

**May 31, 2009**  
**The Festival of Pentecost**

*"Dry Bones Can Live"*

**EZEKIEL 37:1-14**

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**T**he hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-- a vast army. <sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'<sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

He spoke at a Memorial Day service in Lompoc this past week. His name is Dr. Arthur Hicks, a man who served in WW2 as an Air Force pilot, part of the now famous Tuskegee airman. He recalled his days of serving our country, but also the pain of not being able to fraternize with other officers because of the color of his skin. Even though the Tuskegee airman served valiantly in WW2 they were still treated by some as second class citizens.

Now look at God's Old Testament people who were living as captives in the land of Babylon. Their beloved city of Jerusalem lay in ruins. Solomon's magnificent temple has been burnt to the ground. Psalm 137 records the cry of people who have lost their hope. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'" Listen to them cry out through the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me!" Listen to them cry out in the words just read to you, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."

How do you serve a people who have lost their hope? That was the challenge facing

Ezekiel, the priest and prophet, who was among the thousands of people hauled off to serve as slaves in the land of Babylon. It was the Lord who placed his hand on Ezekiel, spoke to him, and gave him visions that helped him lift the people from despair to fill them with new hope. In a vision, Ezekiel saw a valley filled with dry bones. He saw the Spirit of the Lord raise these dry bones to life again. On this Pentecost Sunday we want to have the assurance that dry bones can live, even if these dry bones are you and I. Jesus has promised us his Holy Spirit who will comfort us and bring us to a peace that we can find only in Jesus.

### **Oh how dry the bones are!**

It was the hand of the Lord that led Ezekiel to a place where he saw this valley filled with dry bones. "The hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones." The hand of the Lord has also come into your life and mine. He allows us to look at people who don't have Jesus see them as lifeless bones. The book of Ephesians says they are "dead in trespasses and sin" and "without God and without hope."

The bones lying in the desert floor were many, and they were very dry. "He led me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many on the floor of valley, bones that were very dry." He sees all these dry bones. Then the Lord asks him the question, "Can these bones live?" You see that big dinosaur skeleton in the museum, that T-Rex. It was once a large living creature that roamed this earth. If you ask a group of children touring the museum the question, "Can this skeleton come to life again?" they would all respond with a loud "No." Now look at a human skeleton. Ask the question, "Can these bones come to life again and you would have to say, "Yes." Some day the Lord will raise us back to life again even if there is nothing left of us except for dry bones. Ezekiel gives a good answer to the question, "Can these bones live?" He says, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." He knows the Lord has the power to raise people back to life again.

These bones lying on the desert floor represent or picture what had happened to the nation of Israel. The Lord told Ezekiel, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'" These people lost their hope. They once worshipped the Lord in the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. Listen to the joy and hope that was once there in their lives expressed in the words of Psalm 118, "The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar." It was at the horns of the altar that sacrifices were made picturing the blood of Jesus that would be shed for us. They had lost their hope. They can't even sing the words of Psalm 51 with David who said, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation."

It has been said that a person can live 30 days without food, 3 days without water, and 3 minutes without air to breathe, but only 3 second without hope. When you start losing even a lit bit of hope life can suddenly start looking really dismal and gloomy. Have you ever lost some of your hope in the power of God's Word to change your life? You no longer read the Bible and find its peace and comfort as you once did. Have you ever lost hope in the promise from Romans 8:28 that says all things work for the good of those who love Jesus who have been called according to his purpose? Have you ever lost some of your

hope that God's Word will reach someone you love who has rejected the Word of God in their lives? Have you ever had a hard time saying joyfully, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." You can relate to the people of Israel who said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are cut off."

There is a reason the Apostle Paul said he wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. The resurrection fills our life with hope as we look back at the nail prints in the hand of Jesus and hear him say to us, "Peace be to you" The resurrection fills our lives we hope as we look forward to being with him the place he has prepared for us. We may have bad days when we feel like crying out, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are cut off." The Holy Spirit never has a bad day. He is our Comforter. He is there 24/7 to bring us out of the valley of dry bones and rejoice in the peace we have in Jesus.

### **Oh how miraculously they come to life**

"Can these bones live?" the Lord asks Ezekiel. The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy or preach to these dry bones. See him walking around the desert among the dry bones. Hear him speaking the words, "Dry bones hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life." As he proclaims these words of the Lord, he hears a noise. It is a rattling sound. It is the sound of bones shaking and knocking together. Do you hear the bones rattling. See them come together. It almost makes you want to sing that old song about dem bones: "Toe bone connected to the foot bone.. Foot bone connected to the leg bone... Leg bone connected to the knee bone... Even more miraculous- "I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them."

Bodies are lying ever where on the desert, human bodies with bones and flesh and skin and hair, but there is no life in these bodies.

Ezekiel walks among the lifeless bodies and he calls for life as the Lord had commanded him. "Come from the found winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may live." He proclaimed this message of the Lord and these dead bodies come to life, stand up and become a vast army of people. Do you see what the Lord is trying to show us this morning? This is not some scene from a movie, but a vision given to Ezekiel to illustrate how the Word of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit can breathe new life into people who are like dead bones scattered in the desert. You can be born into this world, and walk around with a human body, and go to work, and go to school, and walk the beach, but without the work of the Holy Spirit to create faith in Jesus, you are nothing but a spiritual dead human being, without life and without hope.

The Lord even promised his people: "I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land." The Lord who wants to take his people who are like dead corpses in a grave, bring them back to life, and take them home again. They complained, "Our hope is lost' and the Lord proclaimed, "Your hope is not lost. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live."

Today we heard Jesus speak to us in the gospel lesson: "The Holy Spirit will teach you all

things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you ...Do not let your hearts be troubled." We were born into this world so dead and so dry. We thought we could make our own peace with God by paying off our debt of sin. Then the Holy Spirit convicted us and convinced us that there is no peace with God except through the peace Jesus made for us through his perfect sacrifice. The Holy Spirit comforts us with this peace every day.

Think of all the things the Holy Spirit has done for you. Look at your Bible. Maybe you are someone who loves to underline verses of the Bible. There was a time in your past life, that you underlined a verse, and then underlined it again, and then put a line down the side of the page, because that verse meant so much to you. It gave you such peace and such hope and such joy. Are those days just in the past? Are we to complain to the Lord, "Our hope is lost?" No, dear Christian, Jesus has promised you the Holy Spirit who will help you remember all things and bring you a peace this world cannot give.

When we drive up and down the coast these days, we notice how dry everything is. The hills are already waiting for the winter rains to bring new life and bring new growth. Look around you and see people driving down the freeway, pushing the cart in the grocery store, and talking on the phone or should I say texting on the phone. So many of them are still dry bones the way you and I were once dry bones. They need to hear the word of the Lord as Ezekiel said, "Dry bones hear the word of the Lord!" They need to have the Spirit put in them through the Word so they can come to life again. "Can these dry bones live?" The Lord gives us the answer, "Yes, these bones can live!" We may be in the last days and things are getting more difficult for all of us, but the Lord is still in control, still bringing people to life and still blessing them with his Holy Spirit. "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live." The Lord says he will do it and the Lord will keep his promise for the future just as he has kept all of his promises in the past. Amen.