



# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 26

Can These Dry Bones Live?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day evening, 17th November, 1985**

**Text:** *“Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord” (Ezekiel 37. 11-14).*

This is one of the most striking chapters in the whole of the Old Testament; also, it is one of the best known. Perhaps because it is so well known, it ceases to be so striking. But you know, if a person who had never read the Word of God were to read this or be told this for the first time, it would amaze him. O the gruesomeness of it! The hand of God carrying the prophet Ezekiel in the spirit in the middle of a valley which was full of bones! Really, that whole valley was just like one awful grave, these bones dead, dry, rotting, putrefying. It was a most horrifying sight, a most gruesome sight.

And then this question: “Can these bones live?” If ever there was an impossible question asked in all Scripture, that was it. “Can these bones live?” These bones, so dry, so dead. You see, the prophet was a godly man, and he had learnt one or two lessons. One was his own lack of wisdom, that he did not know all that answers. The other was that it is unwise to say that things cannot take place when the Lord is concerned. So he gave a very gracious answer. He said, “O Lord God, Thou knowest.”

Of course, all this was in a vision. But in this vision Ezekiel had to speak to the bones and he had to speak to the four winds, representing the Spirit of God. “O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord.” That is the prophet's word to the dry bones. “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” That is the prophet's

word to the Spirit of God. And then he sees this miracle taking place, the bones coming together, the sinews growing upon them, the flesh appearing, the skin, and then at length the breath breathed into them and they rise up like some mighty army. It is one of the most striking passages in all the Old Testament, one of the best-known, and because it is so well-known, we have lost the sense of amazement that there should be in reading it.

Well, what was the immediate point, the immediate significance, to the prophet? Of course, the vital lesson is this. It is a lesson we have had to learn, we have had burnt in our hearts, that with God nothing shall be impossible. Now do you believe it, that the hardest things with God are easy? “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” “With God nothing shall be impossible.”

Of course, the important thing with the prophet and with Israel at this time was the restoration of God’s ancient people back to Jerusalem. They were in exile. The years were passing away. It was just an utter impossibility that they ever could be restored. The whole case was just as hopeless as these dry bones living. The hope of God’s ancient people was not only dead, but it was also buried.

“Then He said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.” That is, they signified the whole house of Israel. Now what is the house of Israel saying? “Behold, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.” The case hopeless, the case impossible. “We are cut off for our parts” – like a limb severed from a body, like a branch severed from a tree.

“Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, O My people.” Now there is no hope lost if the Lord comes and says, “O My people.” There is no being cut off for your parts if the Lord comes and says, “O My people.” There is everything in that word, “My.” A people eternally chosen, a people loved with an everlasting love, a people, redeemed by precious blood, a people effectually called, a people led forth and brought in. “O My people, I will open your graves.” Your hope, your expectation not only dead but buried. “I will open your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your grave, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put My Spirit in

you” – that is the vital thing signified by the winds breathing on the dry bones – “and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land.”

The redemption of ancient Israel from Babylon is sweetly typical of the redemption of God’s people in all ages, and He still says, “I shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land.” That is the new birth. That is effectual calling, and that is the beginning of all real religion, all vital godliness. “I shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land.” After the last war we used to read of displaced persons. These are placed persons. God Himself places them. He placed His ancient people back once again in the promised land, in Canaan, and He places His dear people in Christ. He places them in the covenant of grace. He places them in the promises. At length, He places them in heaven. “I shall place you.” “Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.”

There are a few applications of it. The first one is this: *no case is too hard for the Lord*. Those of you tonight with hard cases, remember that God has said, “And the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it” – hard causes in your soul, hard causes in your circumstances, hard causes in your family, your children, hard causes in your business, hard causes known only to yourself and God. Beloved friends, those of you with your hard causes that are too hard for you, may I take you tonight to the valley of dry bones and may you see that however hard your cause is, it is not too hard for your God. He who can make dry bones live, He who can open graves, can do the most impossible thing.

