Can These Bones Live?

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Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of
the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. [2]He led
me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very
dry. [3]He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you
know.' [4]Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry
bones, hear the word of the LORD. [5]Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will
cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. [6]I will lay sinews on 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.' 7 So I prophesied as I had
been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling,
and the bones came together, bone to its bone. [8]I looked, and there were sinews
on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there
was no breath in them. [9]Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy,
mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds,
O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.'[10]I prophesied as he
commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on
their feet, a vast multitude. 11 Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the
whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we
are cut off completely." [12]Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the
Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves,
O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.[13]And **you shall know
that I am the LORD**, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves,
O my people. [14]I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you
on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,
says the LORD.'

1. The Day of Pentecost

There are important days in Christian calendar. The major days are Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Thanksgiving. Which time in the year do you think is the most important for the church? Everyone may have a different answer, but for me, Pentecost is the most important day because the church is born on the day of Pentecost. Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church. The term "Pentecost" means fifty in Greek. In the Old Testament, Pentecost was called Shavuot, the fiftieth day after Passover (Exodus 34:22).

Shavuot is a joyous time of giving thanks and presenting offerings for the new grain of the wheat harvest. The celebration is also tied to the giving of the Ten Commandments. Jews believe that the Torah was given to the Israelites through Moses on the Mount Sinai on the Day of Pentecost.

In the New Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit is described in Acts 2:1-3. "***When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. [2]And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3]Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them***." The author of Acts, Luke, tells us that the Holy Spirit came 50 days after the resurrection and ten days after the ascension of Jesus. Jews who lived in different nations had gathered in Jerusalem for this festival. When the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, they were able to speak in tongues and the visitors who were with the disciples understood their messages.

"Speaking in tongues" means speaking in a different language. It would be as if I began preaching in Korean and everyone in the room could understand what I am saying. Could something like this happen today? The Book of Acts says that this happened when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. Chapter two of Acts also says that when Peter preached his first sermon, three thousand people accepted Jesus as their Lord and savior and baptized. These amazing things happened when the Holy Spirit came to the people on the day of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit was the beginning of the church.

2. The Valley of Dry Bones

Today's scripture Ezekiel 37 is considered one of the most exciting stories in the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel lived in the 6th century BCE at the time of the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel says that he is in the middle of valley where bones and skulls are lying in disarray. We do not know whether he is in a dream or a trance. But Ezekiel knows that this happens through the hand and the spirit of the Lord.

Ezekiel shares with us what he says with the Lord. God says, "***Mortal, can these bones live?"*** He answers***, "O Lord GOD, you know."*** Then God says to him, ***"Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. [5]Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. [6]I will lay sinews on 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***."

Ezekiel repeats to the dry bones as the Lord has commanded him. As he prophesies, "***Suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together bone to its bone. And there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them***." Then the Lord says to him, "***Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath***." The Lord says, "***Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live***." As Ezekiel says as he heard from the Lord, "***The breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their foot, a vast multitude***."

When Ezekiel is asked by God about the possibility of the restoration of the dry bones, Ezekiel sees no possibility of a return to life. He simply acknowledges that only God knows the answer. God instructs Ezekiel to prophecy to the dry bones to come back to life. Ezekiel tells the dry bones that God will enter them with the breath of life. After Ezekiel delivers these words of hope, he watches the dry bones come back to life.

Most commentaries stress that this story is more metaphorical than literal. Ezekiel's vision symbolizes Israel whose hope has died and which has no future. Yet God says to the prophet Ezekiel that one day the Israelites in Babylon will return to the land of Israel. Verse 14 says that such a miracle is possible through the Spirit of the Lord and they will know that the Lord has done it.

What do the speaking in tongues in chapter 2 of Acts and the restoration of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 teach us? These two stories tell us that the Israelites in Babylon and Jesus' disciples after Jesus' ascension were hopeless. They wondered what God had been doing for them. But after these experiences, the people learned that God is the Lord. God never abandons His people and takes care of His people. The coming of the Holy Spirit assures us that God is always with God's people.

3. Our Dry Bones

What are the dry bones in our lives? What things give us a sense of hopelessness, fear, and doubt? Do our sickness, death of the loved ones, declining membership of the church and no vision for the future make us hopeless? In the midst of these situations where can we find hope?

For the past two years, I have enjoyed serving at our church and living in Sagamore Beach. However, there were times when I struggled with the uncertainty of our future, the unclear direction of our ministry, and my role as the pastor. Recently I felt as though God would have asked me, "***Can these bones live***?" My answer would be the same as Ezekiel's. "O Lord, you know."

A week ago, I felt the Holy Spirit began to show us a sign that he is leading us. If God were to ask me the same question this morning, "***Can these bones live***?" I would say more confidently, "definitely yes, Lord" because the Holy Spirit guides us the direction that we need to go. When the Holy Spirit guides us, we will see miracles.

4. The Power of the Holy Spirit

Last Sunday I said that the Holy Spirit is like the comforting mother. In today's scripture, and in the chapter 2 of Acts, we notice that the Holy Spirit has an amazing power to make the dead, alive and make something impossible, possible.

What do you and I expect the Holy Spirit to do for us? One of the main functions of the Holy Spirit is to empower the followers of Jesus Christ to witness.

Acts 1:8 says, "***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***."

The main job of the disciples of Jesus was witnessing. They were willing to take any risk to bear witness to Jesus Christ because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. The definition of witnessing in a dictionary is "to see, hear or know by personal presence and perception." If we do not have any experience with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we cannot be His witnesses. Even we have experiences if the Holy Spirit does not empower us we can't bear witness. There are so many people who wait for hope for their daily living. What do you think we have to share with them to give hope?

5. Fulton Street Revival

Have you heard about "Fulton Street Revival"? "In 1857 there were 30,000 men idle on the streets of New York. Drunkenness was rampant, and the nation was divided by slavery. On September 23, 1857 Jeremiah Lanphier began to serve a noon lunch in the Old Dutch Church on Fulton Street. A few people showed up. The following week 20 men attended. On the third week 40 came. One of them suggested that he'd be willing to come for food and prayer every day. Before long the building was overflowing. The luncheon had to move again and again. Offices began closing for prayer at noon. God moved so powerfully that the prayer meeting spread across the nation. It is estimated that nearly 1 million people were converted out of a national population of 35 million, including 10,000 weekly conversions in New York City for a season.

6. Conclusion

God would ask us this morning "Can these bones live?" These bones can be ourselves and our church. What would you say to the Lord? I believe that we need to be more creative to reach out people in our community. I would like to make our church more attractive to children, youth, and adults. If we provide what they love to participate, they would come to our church to do what they want to participate in such as choir, band, concert, drama, dance, yoga, sports games, retreat, festival, meals, coffee and tea, movie, fellowship, gifts shop, many interesting classes, yard sales, buzzers, festivals, community service projects, mission projects, and support groups. Then they will come to worship srvices and be part of the church.

7. Application

God had a plan for the restoration of Israel. But the restoration did not happen until Ezekiel prophesied as God had commanded. What does the Lord want you and me to do today? If we follow God's direction, we will see miracles happening in our midst because God will make it happen. Praise God who sent us the Holy Spirit and empowers us to be the builders of God's Kingdom. Amen.