

I. Introduction

Good morning! As we enter the Christmas season, I would like to take a break from our study in Luke and share a few messages about the meaning of Christmas. A moment ago we lit the first candle of the Advent Wreath, a candle that speaks of hope. Let's take a second look at one verse that was read. **Titus 2:13, "while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."**

As this verse teaches us, the Christian life is a life of waiting for the coming of our God and Savior, Jesus. When Jesus comes again, our hope will be fulfilled and the world will be made new. Revelation 21:3-4 looks forward to that time saying, **"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"**

This is a wonderful picture of the blessed hope that we have in the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus. And, we have confidence because our hope is based on solid evidence. One part of that evidence is the experience of love, joy and peace that we have as we walk with Jesus. Another part of the evidence is the historical record of the birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And, a third aspect of the evidence is the historical record of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. When we examine the Scriptures and the record of history, we find many amazing fulfillments of prophecy that prove that God's Word is true and trustworthy. Many of the fulfilled prophecies are about Jesus. Others are about the nations. But regardless of the subject of a prophecy, we can be sure that God will do what He has said. Today, I would like to take a look at an extraordinary prophetic word from Ezekiel. Let's read Ezekiel 37:1-10.

II. Scripture Ezekiel 37:1-10 (NIV)

[1] The hand of the Lord was upon 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. [2] 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. [3] He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." [4] Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! [5] This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. [6] 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.'" [7] So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. [8] I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. [9] Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" [10] So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.

III. Teaching

At the time when this prophecy was given, Ezekiel and the Jewish nation were captives in Babylon, exiled from their homes by the Babylonian king who had conquered them. It was a time of weeping and sadness and Ezekiel had already rebuked the Jews and the surrounding nations for their many sins. But after the rebukes were finished, Ezekiel began to share beautiful visions of a hope and a future for the people.

The people of Israel were desolate and without hope, like a valley full of dry bones. But the Spirit of the Lord showed Ezekiel the situation and asked (Ezekiel 37:3), **"Son of man, can these bones live?"** How would you respond if the Lord asked you such a question? In human terms, it is impossible. No human power can bring a field of dead



bones back to life. And yet, it is the Lord who is asking, and He has all power. The Lord God who created all things can certainly restore life to dry bones if He so chooses.

Ezekiel knew this. The situation before his eyes seemed hopeless. But, the answer to the Lord's question depended on the Lord's plan, not on human wisdom. How did Ezekiel answer the Lord? **Ezekiel 37:3, "He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.""** A good answer, because if it is the Lord's plan, then all things are possible.

Now, take a moment to consider the problems and trials in your own life. What struggles are you facing? Do your circumstances seem impossible? Do you sometimes feel as if there is no hope? If so, you are not alone, there are many others who feel that way. And, in fact, probably every human being feels that way at least a few times during their life. But if you have trusted in Jesus, then you have nothing to fear, because He loves you and He has all power, all might, and all wisdom.

In **Jeremiah 29:11**, the Lord says, **"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"** These words of promise were originally given to the Jews during the Babylonian exile, the same era as when Ezekiel prophesied. But I think they tell us how the Lord feels about all who call upon His name and trust in Him. Whatever struggles you are facing, whatever problems you have, you can be sure that the Lord loves you and that He has good plans of blessing for you. Trust in Him, and He will give you a hope and a future.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to speak to the valley of dry bones. And in **Ezekiel 37:7-8**, we read, **"So I prophesied as I was commanded. 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."** Already this is a great miracle, but something is still lacking, there is no breath.

Do you remember Genesis 2:7? **"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."** After Adam was formed, something was still lacking. But the Lord breathed into him the breath of life, which is the Spirit of God, and then he became a living being. Flesh and bones are necessary, but without the Spirit of God, there is true life. This was the case with Adam, and it was the case with the valley of dry bones. It was not enough that the bones had come together and that flesh had appeared; the breath of God, His Spirit, was needed.

Ezekiel 37:9-10, "Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, 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." With the breath of God came life, and power. For, as the English translation shows, the bones did not merely come to life to form a big crowd, they formed a vast army.

