

The start of something new: Ezekiel 37:1-37:14, Acts 1:1-8

Adapted from: "A Revelation of Revival in the Valley of Dry Bones," by Michael Luke SermonCentral.com

There was once an explorer who was deep in the Amazon jungle. He became lost in the thick foliage and stopped to get his bearings. As he looked around, he found himself surrounded by a group of bloodthirsty cannibals. Quietly to himself, he said, **"I'm doomed!"**

As he pondered his situation, a thought came to him: Wait! You're not doomed yet. Pick up that big stone at your feet and hit the cannibal in front of you in the head. He looks like the chief. So he did. He hit the chief with a swift blow and looked down at the chief's limp body. The rest of the cannibals stared silently at the explorer. As he stared them in the eye, he had another thought: **Okay. NOW I'm doomed.**

The writings of Ezekiel came at a time, when, due to their rebellion and unfaithfulness that last of the Hebrew Nation had been taken off into exile. --What they had taken for granted was taken away from them.



They felt doomed and hopeless, like a valley of dried and scattered bones

Before we get into the text this morning, briefly here are the circumstances that led up to Ezekiel's vision:

1. About **900 BC** – after the reign of Solomon, Israel had become a divided nation: the northern kingdom retained the name Israel while the southern kingdom was called Judah.
2. The northern kingdom quickly left behind their devotion to God and in **722BC** God sent the Assyrians to remove them from the land – these are now what we refer to as the **"Lost Tribes of Israel"**
3. The southern kingdom managed to maintain a relationship with God for a while longer but eventually became as wicked and idolatrous as the northern kingdom.
4. So God sent the Babylonians to defeat the southern kingdom and take them all into exile.
 - a. In a desperate attempt to escape the army besieging Jerusalem, Zedekiah led his army through a break in the wall at night and fled onto the plain where the Babylonian army pursued, overtook them, and slaughtered most of them including The king's sons
 - b. In **586 BC** The city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed; the walls torn down, the Temple burnt down – all of the Temple's gold and articles of worship were taken to Babylon, as well as most of the residents -- taken into captivity with no hope of returning.

5. What a truly discouraging time: Judah and Jerusalem were no more. Everything the people had placed their hope in had been destroyed. As one Psalm laments, *by the waters of Babylon, they sat down and wept. (137:1)*
6. They were dead as a nation and dead as a people
7. They needed **REVIVAL**: Webster defines revival as, *"the act or state of being restored or returned to consciousness or life; Becoming or making active or flourishing again; to bring back into use; to renew"*

Today, most of our churches need the same thing: they need **revival: a restoration to life!**

But revival doesn't come to a church without the individual members of that church First experiencing revival in their own lives.

One old-time preacher was asked, "How can we have a revival?" He replied, ***"Take a piece of chalk, draw a circle on the floor. Then step inside the circle and pray, 'Lord, send a revival to everyone inside this circle.'"***

Today's text in Ezekiel explains how God brings revival to His people: **When the Spirit of Truth comes again from the Father and enters anew into the lives of God's people – that's when we will have revival.**

From Ezekiel, let's see how revival might come in our lives.

I. REALIZE OUR SITUATION



Ezek. 37:1-3 – "The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, *Mortal, can these bones live?*" "I answered, **"O Lord God, you know."**"

A lawyer got somewhat distracted on his drive home and rear-ended the car in front of him at a traffic light. Thinking to head things off at the pass, he got out of his car, strutted up to the driver of the other vehicle and says, "Boy, are you In trouble! I'm a lawyer." The driver of the other car looks out at the lawyer and replies, "No, you're in trouble. I'm the judge"

1. We need to realize that without a vibrant and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, we're in trouble.

- a. Israel's situation is depicted by God as being a pile of bones. Notice that God had Ezekiel walk back and forth among these bones to verify there was no hope of life in them
- b. The bones are described with three terms:
 - a. Ezekiel describes them as being "very many" and "very dry" – picked clean by vultures and other predators; dehydrated and desiccated by the sun and the wind
 - b. Scattered – no longer connected; thrown about
 - c. Numerous – seemingly impossible to sort out and put together again

Apparently a large army had been defeated here. Perhaps this is the same valley where King Zedekiah's sons and army were put to death? It could very well be that Ezekiel was taken to the place where Judah had fought its last battle and lost --It's quite possible that Ezekiel was looking at the bones of his own countrymen

Wherever this valley was located, whether real or just a vision, the symbolism of the bones is clear: The people of God are dead – as dead as all those dry, white bones

In fact, this is the way that the Jews now in exile identified themselves --They said to one another in Ezek. 37:11 – "*Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are cut off.*"

When I was in high school, there was a rock ballad that I really liked; written by Kerry Livgren and performed by him and his band – Kansas. It had a haunting melody and expressed what life was like without Jesus Christ.

