

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

“Can These Bones Live?”

“*Son of man, can these bones live?*” *Ezekiel 37:3*

Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones is the stuff nightmares are made of. The prophet sees himself in the middle of a valley full of human bones. He is led by the Spirit of Yahweh to walk through them, stepping over skulls and rib cages, though with some difficulty, since there are so many. He inevitably crushes some, and behold, they are very dry, going down to the dust. In other words, they are very *dead*. These bones haven’t lived in a *long* time.

So, when God says to him, “Son of man, can these bones live?” he’s uncertain, saying, “O Lord GOD, *You* know.” He knows that God is all-powerful, having spoken creation into existence: for “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6). But this? This was different. This was *death*, and death is very hard to undo—so hard that Ezekiel can’t imagine how even *God* could take these very many, very dry, bones and make them live.

But He does. He commands His prophet to prophesy, to speak His Word over the bones, and make them a promise (Ez. 37:5, 6):

I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I...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.

And as Ezekiel prophesies, as He speaks this good news to the dead, it *happens*: God’s strong Word takes effect, fulfilling His promise and restoring the slain back to life. It’s like watching one of those time-lapse videos in reverse: The bones come together, bone to bone, they are clothed with flesh and covered with skin, the breath of life comes into them, and where there *was* a valley full of dry bones now stands an exceedingly great army.

God then goes on to explain the vision’s meaning. He says to Ezekiel, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.” Israel, you may recall, is the name God gave to the patriarch Jacob after being bested by him in a wrestling match (Gen. 32). It eventually came to refer to Israel’s *descendants*, the people whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt and with whom He made a covenant at Mount Sinai, saying, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples” (Ex. 19:5-6).

But that covenant was soon broken. In spite of the fact that not one word had failed of all the good things that the Lord their God had promised concerning them (Josh. 23:14), the house of Israel broke faith, doing what was evil in His sight. They feared other gods, walked in the customs of the nations, served their idols, and abandoned the commandments of the Lord.

And for that, God sent them into exile. He raised up the armies of Babylon and Assyria to carry off His chosen people into captivity. Many died. The nation itself was destroyed, leaving nothing behind but dry bones and broken down walls (cf. Neh. 1:3). What would become of God's people now? "Our bones are dried up," they said, "and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off" (Ez. 37:11). They were dead, *very* dead. Israel had failed, and they couldn't imagine how even *God* could take these dry bones and make them live.

But He did. He made them a promise, saying (Ez. 37:12-13a),

I will open your graves and raise you from your grave, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD.

And as He spoke, so it happened. God raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, to defeat Israel's captors and return them home. There they stood, an exceedingly great army, a people restored back to life. They rebuilt the walls and the temple in Jerusalem. They rejoiced, for the bones of God's people lived. And they knew that He was the LORD.

There was, however, another resurrection yet to take place. God may have restored Israel as a *nation*, but unless He dealt with the problem of *sin* His human creatures would still end up a heap of bones on the earth. "For the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:11). In sin did our mothers conceive us (Ps. 51:5), going all the way back to our first mother, Eve. So, in spite of the fact that God is good, that He cares for us, and that not one word of all that He has promised concerning us has failed, we have broken faith, doing what is evil in His sight. We have feared other gods, followed the culture, abandoned the commandments of the Lord in what we think, say, and do. And for that, we justly deserve to be punished, to go down to the dust (Gen. 3:19). We were *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), *very* dead, our bones dried up and our hope lost.

But then came Jesus, the Son of Man, walking through our valley of dry bones. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). And yet, a bruised reed He did not break, and a faintly burning wick He did not quench (Isa. 42:3). The only skull He crushed was the devil's. And when the Father asked Him, "Son of Man, can these bones live," He answered unequivocally, "Yes." He proved it, going down to the dust Himself, once for all, and taking His life up again (Heb. 7:27; Jn. 10:17). He achieved it, fearing

the one true God, walking in His ways, keeping the commandments of the Lord without fault. He delivers it, raising us to newness of life in our Baptism (Eph. 5:25), uniting us with His own body and blood in the Supper (1 Cor. 10:16), declaring us righteous in His Word, giving us faith to confess Him as Lord and God (John 20:28). By His dying He has destroyed death, and by His rising again He has restored to us everlasting life.

Today, then, we rejoice, for the bones of God's people will live. In truth, death is very hard to undo, but with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Christ says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn. 5:25). With a word, He will prophesy over *these* bones, and open *our* graves and raise *us* from our graves. He will put us together, body and soul, and clothe our mortal bodies with immortality (1 Cor. 15:53). We will *live*, just as He lives and reigns to all eternity. And there we will stand, a great multitude, before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. 7:9), whom we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

These bones can live. They *will* live. For God has spoken, and He will do it, declares the LORD (Ez. 37:14).

*In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Soli Deo gloria*