What is the difference between a crowd and an army? A crowd is just a crowd, but an army has organization, discipline, and power. And an army is obedient to its orders. If your nation was held captive in Babylon, you would want an army to come to help you. An army speaks of victory. And we need victory in our lives.



The greatest enemies that we face are sin and death. But in Christ we have victory. **1 Corinthians 15:54-57, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** In Christ, we have victory even over sin and death.

What can we learn and apply for our own lives from the prophecy of the dry bones being restored to life to be a great army? First of all, the prophecy is a picture of the resurrection at the end of the age when death is finally conquered forever. And second, the prophecy reminds us that no matter how hopeless or difficult a situation may seem, with the Lord there is always hope. The Lord creates life where there was none and restores life when it has been stolen away by death.

If you face a situation that seems hopeless, do not give up. Wait on the Lord, and when He comes, He will bring victory. There is victory in Jesus. And He will come, because He loves us without limit. During the Christmas, we remember how the people of Israel were waiting for a Savior 2,000 years ago. And then He came; but He did not come as they expected. The Jews thought the Savior would come with a mighty army. And, at the time of the Second Coming, at the end of the age, He will. But first He came as a little baby, born in Bethlehem. As Luke wrote, **(Luke 2:11), "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."**



The coming of Christ Jesus can be found in the past, and He will come again in the future, but Jesus is also always coming to us every day, to share our lives and burdens with us. He has promised that He will always be present with those who trust in Him. And He is trustworthy and His promise is sure. **Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."** In Christ, we have joy and peace and overflowing hope.

There is encouragement and power in Ezekiel's prophecy for us. When we read that the dry bones came together and that God gave them new life, we realize the great power and majesty of God and we have new hope and joy. But when we look closely at the passage and its context, we see that the prophecy also has a very fulfillment in history.

After the verses we read before, the passage continues in **Ezekiel 37:11-12**, with these words, **"Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.'"** Here we see that the dry bones are a symbol of the despair of the house of Israel and the new life given to the dry bones is a symbol of the restoration of the nation of Israel.

In context, the first meaning of the vision of the dry bones coming to life is a promise from the Lord to restore the nation of Israel. When did this happen? After the Babylonian exile, the Jews from Judah returned to the land. But that was not the whole house of Israel, it was only a portion. And the context in Ezekiel chapters 36-38 shows that the prophet is speaking of a greater return to the land than happened after the Babylonian exile. This return of the whole house of Israel to the land is not yet complete, but in our time it is happening. By the power and purpose of the Lord, in our time the Jewish people are returning from the nations to their ancient home in Israel.

In 1867, the famous author Mark Twain visited the land of Israel, and recorded these impressions. *"Palestine is desolate and unlovely... It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land... desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds - a silent mournful expanse... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action... We never saw a human being on the whole route... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country..."*

One hundred and fifty years ago, few people lived in Palestine, as Israel was called at that time. But then, the Jewish people began to return and develop the land. Swamps were drained. Trees were planted on the mountains. Fields were cultivated once again. This return of the Jews to Israel has been accompanied by many political and social problems and it is easy to make a list of the things that have gone badly. But the return of the Jewish people to the land is a visible reality. And the land is blooming once again, as it did centuries ago.



In our day, the prophecy of the dry bones is being fulfilled as the whole house of Israel returns to the land of Israel. In the mountains and valleys of Israel, where Mark Twain saw only desolation and weeds, there are now homes and cities, and farms and forests. Israel now



provides almost all of its own food and also exports flowers, fruits, and vegetables to Europe and around the world. Israel, the people and the land, are coming alive once again.

IV. Conclusion

Ezekiel's prophecy about the valley of dry bones coming to life is about hope. The fact that it has a visible fulfillment in history only makes our hope stronger as we see that God is faithful to keep all of His promises. God promised to restore the land and people of Israel, and He is fulfilling this promise in our time.

And God has promised to provide forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a home in heaven to all who place their faith in Jesus. **Colossians 1:27** says, **“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”**

In Christ Jesus, we have hope made sure through the long record of God's faithfulness in keeping all of His promises. The ways of God are sometimes mysterious, but they are also certain and full of love. As we enter the Christmas season this year, let's do so with hearts filled with faith and hope. Let's pray.

V. Closing Prayer