

"NEW LIFE FOR DEAD BONES"
EZEKIEL 37:1-14
THE DAY OF PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MAY 19, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: EZEKIEL 37:1-14

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

THANKS TO IMPROVEMENTS IN MEDICAL SCIENCE OVER THE YEARS,
PEOPLE ALL OVER OUR COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD ARE LEARNING
NEW WAYS TO RESUSCITATE INDIVIDUALS. THEY ARE BEING TAUGHT
NOT ONLY HOW TO ADMINISTER CPR, THAT IS, CARDIO-PULMONARY
RESUCITIATION, TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE STOPPED BREATHING, BUT ALSO
HOW TO ADMINISTER AED'S, THAT IS, AUTOMATIC EXTERNAL
DEFIBRILLATORS, TO PEOPLE WHOSE HEARTS HAVE STOPPED BEATING.
THROUGH THE USE OF THESE MEDICAL TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES, THE
CHANCES OF SOMEONE SURVIVING A HEART ATTACK HAVE IMPROVED BY
MORE THAN FIFTY PERCENT. THUS, IN A LIMITED SENSE, WE MIGHT
SAY THAT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN THESE TECHNIQUES AND
THE USE OF THESE DEVICES HAVE LEARNED HOW TO BRING PEOPLE BACK
FROM THE DEAD.

STRICKLY SPEAKING, HOWEVER, BRINGING SOMEONE BACK FROM
THE DEAD IS TERMED *RESURRECTION*, NOT RESUCITATION, AND THE
MOST IMPORTANT RESURRECTION OF *ALL* OCCURRED THAT FIRST EASTER
WHEN GOD RASIED HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, JESUS CHRIST, FROM THE

DEAD, "THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP" (1 COR 15:20). OF COURSE, THERE WERE OTHER RESURRECTIONS BEFORE JESUS (1 KINGS 17:22; 2 KINGS 13:21), AS WELL AS THOSE WHICH JESUS HIMSELF PERFORMED DURING HIS MINISTRY ON EARTH (JN 11:44; LK 7:15; MT 9:25), AND THERE WILL BE MORE IN THE FUTURE. IN FACT, WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD ON THE LAST DAY, ALL WHO HAVE DIED WILL BE RESURRECTED. THEY WILL RAISED FROM THEIR RESTING PLACES, WHEREVER THEY MAY BE, AND ALL BELIEVERS IN CHRIST WILL GO TO ETERNAL LIFE AND ALL UNBELIEVERS TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT (MT 25:46).

NOW, OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING FOR TODAY FROM EZEKIEL 37 REFERS TO A *DIFFERENT* KIND OF RESURRECTION, A *SPIRITUAL* RESURRECTION. MANY PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS SORT OF RESURRECTION. IT'S THE RESURRECTION GOD BRINGS ABOUT WHEN HE CALLS SOMEONE TO NEW LIFE IN HIS KINGDOM THROUGH THE GOSPEL. SOME OF YOU MAY THINK, "ISN'T THAT GOING A LITTLE TOO FAR, PASTOR, TO DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD CALLS US TO FAITH THROUGH THE GOSPEL A RESURRECTION?" NO, BECAUSE THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT IS! IN FACT, WITHOUT THE *SPIRITUAL* RESURRECTION TAKING PLACE FIRST THROUGH THE GOSPEL, THE PROMISE OF THE *BODILY* RESURRECTION TO ETERNAL LIFE CAN NEVER TAKE PLACE.

YOU SEE, TO SPEAK ABOUT OUR BEING BROUGHT TO FAITH THROUGH THE GOSPEL AS BEING BROUGHT FROM DEATH TO LIFE IS BIBLICAL AND ACCURATELY REFLECTS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON COMES TO FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST. AS JESUS SAYS, "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHOEVER HEARS MY WORD AND BELIEVES HIM WHO SENT ME HAS ETERNAL LIFE AND WILL NOT BE CONDEMNED; HE HAS CROSSED OVER FROM DEATH TO LIFE" (JN 5:24). THE HOLY SPIRIT USES CLEAR AND DIRECT LANGUAGE IN THE SCRIPTURES TO SAY THAT, WITHOUT GOD'S GRACE, WE ARE *SPIRITUALLY DEAD*. ST. PAUL WRITES TO THE CHRISTIANS IN EPHESUS: "AS FOR YOU, YOU WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRESPASSES AND SINS, IN WHICH YOU USED TO LIVE WHEN YOU FOLLOWED THE WAYS OF THIS WORLD AND OF THE RULER OF THE AIR, THE SPIRIT WHO IS NOW AT WORK IN THOSE WHO ARE DISOBEDIENT" (2:1-2). HE ALSO TELLS THE CHRISTIANS IN ROME THAT WE WERE BORN "DEAD" BECAUSE THEY WERE BORN UNDER THE POWER OF SIN:

