feel like you are holding on, you feel like you have already let go. Hope is nowhere to be found.

It's a dark place...a lonely time...you're walking and breathing, but truthfully on the inside you feel dead. And that situation you are facing – there's seems to be no life in it at all.

- The ship has sailed...
- The lights are off...
- The door has been shut closed, locked and key thrown away...

Any of you you know what I'm talking about? Of course you do. We've all been here before. And the question is, can what is dead:

- a relationship...
- a career...
- a dream...
- a nation...
- a church...
- a spiritual life...

Can what is dead be brought to life? And if so, how?

Now, I have to tell you, I've been wanting to preach this message for while here at Champion Forest. It is one of the premier passages that pastors and preachers have used through the years to

speaking on revival and awakening and you'll see why that's the case by the time we are done today.

It's a powerful passage of scripture and one I'm eager to explore with you and to attempt to shed some light on as we move into this Fall season.

As noted, Israel has fallen on tough times. In exile, away from everything they know and love, they feel the brunt of being rejected and they are dejected.

And in this time, God gives the prophet, Ezekiel a message to declare to the Jewish people. This message is actually tied to a vision that God gives him...and this vision is off the charts!

Let's look at it.

Ez. 37:1-2 – “The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry.”

Since we're talking about death and life, I figured the best way to outline this passage today was to do it in medical terms. Let's begin first with the: **Diagnosis = Death.**

This is the problem. Ezekiel is taken on a journey. Now, a lot of scholars debate whether this was an actual, literal valley that God took Ezekiel to...was it the sight of an actual battle in the nation of Israel's history or was it just a spiritual vision he is giving him.

It really doesn't matter which view you take here, what's important is that you take note of what Ezekiel is surrounded by – and that is death...decay...this is what bones represent (like Skelator here) – they are relics of life!

That's all that's in the valley - skeletons. And they must have been here a while because there is an emphasis on the fact that these bones are “very dry” (v. 2b).

There was no missing the point of what God is showing Ezekiel here. Notice the smallest of details:

- He places him in the “middle of the valley” (v. 1).
- He then leads Ezekiel “around among them” – takes him on a field trip through the valley and shows the prophet that he is surrounded by death on all sides.

This was the state of the nation of Israel at this time! They were nothing but dead bones...no life in them. He made this clear to the prophet saying to him in:

Ez. 37:11a – “Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel...”

God wants Ezekiel to see in an up close and personal way the death of his people. Now, the question becomes how did this death come about?

And Ezekiel knows the exact reason why. His entire ministry was about warning the people of Israel of their sin and rebellion against God. He knows this is why they are in exile, and he knows this is why he sees bones – because sin always brings two things: judgment and death.

Just look at the sin Ezekiel preached against Warning here...this is graphic!

Ez. 36:16-21 – “The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.”

Simply put...Israel is dead due to their sin. There are dry bones all around because God is not mocked. Israel will reap what they have sown and if:

- Israel chose to rebel against God...
- worship foreign gods...
- align themselves with people who don't honor God...
- if they choose to profane his name in this way and live in a constant state of pride and rebellion...

Bones is what you become! Listen...hear this today...it should be a MAJOR take away for us from this sermon today- God judges sin!

He did then and he does now. His love and his judgment are the two sides of the same coin. And in the nation of Israel's case, God had had enough!

He judged their sin by sending them into exile and when they didn't repent – when they profaned his name even while in exile (36:21), God says, “death!” Ultimate judgment. Bones you become.

“Ezekiel, Israel is dead – they don't know me. They don't honor me. They are not in a relationship with me. And what's even more sad is they don't even know it.” I could camp out here all day...

There are people in this room, that if God opened our eyes and allowed us to see it, while you may be wearing flesh and breathing in air, if we had spiritual eyes we could see what God sees, you are really in effect nothing but dry bones – Skelator spiritually!

You come to church...may be a good, moral person, but there is no life in you...and what's sad is just like the nation of Israel, you don't even know it! Living every day going through the motions, but you are just a dead man walking – there is no life in you if you don't know God through the person of Jesus Christ (who by the way came to this earth to bear the judgment of our sin and the death that comes with it!)

It could be you are here today and you are a Christian. You know what God wants you to see and be aware of? God wants to do for us today what he did for Ezekiel on this day. He wants to give us eyes to see the death and decay around us.

- When you go to that restaurant you eat at this afternoon, that waiter that is waiting on you – if they don't know Christ - nothing but bones – Skelator!
- When you are around that table, there may be someone in your family that is not a believer, nothing but bones – Skelator!
- When you go to the office or as school starts back...that person in the cubicle next to you, plays the position right next to you on the team, they may be their physically, but if they don't know Jesus, God wants you to see they are nothing but bones – Skelator!