I close my eyes, only for moment, and the moment's gone
 All my dreams, pass before my eyes, a curiosity
 Dust in the wind, all they are is dust in the wind.
 Same old song, just a drop of water in an endless sea
 All we do, crumbles to the ground, though we refuse to see.
 Dust in the wind, All we are is dust in the wind

Sometimes, experiencing "dry bones" – realizing that "all we are is dust in the wind" is the start of something new: -- A time to realize we have no other place to go but to God

II. WE NEED TO REALIZE OUR SITUATION AND THEN RETURN TO THE BEGINNING

I believe that many of us, who call ourselves Christian, are now living in the valley of dry bones.

1. It's a dry place – there's no joy here

2. It's a dead place – there's no fruit here
3. It's a lifeless place – no Christian can thrive here.

Like a flood, spiritual death is a slow but eventually consuming process. How do we become spiritually dead:

1. Sin gets in the way --We're having way to much fun or we're in too deep to realize what's happening in our lives
2. Life gets in the way -- There's so much to do in our world today --Unfortunately, little of it would please the Lord. Like wheat growing in a weedy ditch, we bear very little fruit.
3. Boredom sets in -- There was once a time when we enjoyed reading the Bible – couldn't get enough. Now it's a struggle to read a chapter or two and get anything out of it.

There was once a time when prayer was an important time in our life – we looked forward to communicating with God --Now we just never get around to praying – we know we need to but there is so much else to do

There was once a time when being with the people of God in worship and fellowship was a priority, We freed up our schedule to attend and participate. -- But now there are all kinds of activities that fill our schedule; activities that seem more important than the assembly of God's people

We know we're supposed to be living holy lives. We know we're supposed to be telling others about Jesus Christ. We know that God has called and equipped us for service to His glory. But there is so many more captivating things, so many demanding things, that demand our time.

The Apostle Peter would say that we have become: *nearsighted and blind having forgotten who we had become in Jesus* (2 Peter 1:9)

The answer is to this dry dead existence, as the Spirit of Jesus told the Churches in the book of Revelation (2:4), *"remember who you are, to return to your first love, to repent and do again the things you did at first"*

As Ezekiel surveys this gruesome scene, God asks him a surprising question: "what do you think: can these bones live ?" The implied answer is "No."

"No, God. These bones cannot live." They're white and dry and dead. These bones are old and chipped and scattered.

That's the answer we expect but it's not the answer Ezekiel gives
Ezekiel replies, **"O LORD God, you know"**

Ezekiel has seen many strange and wonderful things and he can't dismiss the possibility of God doing something with these bones

Ezekiel knows that the power of God transcends the power of the grave. *"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up."* (1 Sam. 2:6).

<p><i>Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.</i></p>
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Then [God] said to [Ezekiel], *"Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on 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."* So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. (Ezek. 37:4-8)

Did, you notice? While God would perform the miracle, still he waited, first telling Ezekiel that he must prophecy, preach, to these dry bones. Revival is always a cooperative effort. God can bring revival but first we need to be involved in asking for such.

Ezekiel obeys and the results are amazing

1. The scattered bones being to clank and clink and rattle
2. They move toward each other and are joined together forming human skeletons.
3. Miraculously, muscles and flesh are fitted to each skeleton but they're still dead
4. When the bones started coming back together, all of a sudden there was again hope amidst a hopeless situation. But now the bodies laying there were still lifeless. Obviously, something else was still needed.

Ezekiel says, *"There was no breath in them."*

III. REALIZE, RETURN & RELY ON THE SPIRIT

(Ezek. 37:9-14) – Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’

Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, . . . then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

There’s a play on words here in this section of text

1. The Hebrew word **ruah** can mean breath, wind, or spirit -- as in a human breath, a wind over the desert, or the Holy Spirit

In a wonderful children’s story, “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,” C.S. Lewis introduces us to **Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy** who find their way into a wondrous land through the back of a wardrobe in their uncle’s sprawling manor house. Narnia should be a beautiful land, full of life, but its locked in the midst of a perpetual winter (*always winter but never Christmas*)

This is because a wicked queen has usurped the throne of Narnia and now holds the land frozen under her curse.

