

God Gives Life to Dry Bones

Ezek. 37:1-14

Introduction:

1. Recently we have been studying some representative parables in the O.T. and most recently some parables in the book of Ezekiel.
2. No prophecy in the book of Ezekiel is as well known as 37:1-14.
3. Part of the reason for that is the song written by African-American songwriter James Weldon Johnson entitled Dem Bones. It was first recorded in 1928 by the Myers Jubilee Singers.
4. Since that time it has been played and recorded by many including Rosemary Clooney, The Kingsmen, Mills Brothers, and Tennessee Ernie Ford. It has been used in children's songs and the rock band Alice In Chains even recorded a version of it.
5. It is easy for those who are hopeless and distraught to see themselves in the valley of dry bones, but the passage is really about the hope that God brings.
6. We will examine the parable in light of its historical context, identify the message communicated and discuss its relevance in our own historical setting.

Discussion:

I. The parable and its explanation (37:1-10, 11-14).

A. The nation of Israel was in captivity.

1. The northern kingdom had been captured and taken to Assyria.
2. The southern kingdom had been captured and taken to Babylon.

B. No king sat on the throne. Jerusalem had been destroyed; the temple ransacked.

C. They described themselves, "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off."

D. The parable calls attention to the consequence of their sin.

1. We often quote Paul, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) as an academic and logical conclusion.
2. But the Israelites had come face to face with the reality.
3. Moses had predicted before they had entered the land of Canaan that calamity would result if they were not loyal to the Lord. "The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will

flee

seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away" (Deut. 28:25-26).

4. Jeremiah had said the same (Jer. 34:20).

5. To have one's body abandoned to the buzzards was the ultimate in dishonor.

6. This valley was filled with dry bones representative of the human corpses that had

not had proper treatment. There were very many and they were very dry. They had been dead for a long time, stripped clean by the buzzards, then the insects, left, bleaching in the sun. It was a picture of death in all its horror, intensity, and finality.

7. This is where sin had left the nation of Israel.
- D. But then God asks, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel's response, "Only you know Lord."
- E. God commands Ezekiel to speak to the bones.
 1. God says that He will bring them back to life.
 2. As Ezekiel spoke the bones began to come together. Sinews, flesh, skin covered them, but still there was no breath in them.
 3. Not until God put His breath in them did they come to life.
 - a. Much like what happened in Gen. 2. Man was formed "from the dust of the ground and then God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (7).
 - b. In a two-fold process God brings men to life.
 - c. It is founded upon the powerfulness of His word and God putting His Spirit (breath) in them (37:14). Note 36:25-27.
 4. Not only would they have life as a result of the power of God God said, "I will place you on your own land" (37:14).
 - a. Some interpret this to be the land of Canaan.
 - b. Israel was indeed brought back from Babylonian captivity. The books of Ezra/Nehemiah, Haggai describe the return. The N.T. opens with Israel dwelling in the land of Canaan.
 - c. But they are expecting more—"the restoring of the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).
 - d. Some today are looking for Israel to be granted again the land of Canaan. Some have viewed the modern nation of Israel as preliminary to a future ingathering of the nation of Israel to Jerusalem and the promised land.
 - e. But the forefathers were looking to a land that surpasses the physical land of Israel with its capital in earthly Jerusalem.
 - 1) Heb. 4:8 alludes to it.
 - 2) Heb. 11:13ff looks beyond the earth to a country and a city that is described as "a heavenly one."
 - 3) Heb. 12:22 refers to "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."
 - 4) Rev. 21 describes a "new heaven and a new earth," and "a holy city, new Jerusalem."
 - 5) I believe that this is the land that God promised to His resurrected people in Ezek. 37.

II. What is the message that God is communicating to these people who view themselves as a valley of dry bones?

- A. They are saying, "Our hope has perished." God is saying, "I am your hope."
- B. They see themselves as dead. "Our bones are dried up." God is saying, "I will give you life."
- C. They see themselves as "completely cut off." I do not know if they are seeing

themselves as cut off, as one might cut off their hand OR if they are seeing themselves as “cut off” from God (Cf. Psa. 88:5). Their sin has created a separation from God, the source of life. God’s message to those cut off? “I will bring you to life.” A similar image is used in Rom. 11 of “branches being cut (or broken) off, but grafted in again” (20-24). The message: God cuts off, but grafts in again.

- D. God’s Spirit is removed from them. Cf. Ezek. 9-10. God’s message, “I will put My Spirit within you.”
- E. They are removed from the land. God’s message, “I will place you on your own land.”
- F. The result would be -- “They would know that, the Lord, had spoken and done it.”

III. How is this relevant to us in our historical setting?

- A. God is the source of life for us too.
- B. He is the source of life for all those who place their trust (faith) in Him.
 - 1. Rom. 11 makes it clear that Gentiles can also be grafted in to the source of life.
 - 2. Paul speaks of Gentiles being dead in trespasses and sins, just like the Jews (Eph. 2:1-3). BUT God raised us up with Christ (Eph. 2:5-6). Though we were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, that we have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13). Thus both groups, Jews and Gentiles, are brought near to God. Through Christ we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).
 - 3. “They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom. 9:6). It is through faith in Christ that men become the Israel of God.
 - 4. It is through faith in Christ that we enter into the promised land (Rev. 21-22).
- C. We know that the Lord is the one who has predicted it and done it. Our hope. Our life. Our future. All rests on Him and His word!

Conclusion:

- 1. Do you see yourself as dead? Hopeless? Dried up? Completely cut off?
- 2. The Lord God gives life to the dead, and hope to the hopeless.
- 3. Will you place your trust in Him?