THEREFORE, JUST AS SIN ENTERED THE WORLD THROUGH ONE MAN, AND DEATH THROUGH SIN, AND IN THIS WAY DEATH CAME TO ALL MEN, BECAUSE ALL SINNED. . . . NEVERTHELESS, DEATH REIGNED FROM THE TIME OF ADAM TO THE TIME OF MOSES, EVEN OVER THOSE WHO DID NOT SIN BY BREAKING A COMMAND, AS DID ADAM, WHO WAS A PATTERN OF THE ONE TO COME. (5:12, 14)

THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE—NEW AND OLD TESTAMENTS—PEOPLE WITHOUT GOD'S GRACE IN CHRIST ARE DESCRIBED AS *DEAD*. THIS IS CERTAINLY THE CASE IN OUR OLD TESTAMENT READING TODAY WHERE WE HEAR ABOUT THE CONDITION OF GOD'S PEOPLE AT THE TIME OF EZEKIEL. THEIR HISTORY HAD BEEN ONE OF CONTINUOUS REBELLION

AGAINST THE LORD. THEY HAD REJECTED GOD AND HIS WORD BROUGHT TO THEM THROUGH THE PROPHETS. WHEN HE REBUKED THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR SINS, SOME WOULD REPENT AND CHANGE FOR A LITTLE WHILE, BUT THIS WOULDN'T LAST TOO LONG. SOON THEY, TOO, WOULD RETURN TO THEIR PREVIOUS SINS OF IDOLATRY AND DISOBEDIENCE.

FINALLY, GOD HAD HAD ENOUGH, AND HE LET THEM FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THEIR ENEMIES, THE BABYLONIANS. THEIR ARMY CAME OUT OF THE NORTH AND Poured OVER THE HOLY LAND, OVERPOWERING GOD'S PEOPLE AND CARRYING THEM OFF INTO EXILE. THIS ONCE PROUD PEOPLE, UPON WHOM GOD LAVISHED HIS SPECIAL ATTENTION AND CARE, WERE REDUCED TO A HUDDLED MASS OF HOMELESS AND HELPLESS PRISONERS. THEIR BEAUTIFUL HOMELAND AND CAPITAL CITY, JERUSALEM, COMPLETE WITH SPLENDID PALACE AND MAGNIFICENT TEMPLE, WERE REDUCED TO RUINS, LEFT TO WILD ANIMALS AND TO THE CARE OF THE POOR OF THE LAND. EZEKIEL SAW THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AS THEY WERE IN BABYLONIA—HOPELESS, LIKE DEAD AND DRY BONES. AFTER BEING TRANSPORTED BY THE SPIRIT TO THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES, A BATTLEFIELD WHERE THE ISRAELITES HAD EXPERIENCED DEFEAT AND DESTRUCTION, THE LORD ASKED HIM, "SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE?" (V 3a)

NOW, WE MIGHT SAY (OR THINK), "OF COURSE NOT! THAT'S A SILLY QUESTION!" BUT THE PROPHET EZEKIEL KNEW BETTER. HE SIMPLY REPLIED, "O SOVEREIGN LORD, YOU ALONE KNOW" (V 3b).

WHAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US IS NOT AT ALL IMPOSSIBLE TO GOD. INDEED, "NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD" (LK 1:37). IT'S EVEN POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BRING THE LONG-DEAD TO LIFE AGAIN.

AND HOW DOES THAT NEW LIFE COME ABOUT? BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKING THROUGH GOD'S WORD. THE LORD SAID TO EZEKIEL, "PROPHECY TO THESE BONES AND SAY TO THEM, 'DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD! THIS IS WHAT THE SOVEREIGN LORD SAYS TO THESE BONES: I WILL MAKE BREATH,' " THAT IS, SPIRIT, " 'ENTER YOU, AND YOU WILL COME TO LIFE' " (VV 4-5). SO EZEKIEL PROPHESED AS HE HAD BEEN COMMANDED, AND GOD FULFILLED HIS PROMISE. THE DRY BONES CAME TOGETHER, TENDONS, FLESH, AND SKIN COVERED THEM, AND WHEN EZEKIEL OBEYED GOD'S COMMAND TO BREATHE INTO THEM THE BREATH OR SPIRIT OF LIFE, "THEY CAME TO LIFE AND STOOD ON THEIR FEET—A VAST ARMY" (V 10).

