

THEM DRY BONES - part 1

What's the worst news you've ever gotten? Something you dread, but now must face facts? That's what happened to the prophet Ezekiel in Babylon. As we begin a new summer series, we'll trace how God turned that bad news into good news, as He prepared His people for the coming of Christ. For Ezekiel, the date was indelible: "*in the 12th year of exile, in the 10th month, on the 5th day, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, the city has been struck down.*" The worst news he could imagine.

1- BAD NEWS - It was time to deal with a new reality. Ezekiel was part of about ten thousand exiles in Babylon. Back home in Jerusalem, the false prophets kept saying "*peace, peace*" when there was no peace. God fulfilled the words of the true prophets, and the city was destroyed. Because of the great sins of the people. Ezekiel had even prophesied against them. God spoke through him about the failure of the leaders, and how the people had willfully disobeyed God's Word time and again. Finally they got what they wanted, as the consequences of their sin came upon them, through the conquest by Babylon.

Perhaps you are near such a point, denying the inevitable results of your sin. Things you have done and said and thought that go against God's Word. Or things you have left undone and unsaid, in your willful disobedience of Almighty God. He is perfectly pure, and sees such things not as mistakes or bad choices, but as abominations against His holy name and character. Unacceptable for people called by His name.

Perhaps you are despairing today about life, thinking all is lost, no hope. Pastor-author Colin Smith says, "There are times when the broken circumstances of life make us feel that we are beyond the range of the promises of God, and that while they may be for other people, at other times or in other places, they are somehow not for us. If I have felt this, then the vision God gave to Ezekiel is just for you."

2- DRY BONES - It's recorded in Ezekiel 37, as God gives Ezekiel a powerful object lesson of the reality of their situation. "*The hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me out, in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And He led me around among them, and behold there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold they were very dry. And He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O LORD God, You know.*"

Perhaps your life situation seems just like a field of dry bones. Can you imagine what Ezekiel saw? A vast valley full of nothing but dry bones. Like the aftermath of a great battle. Devoid of life. Perhaps your own spiritual life has felt this way. Perhaps you're concerned for people you care about, or are witnessing to, hoping to see signs of life. Perhaps you despair for our nation. You need real news, not fake news.

Like Jerusalem's leaders, a lot of false promises have been made, for many years. Evil has seemed to triumph for a long time. Will it be the death of a nation? But God has been at work, behind the scenes. And God's people need to be repenting, and praying, and asking God to withhold judgment and have mercy on His people. That's what Ezekiel faced. His beloved nation, the chosen people of God, had come to utter ruin. Was there any hope? Could these dry bones live?

3- GOD'S NEWS - God is asking you, can these dry bones live? You could reply, yes, God can do anything. Name it and claim it and He has to do it. You could reply, no, our world is too far gone. The church has missed its chance. You could reply, who knows? Some even say God doesn't know, which is the heresy of "open theism" today, denying the sovereignty, omniscience, and divine nature of God.

Can these bones live? In the humility of faith, we know that only God knows! Ezekiel was a true prophet of God, and let God speak, rather than putting words in His mouth like the false prophets do, even today. God's people must listen to God alone, and this begins with reading His written-down word. He promises that He will never go against what He has already spoken and written down and preserved in the Bible. Then God spoke. "*He said to me, prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord*" (like that song)! Note that to prophesy is to "speak forth" the word of God.

4- YOUR HOPE - A prophet speaks forth the breath of God's mouth. This was Ezekiel's job, but he had grown despondent about it because the people did not listen. In Ezekiel 33, though his words had come true, the people regarded his prophesying as mere entertainment. In Ezekiel 34, the leaders had earned disgrace. In Ezekiel 36, the people had defiled the temple and the land by their wicked ways and idols, and profaning of the name of God. And now, judgment (Babylon) had come. They were all dead.

Thousands physically dead, beyond salvation. And thousands spiritually dead, who must be brought to the point of admitting it, confessing their need, no longer denying the reality, in repentance and faith. For them, and you, the only hope is God Himself, as we'll see next time. Meantime, what will be the result, if God's truth is spoken into your life? Ephesians 3:20, "*now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.*" Amen! ☐