

Scripture:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

“Be born in us again.”

For the most part Ezekiel --- like Jeremiah ---- is all about doom and gloom.

The Jews are under foreign control --- captives.

Jeremiah preaches to the Jews still at home --- and Ezekiel --- a contemporary to Jeremiah ----- preaches and prophesizes to the Jews away from home ----- in exile in Babylon after the defeat of Jehoiakim.

And up to chapter 33 --- God’s judgement ----- doom and gloom --- is much of the theme in Ezekiel.

But thankfully around chapter 33 there is a shift and something else starts to happen ----- finally we see the much anticipated restoration --- that ultimately leads to salvation.

Finally we begin to see new hearts --- new spirit ----- new breath --- new life.

Just before our passage today we have these verses in Ezekiel 36 --- verses 24-26 ----- a foreshadowing of our passage today.

Ezekiel 36: 24-26 -----

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Indeed these verses ---- are what many scholars consider the very heart of Ezekiel.

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water

on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

And in a sense this is precisely what happens in the next part of the book --- beginning with our passage today.

God comes to Ezekiel ----- God comes to His people in a season of discouragement ----- a down time in their lives.

Many of the people have been displaced --- kicked out of their homes --- they're in exile ----- remember the Exodus is the people wandering around in the desert with Moses ----- and then there is the Exile ----- they're 2 different things --- Exodus --- Moses Egypt The Promised Land ----- and then about 2,000 years later exile --- Babylon.

The people have been exiled --- or at least most of them have ---- kicked out their homeland by the Babylonians ----- and they are now captives in Babylon.

And so it is a season of profound discouragement.

And from this place of misery and gloom --- from this season of discouragement ----- God births --- renewal --- new life.

Indeed they are born again --- and find resurrection life --- Spirit life --- God breathed new life.

New life akin to first life in Eden ---- and new life akin to resurrection life when Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into His disciples after the resurrection.

Things are going badly for the people of God --- by society's standards ---- by all appearances --- by the yardstick of the culture God's people have failed and are washed up --- their power and influence is gone --- they've finally been defeated.

Sounds kind of familiar --- at least in Europe and North America anyway.

For many people in North America and Europe especially ----- the church is passé --- old news ---- washed up --- an institution of the past.

The hey day of the 30's ---- 40's and 50's are over --- the church had its day in the sun ----- on to something new ---- things like atheism and the new humanism.

By the conclusions of our culture --- in the minds of many ---- the church has been marginalized and pushed off to the side ---- with little influence --- clout---- or respectability --- a thing of the past for many.

Some of us will even remember when the media ---- the culture ---- was interested in what the church had to say on an ongoing day to day basis. They wanted to know hoe the church interpreted what was happening in the world --- what it had to say.

Not so much anymore.

A season of discouragement.

And amidst a season of discouragement in Ezekiel ---- along comes God and makes of it a season of renewal and encouragement --- a season of new life.

“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.” ----- the beginning of our passage today.

God gets a hold Ezekiel and takes him to a desolate place ----- a valley full of dry bones --- dead soldiers ---- a lifeless void.

And then the next verse ----

“He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.””

What humility --- and what trust ----- and what faith ----- Ezekiel replies simply --- “Only you know.” ---- “Only you know God.”

When will the church be popular again?

When will churches once again be filled to the brim?

When will we need to build more churches?
 When will young people come back again?

Will church budgets ever explode --- and grow exponentially --- anytime soon

Will people fill the pews ---- and will dollar bills be leaping out of their pockets into the collection plates?

When will we take the great commission seriously once again?

When will we share our faith unapologetically and aggressively ---- with zeal as the Bible says?

“Sovereign Lord ---- you alone know.”

“Can these bones live?” --- God asked Ezekiel.

Can our church grow and flourish and be abundant and generous and mission oriented and ministry focused --- and more and more and more faithful ---- and more and more and more generous?

“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.’”

God can show up ----- anywhere --- anytime ---- and for any reason He wants.

And on this day in Ezekiel’s witness He chose these heaps of dry bones in a dark valley.

God chose a discouraged people ---- a people deep into a season of discouragement.

And He made them new again.

And Ezekiel didn't have to do some outrageous ----- fantastic --- or miraculous thing ----- like build an ark as Noah did --- or travel to a far away city like Jonah did --- or fight a massive battled tested warrior like David did.

Ezekiel simply had to say what God asked him to say over a valley of darkness.

“So I prophesied as I was commanded.”

That's what Ezekiel did ----- he said what God told him to say.

“So I prophesied as I was commanded.”

And then came the power of God's word.

And then came new life ---- the seemingly impossible.

“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.”

Something started to happen ----- there was movement --- change --- new growth --- new life.

They were soon on their way.

But ----- as the end of verse 8 says --- “but there was no breath in them.”

It happened in stages right --- not all at once --- instead ----- like creation --- it happened in stages --- patience.

Deep identity in Christ takes time.

The movement of the Holy Spirit often happens in stages --- patience ---- “but there was no breath in them.”

There was no breath in them ----- but it was coming.

The breath was coming.

Beginning at verse 9.

“Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, 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.”

And remember it’s noisy --- verse 7 says there was noise --- a “rattling sound.”

That sounds a bit unsettling doesn’t it?

Rattling is rarely comforting.

Often renewal ----- God initiated and sustained renewal is messy and loud --- when the bones start moving it’s loud and there is a rattling sound.

When the spirit moves --- when there is renewal there’s often a little noise and clanging and rattling ---- things start coming together.

The gospel ----- the Good News of life in Christ for today includes that Ezekiel spoke to dry bones --- not just God but Ezekiel.

“Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them”

God doesn’t just speak the words to the dry bones --- He has Ezekiel speak the words.

God may not just speak to our culture and wake people up from the dry cold valley of secular darkness ----- instead He may choose us to speak for Him -- - just as He chose Ezekiel.

The one thing needed in Ezekiel 37 is ----- “go and preach to them.”

Sometimes the one thing needed is humility --- or forgiveness --- or compassion --- or a changed heart.

For the Good Samaritan the one thing needed was compassion.

But here in Ezekiel 37 the one thing needed is --- “go and speak to them.”

Maybe our culture is kind of like the dry bones ---- a cut off dead people.

And maybe just maybe ---- the one thing needed is for us to speak the truth of the Gospel --- and speak the words God wants us to speak.

“I would but I just don’t know what to say.”

If you find yourself saying --- something like this --- something like -----
----- “I would but I just don’t know what to say.” --- stop.

Stop saying things like ---- “I just don’t know what to say.” --- and pray --- start engaging in conversation with God --- be open to God’s leading.

Ezekiel didn’t know what to do or say either --- but that didn’t stop him.

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” --- is what he said when God asked him what was going to do --- and so God gave him the words.

Something happened in that valley on that day.

Something amazing and marvelous and life giving happened that day in the valley.

But ----- it still wasn’t the fullness of what God intended --- patience.

They are brought up and out of despair --- breathed into ---- spoken to ---- revived --- and renewed --- up on their feet and ready to go --- “a vast army” ---- as verse 10 says.

But then they don’t really do anything do they --- not yet anyway.

That comes later --- we don’t really find out all that God has in store for them just yet?

What we do know is that God is born in them again.

What we do is that they go from a season of discouragement doom and gloom --- into new life.

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet ---- a vast army.”

More often than not God calls us into a valley with struggles than He does a mountaintop.

God comes to this lost valley --- this defeated community and renews them.

And He doesn't leave them until they are alive and functioning again.

They had to go down pretty low and pretty deep --- and pretty cold and dark.

Dried up --- wasted away they were --- before God came to them.

They weren't just limping along --- struggling a little bit --- down a bit ---- anxious a bit --- having a bad day --- or a bad week or even a bad year or bad decade.

They were done.

Dried right up --- no life --- no spirit ---- no energy ---- no nothin'.

And then God came.

Be born in us again. ---- Be born in us again God.

God can show up --- anywhere ---- anytime --- for any reason He wants.

God can ambush us --- surprise us ----- breathe new life into us --- renew and resurrect us --- at any time and in anyway He so chooses.

These people were dead.

They were down as low as low could get.

Kicked out of their homes --- kicked out of their culture --- dead on the battlefield of life ----- dried out to the very bone.

And along God came --- and through the words of His servant ---- “Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them”

Through the words of Ezekiel ----- and the actions of God ----- they are renewed ----- and He is born in them again.

God could have simply acted and bypassed Ezekiel but He didn't.

The one thing need in the Good Samaritan was compassion --- the one thing needed here in the valley of dry bones was --- “go and preach to them --- “go and speak to them.”

God needs human beings --- God chooses human beings ----God became a human being.

It isn't ever just God --- way over there ---- and us way over here ----- it's God in and through us --- together.

Lord be born in us again.

Be born in us again that the dried out bones of our culture ----- that the sleepy valley of indifference and sometimes even antagonism to the power of Christ might be awoken once again and breathed into once again.

The one thing needed in the valley of dry bones --- was go and preach --- go and speak to them.

We are living in a valley of dry bones --- a culture that for the most part is dead and cut off from Christ.

It's a season of discouragement --- at least by all cultural measures and conclusions ---- it's a season of discouragement in the life of the church.

But maybe just maybe this season of discouragement is actually a season of encouragement --- and like the valley of dried out bones ---- God has great plans for renewal and refreshment ----- new life.

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

There is a vast army of people out there hungry for Christ --- even if they aren't willing ---- or able to articulate it.

Profound is the confusion in the world.

The world is hungry for something else --- something other than what is seen ----- para religious spiritual watered down secular humanistic garbage is everywhere ---- people are eating up anything that has but a whiff of truth --- even when it's all garbled up in layers of foolishness and nonsense.

But we have the one who stands over the death of the soul and spirit --- and body ----- and breathes new --- abundant and everlasting life ----- Jesus Christ.

Be born in us again Lord.

Take us to the places that need your Word ---- and life --- and presence.

Take us ---- just as you took Ezekiel to the valley where there are struggles.

What is going to happen ---- where you are taking us Lord --- we don't know ----- but thankfully ---

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

“Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones...”

“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet --- a vast army.”

Gad can show up anywhere --- anytime ----- for any reason He wants.

And very often it's in valleys with struggles.

And God can ambush us ---- surprise us ----- renew --- and revitalize us -----
- in any way He so chooses.

And so ----- Be born in us again Lord.

“You alone know Lord.” ----- often we don’t have a clue what God is about
to do.

Ezekiel surely didn’t -----

“But he I prophesied --- he did as God asked of him ----- and breath
entered them ----- and they came to life and stood up on their feet --- a vast
army.”

If our prayer is ---- “Be born in us again Lord.” --- then He most certainly
will be.

Yes it may take years ---- decades perhaps even ----- Moses didn’t get to
enter into the Promised Land remember ----- he stood and looked out over it
but enter it he did not.

If our prayer is be born in us again Lord ---- then He most certainly will be --
- in His time.

Dry lifeless bones --- are no match for the God of Abraham ---- Isaac and of
Jacob.

Be born in us again Lord

--- be born in us again.

Amen.