LIFE SEEMS SO FULL OF TRAGEDIES THAT APPEAR TO DEFY SOLUTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, DISASTERS, SUCH AS THE TORNADOS, DESTRUCTIVE WINDS, AND TORRENTIAL RAINS OF THE PAST WEEK, STRIKE WITHOUT WARNING, TAKING FROM PEOPLE THEIR LOVED ONES AND LEAVING THEM HOMELESS AND WITHOUT A LIVELIHOOD, WITH BROKEN HEALTH, DISAPPOINTED, AND CRUSHED. "CAN THESE BONES LIVE?" AGAIN, AN ACQUAINTANCE BEGINS TO DRINK MORE THAN CAN BE HANDLED AND SOON BECOMES SO ENSLAVED TO ALCOHOL THAT ADDICTION UNDERMINES THEIR BUSINESS, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY.

"CAN THESE BONES LIVE?" AND AGAIN, A YOUNG PERSON GOES OFF TO COLLEGE, GIVES IN TO PEER PRESSURE, AND BEGINS TO USE DRUGS, RESULTING IN A CAR ACCIDENT, ARREST, AND PERSONAL RUIN. "CAN THESE BONES LIVE?" THESE AND SIMILAR TRAGEDIES ARE SOMETIMES OVERCOME AND LIVES ARE EVENTUALLY PUT BACK TOGETHER BY GOD'S GRACE AND WITH HIS HELP AND POWER.

YET EVEN MORE AMAZING THAN LIVES RESTORED AFTER TRAGEDIES IS HOW GOD RAISIES SINNERS TO NEW LIFE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE GOSPEL, INCLUDING THE "VISIBLE" GOSPEL OF THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM. WE ALL KNOW THE BITTERNESS OF PERSONAL FAILURE AND LIVE WITH THE RESULTS OF SIN IN OUR DAILY LIVES. WE ALSO KNOW THAT WHAT PAUL SAYS ABOUT ALL PEOPLE IS TRUE OF *EACH* OF US *INDIVIDUALLY*: "NO ONE WILL BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS IN [GOD'S] SIGHT BY OBSERVING THE LAW; RATHER, THROUGH THE LAW WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF SIN. . . . THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE, FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (ROM 3:20, 23). "CAN THESE BONES LIVE?"

THE ANSWER IS, "YES!" YES, THESE BONES, DRY AND BRITTLE AS THEY ARE, CAN *LIVE*. YES, THEY *SHALL* LIVE BECAUSE GOD HIMSELF WILL PUT THEM BACK TOGETHER AND COVER THEM WITH TENDONS, FLESH, AND SKIN, AND BREATHE INTO THEM HIS LIFE ONCE AGAIN. INCREDIBLE? NOT FOR OUR GOD, A GOD OF MERCY AND GRACE AND LOVE; NOT FOR THE GOD WHO REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE FROM THE

GUILT AND SHAME AND POWER OF SIN WHEN HE SENT HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, TO GIVE HIS LIFE AND SHED HIS BLOOD FOR US ON THE CROSS AND RISE AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY; NOT FOR OUR GOD, WHO GIVES HIS SPIRIT AND NEW LIFE TO HIS CHILDREN IN HOLY BAPTISM, FORGIVING THEM ALL THEIR SINS, AND WHO ASSURES THEM OF THAT FORGIVENESS EVERY TIME THEY RECEIVE HIS TRUE BODY AND BLOOD, GIVEN AND SHED FOR THEM, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE HOLY SUPPER. GOD ASSURES US THAT BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT THESE BONES CAN—AND *WILL*—LIVE. NO MATTER WHAT TROUBLES YOU FIND YOURSELF IN, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR SITUATION IN LIFE MAY BE, NO MATTER HOW HELPLESS OR HOPELESS OR UNLOVABLE OR UNFORGIVEABLE YOU SEE YOURSELF, THESE BONES CAN *LIVE!* AND THEY *WILL* LIVE AGAIN!

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, TODAY IS PENTECOST, THE DAY WHEN GOD ESTABLISHED HIS CHURCH AND SENT IT OUT TO TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN BY THE GOSPEL. THE WONDER OF IT ALL BECOMES EVEN MORE CLEAR WHEN WE REMEMBER THAT HE DID THIS THROUGH WEAK, DOUBTING, MISUNDERSTANDING MEN AND WOMEN, WHOSE HOPES HAD BEEN DASHED BY THE LORD'S CRUCIFIXION, WHOSE FAITH FLICKERED EVEN AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, AND WHOSE BOLDNESS BURST INTO FLAME BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST. WE ARE ABLE TO EMPATHIZE WITH THOSE FIRST DISCIPLES, FOR WE, TOO, ARE OFTEN WEAK, DOUBTING, AND MISUNDERSTANDING. BUT THANKS BE TO GOD!

EVEN DRY AND BRITTLE BONES CAN LIVE AGAIN! GOD GRANT EACH OF
US REPENTANCE AND FAITH BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT EVERY
DAY AS WE REMEMBER OUR OWN BAPTISM, OUR LIVES ARE RENEWED BY
THE GOSPEL, AND OUR DRY BONES BEGIN TO LIVE AGAIN. AMEN.