Next, we’re introduced to **ASLAN** the lion (In this story he is the person of Jesus – God’s son, the rightful heir to the throne) Lucy, the youngest child, asks one of the creatures: “Is this lion safe?” and they respond, **“Safe? Oh my, no! But he’s good.”**

AS the story progresses, Aslan must lay down his life to save Narnia. But afterwards, rises back from the dead more glorious and majestic than ever. Wherever Aslan goes, he reverses the effects of the curse on Narnia. You don’t need to see him to know he’s near --because trees begin to leaf out and the crocuses begin to bloom, the flowers breaking the surface of the snow; life returns to the land

At the end of this story, the brave beasts of Narnia are engaged in what they think is their final desperate war with the witch; she’s not yet aware that Aslan is once again alive. While everyone is on the battlefield, Aslan enters the courtyard of Narnia’s castle, which is strewn with stone statues

The statues are those who refused to follow the witch and have been turned to stone under her spell. Aslan approaches the statues and breathes on each one of them; as the breath touches the stone, the stone ripples back into a living creature.

What a beautiful picture of what God does when we allow His Spirit to control our lives
The very breath of God instills us with renewed life!

This scene in Ezekiel bears a striking similarity to the story of the creation of humans in Genesis

1. First, we read about how the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground. There was a body laying there, but it was lifeless.
2. Then the LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life --It's only then that man becomes a living being

Now, in the valley of dry bones, Ezekiel again witnesses God's creative power at work. Ezekiel writes, *I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and they stood on their feet* (37:10).

I am come that you may have life and have it in abundance – Jesus.

This is what Jesus came into our life to do as well. He said, that *the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; but I am come that you may have life and have it in abundance* (John 10:10)

What do you think people. Pentecost is that day when we remember the Holy Spirit first coming to reside in the life of all believers. It is our reminder that God is always able – and waiting -- to start something new in our lives: Do you want new life for yourself for this church?

Then we need to realize our situation
Return to our beginnings
And rely on the Spirit to bring new life.

We need to draw a circle on the ground,
Step into that circle,
And begin praying fervently –
Lord send a revival to everyone in this circle.

Christian musician **Tim Timmons** tells about a unique encounter on California toll road

If you've ever gone through a toll booth, you know that your relationship to the person in the booth is not the most intimate you'll ever have. **It's one of life's frequent non-encounters.** You hand over some money; you might get change; you drive off.

I've driven through every one of the seventeen toll booths on the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge on thousands of occasions and never had an exchange worth remembering with anybody.

Late one morning in 1984, headed for lunch in San Francisco, I drove toward one of the booths. I heard loud music. It sounded like a party or a concert. I looked around. No other cars with their windows open. No sound trucks. I looked at the tollbooth.

Inside it, the man was dancing. "What are you doing?" I asked. "I'm having a party," he said. "What about the rest of these people?" I looked over at other booths; nothing moving there. "They're not invited."

I had a dozen other questions for him, but somebody in a big hurry started punching his horn behind me, and I drove off. But I made a note to myself: find this guy again.

Months later I did find him again, still with the loud music, still having a party. Again I asked, "What are you doing?" He said, "I remember you from the last time. I'm still dancing. I'm having the same party."

I said, "Look. What about the rest of the people?"

He said, "Stop. -- What do those look like to you?"

He pointed down the row of toll booths.

"They look like ... toll booths," I said

"Nooooooo imagination!"

"Okay I give up. What do they look like to you?"

He said, "Vertical coffins."

"What do you mean?"

He said, "I can prove it. At 8:30 every morning, live people get in. Then they die for eight hours. At 4:30, like Lazarus from the dead, they re-emerge and go home. For eight hours, their brains are on hold, dead on the job. Going through the motions."

I was amazed. This guy had developed a philosophy about his job. I couldn't help asking the next question: "**Why is it different for you?** You're having a good time."

He looked at me. "I knew you were going to ask that," he paused. "**I'm going to be a dancer some day.**" He pointed to the administration building. "My bosses are in there, and they're paying for my training."

Sixteen people on the job, and the seventeenth – in precisely the same environment – figures out a way to live. That man was having a party where you and I wouldn't last three days.

He and I had lunch later, and he said, "I don't understand why anybody would think my job is boring. I have a corner office, glass on all sides. I can see the Golden

Gate, San Francisco, the Berkeley hills. Half of the Western world comes here on vacation. And I just stroll in every day and practice dancing.”

You have a choice: you can choose a coffin or you can dance to the music of the King

In Dt. 30:19, God said to His people (as He again says to us) – “*This day ... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live!*”

Today, can be one more day, just like every other in your life.
Or it can be the start of something new.

This Pentecost Sunday, let’s begin to fervently pray together, asking God to send a fresh breath of His Spirit to us to our church.