God, give us eyes to see the dry bones around us...this is what all sin eventually leads to – dead, dry bones.

Illus. Football season coming up – Cottonmouth – so, dry...there was nothing like getting a drink of water.

Listen, its possible to get “cottonmouth” in our marriage. We don't keep those embers of love and faithfulness going and our marriage can get dry...just like dry bones.

We can get dry spiritually. Some of us have “cottonmouth” when it comes to our walk with the Lord. We don't stay in God's Word, we don't stay in community (so concerned with irregular church attendance – that its not a priority) – this troubling because we become ineffective when we are “cotton-mouthed” spiritually.

We're dry...we're nothing but bones. As a nation...let's not fool ourselves, we are just as dead as the nation of Israel was in Ezekiel's time. We too have aligned with other gods, pursued idols of every kind, profaned his name.

And get this...we'll talk about this in our Daniel series – elections are coming up and they are important...no question about it! But elections can't make something dead come back to life! Elections can't fix dead, dry bones!

Look around, Champion Forest – eyes to see – there are bones everywhere - all around us and they are very dry. The diagnosis is death all around!

So, what's the prognosis? If the diagnosis...the problem is death, is there anywhere to go from here? Well, I said this is a message of hope and here we get our first glimpse of it right here.

If the diagnosis is death, the: **Prognosis = Life**

Now, on the surface this doesn't make any sense at all. The dead coming back to life? Come on...that doesn't happen. It seems a little too far fetched for even the prophet, Ezekiel. He's asked by God in:

Ez. 37:3 – “And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O LORD GOD, you know.”

In other words, “Lord, please don't ask me that right now. Ezekiel is more than a little discouraged...he's borderline depressed. He's just been given the vision of a valley filled with dry bones. Bones don't come back to life, but he's not going to say that to the living and all-powerful God.

So, he musters up the strength and creativity to come up with one of the best non-answers of all time – “God, you know.”

Ezekiel...I feel for him here! He doesn't want to say, “Yes, God they can live” and then be let down if they can't. At the same time he doesn't want to say “No, God, they can't live again” and show a lack of faith. Do you feel the tension?

Why say, “yes, these bones can live” and set myself up for more disappointment if/when they don't?

Ezekiel is having a hard time seeing and believing that anything good can come from death...and I TOTALLY get it!

It's hard to think positive and be hopeful...think that something good can happen when everything in front of you screams the opposite, isn't it?

Life in the midst of dry bones...it seems inconceivable.

- It seems inconceivable to think that a marriage when one of the partners refuses to come to the table to discuss the root issues causing all the problems can once again be brought to life...
- It doesn't make sense...it's not conceivable to think that that person at the office...at my school...my neighbor that is so antagonistic toward the gospel would ever humble themselves and trust in Christ...
- It seems inconceivable to think that God could light a fire and begin another Great Awakening in our nation, beginning with us here at Champion Forest...

Bringing dead things to life seems inconceivable...it doesn't make sense. But we know that our God makes the impossible, possible!

Luke 18:27 – “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

ALL things are possible. Are you hearing me today? ALL things are possible with God – including bringing that which is dead back to life! In fact, resurrection is what Jesus specializes in!

He showed us this multiple times in his ministry. Whether it was raising the only child of a widowed woman (Luke 7) or the young daughter of Jairus, a ruler in the synagogue (Mark 5) or raising his best friend, Lazarus from the dead (John 11) – not to mention his own resurrection after three days of being dead...

Listen...our God specializes in bringing dead things back to life! Count on it...believe it! It's what he does!

Jesus, confirming his authority as the son of God said in in **John 5:21 – “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.”**

Paul making his defense before King Agrippa, sharing his faith with him said this in **Acts 26:8 – “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”**

This is what God does!

- He raises those who are dead spiritually and brings them to life!
- He raises dead marriages and broken relationships!
- He raises to life broken dreams and aspirations!
- He raises to life dead churches!
- One day he will raise to life physically those that have gone before us in the faith!

If something or someone is dead – don't despair! It's in the perfect place to be raised up by God! This is where he does his best work!

BUT...listen to this...for resurrection to occur, we need to follow the treatment he places us on!

Isn't this how it works? We go to doctor. He gives us the diagnosis. After performing some tests and maybe consulting others, he gives us the prognosis. And then what does he do? He puts us on a plan. He gives us some treatment.

He writes us a: **Prescription = His Word and His Spirit**

This is how God brings the dead back to life. It's the ingredients to his special concoction, called revival...called resurrection...it's the way to dead things coming to life again!

Illus. Migraines – I have found a special concoction! Well, for the dead to come to life, here's the elements in the concoction of resurrection and revival: His Word and His Spirit.

