

At a loss for words. Sometimes, even as Christians, we are at a loss for words. The events that have taken place in our lives, or the losses that someone we love has suffered as they explain them to us heavy burden or grief one on top of another like waves crashing down, or the anger, anxiousness and despair we hear in the voice of a loved one who is godly but struggling can rattle us so that we are at a loss for words, at least temporarily.

Ezekiel, and the other exiles ripped away from Jerusalem to Babylon, had suffered the defeat of their people, waves of deportations and the destruction of the temple. It may have seemed like the valley of the shadow of death was their permanent place and they were lost forever, rejected, and forgotten by God. But God was not at a loss for words and gave Ezekiel a message to deliver that gave life and certainty to his people then and now, and the Word worth sharing:

“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.”

- 1) God gives the Word that brings from death to life.**
- 2) God gives the Word worth sharing.**

“The hand of the LORD was on 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. 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. He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘Sovereign LORD, you alone know.’ Then he said to me, ‘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 enter you, and you will 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. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” 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. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. 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, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army. Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 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. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I 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. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

What a sight – a valley full of dry bones, unmistakably dead – “very dry.” It takes some time for bones to be that dry, to be picked over, no flesh left, and detached from one another – no life. God asks his prophet if they will ever live again, “*Son of man, can these bones live?*” Ezekiel didn’t presume to give an answer, but God could. Ezekiel knew if anyone knew and if anyone could make them live it was the one speaking to him, the *Sovereign LORD*. By his word the heavens and earth were made. By his breath the dust man Adam was brought to life.

Bones that were totally dead were going to experience the power of the *Sovereign LORD*. “*Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’*” When God speaks, when God gives his Word, that Word has the power to change hearts, lives, and eternities. Ezekiel delivered the message to a valley full of bones, and before his eyes, the dead bones came together, tendons and flesh came over the bodies. “*Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’*” There is no where you could go in this life where God is not. He knows where you are, who you are, and he has a plan for you. His plan for these bones was that they live again. “*they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.*” God, by his Word, brought the dead to life.

What does this mean for us? We can take away that when God gives a promise through his Word, through his messengers who deliver it, it stands and will not fail. It will not falter. No matter how hopeless you see your life or the lives of others, God does not. He is there. And he promises to be with you. Ezekiel didn’t

answer God's question – with “it looks pretty hopeless.” He answered it by looking to the LORD who knows, who cares, and who has the power to bring from death to life.

Too often we let moods, the struggles, the anxieties of this life, the intrusive thoughts and temptations of the devil and our sinful flesh hold sway and take root in our hearts. We can't kick the feelings that scream at us and then their logic seems to make more and more sense. It seems like our hope is lost. It seems like our sins are too great. It seems like no one is answering, and we are boxed in and hopeless. Do you realize what our sinful nature is tricking us into doing? It's getting us to say, “You know what LORD, I don't think these bones can live again. I think it's over for them. I don't have the power. You must not have the power.” When we fail to trust God's promises, we betray that deep down we either think our God isn't big enough, strong enough, wise enough. Or we think his love isn't big enough to extend to us and impact our lives and futures. But we would be wrong, dead wrong, like the exiles were. “*Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'*” But God didn't let that stand. He promised they'd return to Jerusalem and what they called dead and cut off, *slain*, he brought to life. He brought them back to Jerusalem 70 years from when the temple was destroyed to rebuild and worship him there again, just as he had promised.

So trust him when he says, “**I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.**” God didn't stop there. He fulfills all his promises! When all hope for a real Messiah seemed lost and the faithful seemed few, “*God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*” (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus Christ, the only Messiah, came to redeem you, to suffer and die for the sins of all people on that cross. He rose from the grave and promises that if we die, our bodies will rise from the grave to be glorified and with him for all eternity. Our sins are fully forgiven in him. Heaven is assured. Doubt dissolves when we look at Jesus. Certainty and confidence grow. What Ezekiel speaks is true, “*Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.*” The Holy Spirit works through this Word to create and sustain faith – bringing us from spiritual death to life.

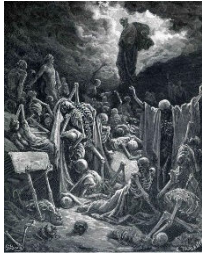
I will put my Spirit in you and you will live. God gives the Word that brings from spiritual death to life. God gives the Word worth sharing.

Ezekiel was not at a loss for words when facing the misery his people were in and the hopelessness that weighed them down. God gave him the words – “*the hand of the LORD was on me.*” “*Prophecy.*” He simply spoke God's Word. And not only did dry bones turn into an vast army living and breathing, God's people had hope and certainty.

Peter got up at Pentecost, the man who once hid away in fear now stood before the crowds in Jerusalem 50 some days after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Peter was not afraid. Why? Because he knew Jesus brings from death to life. Jesus had forgiven him, lifted the burden of guilt and shame from him and paid for it on the cross. What peace! What relief! God sent his Spirit on Pentecost and gave Peter a message to proclaim. He shared Law and Gospel. He shared what Jesus had done. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. 3000 were added to the disciples' number that day. The church grew from there.

Twenty Years ago, I sat across from a person my age who was interviewing me about what our church taught for a night school class. I simply shared the good news I had known since youth that we aren't saved by what we do, and there is nothing we could ever do to earn God's love, but God has freely given it to us through Jesus by his death on the cross for us. John 3:16. We are forgiven fully and freely by his gift, all ours by faith, not by works. Ephesians 2:8,9. They broke down. They had grown up in a church that never really taught that. For the first time they had the certainty they had been craving but never knew. And this person didn't let go of it, didn't let go of Him. I was surprised, but I shouldn't have been. God's Word has power. They kept coming to church, not for an assignment, but to hear this good Word and grow.

You and I are here today because someone shared the good news of Jesus with you and me. You have the message **that brings from death to life**. Read it. Grow in it. Learn it. Live it with joy. Share it. Go surprised yet unsurprised by the peace, joy, and certainty God gives through his Word. Trust him when he says: “**I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.**” What life and certainty he gives! Thank you, Holy Spirit! Amen.



The Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones – Gustave Dore – 1866