



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Pentecost Sunday**  
**May 23, 2021**

## Prophecy!

### Ezekiel 37:1–14

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup> And I will lay sinews upon you, and 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.”*

*<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.*

*<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”*

In today's Old Testament the Prophet Ezekiel is given a vision in which he finds himself standing in the middle of a valley full of dry bones. The bones were many – very *many* – and very *dry*. And the Spirit of the Lord – the Holy Spirit – asks the prophet a question to which the prophet can only answer: “O Lord God, You alone know.” “O son of man, can these bones live?” Now, what's the human answer? If you were to stand on an ancient battlefield, a field littered with the bones of soldiers who died there long ago, would you expect that these bones could live? Of course not. The life that once activated them



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has long since departed. Humanly speaking, such bones cannot live.

But the Spirit of God directs Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and say to them, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.’”

So he prophesies as he’s commanded, and while he’s preaching, he hears a noise, a rattling sound. The bones were coming together! Can you imagine? And then he sees the tendons and flesh forming, and the skin beginning to cover them. *But they were still dead* – still just bodies, without life. They were like the first man – Adam – whom God had “formed from the dust of the ground.” But with Adam, remember, God “breathed into his nostrils the breadth of life, and man became a living creature.”

So God then commanded Ezekiel to say, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So he preaches and “breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

Now the Spirit of the Lord explains the meaning of the vision: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

You see, in Ezekiel’s day, the Children of Israel were a defeated people, languishing in exile in a foreign land. They considered that, as a people, they were dead, slain, worthless, hopeless, cut off. But God was telling them, “No, you’re not defeated, you’re not dead, you’re not worthless. Despite appearances, you have all the hope you could ever want, because you have me, the God of hope. You may feel dead right now, but I will raise you to life.”

And He calls them to life by His Word. Through His prophet, He commands them, “Rise up, O sons of men! Stand on your feet! Let your bones reassemble, let muscle and tissue return to your bodies. Let breath fill your lungs and blood course through your veins. Be my living children again. As I gave life to Adam by the breath of my mouth, so I give life to you. And you shall know, O Israel, that I am the Lord, your God.” God would restore them as a people, as a nation. Already, He was restoring their hope.

Eventually they were restored. Roughly 30 years after the death of Ezekiel the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians and King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Israelites to begin returning home. God’s promises are true, beloved, though His timing may be a bit different than ours.

So, what about you, O children of men? Are there times when you feel defeated, slain, worthless, and hopeless? You bet there are! But, if we have a God of hope, how does this happen? If God is our hope, how do we lose hope? We lose hope when we let go of God. And then God has to – somehow – get our attention. The Children of Israel had



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let go of God. So God got their attention by allowing them to be taken into captivity.

Many in our day have let go of God. Is God trying to get our attention by allowing persecution to come to His church? It may well be. It certainly appears that persecution is crouching at the door. There may tough days ahead, beloved. And don't think that we will be immune. Ezekiel wasn't. Jeremiah wasn't. They were carted off to Babylon along with everybody else. Times of persecution come like rain upon the just and the unjust alike. If the nation suffers for the sins of the many, suffering comes also to the faithful few.

But there will be restoration. At a time of God's choosing, in a *way* of His choosing, He will restore His people. You will be restored, beloved, resurrected. You may feel defeated today, slain, worthless, and hopeless. But God says, "No, you're not! You're not dead! You're not defeated! You're not worthless or hopeless. Despite appearances, you have all the hope you could ever want, because you have me, the God of hope. And I will raise you to life."

And raise us to life He will. In fact, He already has! For, we *were* dead – dead in our trespasses and sins! At one time we were defeated, slain, worthless, and hopeless. Our sinful nature had made us so. We had no future but hell to look forward to. But Christ, in His unfathomable mercy, restored us to life by sacrificing His own. But, He didn't stay dead, did He. No, God raised Him and made Him the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep – in other words, He was the first of many to rise again from the dead.

The Israelites in Ezekiel's day felt dead even though they were alive. They complained about a philosophical death, a political death, the death of their liberty as a nation. Some are worried about that in our day. But, despite our political and philosophical prospects, there awaits a very real grave for each and every one of us. Its yawning maw will not be satisfied until our mortal flesh is enshrouded within it. But it will not be able to hold us! One day our Risen and Ascended Savior will call to you, dear Christian, "Rise up, O child of God! Be restored to life! Receive your new body, your resurrected body, better than it ever was before. Rise, and stand on your feet! Receive the breath of life from the mouth of your Creator. Be recreated in my image. Rise and live!"

Oh, this is our destiny, fellow children of God – not death, but life. As Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). This is our song, beloved, this is our confession, our statement of faith. The grave is not our final destination. Hallelujah!

But there's one more thing to discuss before we leave this text. For what purpose were Ezekiel's dry bones raised? Did he say, "They lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great audience of spectators?" Did he say, "They lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great host of those who went on with their lives as if nothing had happened?" Did he say, "They lived and stood on their feet, and afterward simply walked away?" No! He said, "They lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army!" These slain were raised for a purpose. And so were you.



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What purpose? You are a Christian. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit you follow Jesus. What was Christ's purpose? To give His life for others. How do you do that? There are many ways in which a Christian can serve God by serving others. What is it that God has laid on your heart to do for Him and your neighbor? Our Confirmands stand today on the threshold of life. What is God calling you to do in your life as a Christian? Regardless of your individual calling, there's one thing – one task – that we all share in common: to prophesy to dead souls so that God's Spirit can make them live. Catechumens are taught the Christian Faith not merely to strengthen their own walk with Christ, but so that they may prophesy to their neighbors – their family and friends, schoolmates and coworkers, those with whom they come in contact every day. God has given you the breath of life, Christian – His very own Word of Law and Gospel – that you may be His voice.

So rise up, O child of God. Take your stand and prophesy, and may God use you to bring life to your world. In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.