Ez. 37:4-6 – “Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

Notice in (v. 4) – “hear the word of the LORD” – that word “hear “means to “listen intelligently.” In other words, you are listening to obey.

Life doesn't begin to occur by downloading podcasts, hearing messages that just go in one ear and out the other. It doesn't take place by casually opening up God's word and giving it a brief run through as if reading it is doing God a favor.

No...the hearing of the Word that is being talked about here is a taking in in for all its worth. It's holding tight to it, like someone who is drowning would hold on to a lifejacket.

You want to know one of the reasons its so important to be in church on a consistent basis? You want to know why it is so important to invite people who don't know Jesus to church? To invite them and bring them with you...want to know why it's so important?

Look at who this word is given to? It's given to the prophet Ezekiel. And he is told in (v. 4) to prophesy the word over the dead, dry bones. That word “prophesy” there means to “speak forth”. It's akin to the word we use to describe preaching...it's declaration. See:

- What dead people need is not a self-help plan that teaches them to manage their time...
- Dead people don't need a substance of some kind to try and escape their reality...
- Dead people don't need a physical makeover to make them feel good on the outside...
- Dead people don't need a list of “to-do's” that will help them be a better and more moral person...

Dead people don't need any of these things. What dead people need is someone to preach...declare the word of God over them!

Illus. Midweek (SHOW SLIDE)– Chapel this week talked about our dream of CF being a “healing place” for people. Starts Aug. 28 Financial Peace, Merge, ReEngage, Grief Share, Divorce Care, Prayer, Life's Healing Choices (explain) – all about the word!

Look, this is why people who don't know Christ need to be invited (talk about this at Summit this evening) and brought to church or a Life Group...this is why they need a friend who knows God's Word and is skilled in handling God's Word so that they can speak it over their life – this is what starts the treatment to brings resurrection and revival!

It's the word of God that is like a hammer that breaks the hard rock into pieces (Jer. 23:29). It's the word of God that is living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12)

Only the word of God can get to a hard heart and penetrate the rockiest of soils, but the Word of God alone – won't bring life.

God's word is fundamental and it is more than necessary, but if you want life – God's spirit has to come! This is illustrated for us here in this passage.

Ez. 37:7-10 – “So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them (“breath – it's the Hebrew Word “ruach” which is translated elsewhere as “wind, spirit” –it's the exact same word! In Gen. 2, God created the man and “formed him from the dust of the ground, but he did not become a living creature until God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of of life” Gen. 2:7 – same thing here! These are creatures with muscles on the skeletons and skin on the bones, but there is not life...UNTIL...v. 9 here). Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

COME ON! Life occurred with the special concoction of the Word of God combined with the Spirit of God.

- This is what dry, dead people need – they need the Word of God and the Spirit of God!
- This is what a dry spiritual life needs – it needs the Word of God and Spirit of God!
- This is what a dry, dead marriage needs – it needs the Word of God and Spirit of God!
- This is what a dry, dead church needs – it needs the Word of God and Spirit of God!
- This is what a dry, dead nation needs – its needs the Word of God and Spirit of God!

If you need hope today, look no further than the God that brings the dead back to life! And you want proof that he can do this? I mean proof that is black and white and can't be denied.

Some of you may be thinking “Jarrett, its too good to be true! I don't think God can bring life out of what I'm facing and up against.” Here's proof that he can!

We'll close this message out by looking at **Ez. 37:11-14** – **“Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”**

God gave Ezekiel a promise that one day the dead bones of Israel would be raised up...that they would come out of the graves and (v. 12) be brought back into their land.

THIS happened! Israel as a nation was dead and scattered all over the earth for nearly 2,000 years! They were dead, dry bones. And many scholars will point to May 14, 1948 when Israel was reestablished as a nation and were brought back into their land...and that re-gathering from the nations of the world continues to this day. It's happening!

So, when God says he can bring something to life, all we have to do is look at the nation of Israel to whom this prophecy was directed to, and we can see that it's true and factual. God makes dry bones live!

And get this...(v. 14) speaks of the reign of Christ in the world and we know that before Jesus returns large numbers of Jewish people (Rom. 11 and Rev “all Israel”) will come to know Christ and many will say this is already happening today at a rate that has never been seen before!

Dry bones WILL/ARE living again! God's reputation is on the line – you better believe he IS and WILL continue to bring that which is dead back to life.

So, if you are feeling a bit hopeless today...in despair? You feel dead and it's as dry bones are all around you? – there's hope.

Because with God, any situation...any circumstance – any body...no matter how inconceivable it may be, can come to life!

And it can happen right now to you, if you will place your faith and trust in Christ. Get on God's treatment plan today and start taking in some serious dosage of the word of God and the Spirit of God and watch as resurrection and revival begins.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.