Some of you may be saying. “It is too late.” It is never too late with God. Some of you may be saying, “It is not only dead, it is buried, my hope, my expectation.” “O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord.” That is, I am the Lord almighty. I am the Lord ever-faithful. I am the Lord merciful and gracious. “Ye shall know that I am the Lord.” So there is an encouragement to pray here. There is an encouragement to bring your hard case to the Lord, whatever it is.

“Thou art coming to a King;  
Large petitions with thee bring;

For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.”

Now that is the first application of it, the Lord’s ability to deal with these hard cases, to do these impossible things. You may have a sheer impossibility tonight.

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone;  
Laughs at impossibilities,  
And says, ‘It shall be done.’”

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.” “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

The second application of it is *the Lord’s sacred ability in regenerating those who are dead in sin*. This gruesome sight that Ezekiel saw is a fit picture of the whole human race, the whole of fallen, lost humanity – dry bones, and they are very dry, nothing attractive, no beauty, nothing to merit the Lord’s favour or esteem or love – an awful sight. Also, completely helpless, completely incapable of doing anything. Then why preach? The gospel is to be preached not only to God’s people to feed their souls and edify them and establish them. The gospel is to be preached to those who are dead in sin. Do not forget there were two things: the prophet had to speak to the dry bones, but He also had to speak to the four winds. “Breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

When the new birth takes place, it is a resurrection, just as much a resurrection as here in this valley of dry bones. It is life from the dead, just as much a resurrection as when Jairus’ daughter was raised, as when the widow of Nain’s son was raised, as when Lazarus was raised. “Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth.” And Jesus says, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

You see, there is an encouragement to pray. There may be someone you love. You pray for that one. You carry your burden, your exercise about it, and the case may seem to be impossible. It may be you have prayed long and seen no answer. “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.” It is an

impossible thing that the dead shall rise, that the dry bones shall live, but it is the same power, the same almighty power of God, that does it.

You have this point clearly set forth at the end of Ephesians 1 and the beginning of Ephesians 2. At the end of chapter 1, Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and that almighty power that brought Him from the dead: “The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.” And then he begins chapter 2: “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” quickening being the old word for making alive. But it is only that divine, almighty power that rolled away the stone, that caused the earth to quake, that brought the Lord Jesus from the dead, that can ever quicken a sinner into newness of life in the new birth. It is a resurrection.

“The sinner sleeping in his grave  
Shall at My voice awake,  
And when I once begin to save.  
My work I’ll ne’er forsake.”

And then to take another view of it, how it sets forth *the resurrection in the last great day*. This world is one great cemetery. Everywhere there must be graves. If you think of all the people who have lived and died and been buried since creation, then the whole world is one great cemetery, and it is sin that digs our graves. Sin will dig a grave for you and sin will dig a grave for me. We must die because we have sinned. The body must sink into the dust. The spirit must return to God who gave it. And what then? “It is appointed unto men once to die,” (because of sin) “but after this the judgment.” “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” so the lifeless body is laid in the grave and this grave will one day be opened. Divine omnipotence will open those graves, the righteous and the wicked. “Blessed is he that hath a part in the first resurrection.” The dead in Christ shall rise first, but every grave will be opened.

You see, this is a great mystery. What about those who have been burned, as the martyrs were burned, or with present-day cremation? What about those who have been devoured by wild animals? Well, it does not

make any difference to omnipotence. Still, “O My people, I will open your graves.”

I remember Mr. Pack of Irthlingborough speaking to me once about this point. He felt the Lord revealed it to him so clearly. He felt that if in the palm of his hand he had just four or five pieces, what an easy thing it would be for him to take them and to assemble them together, and he felt that although the dust of some who have died may be scattered in various places in the earth, it is just as simple a thing for omnipotence to raise the dead to life.

There are two resurrections: the resurrection of justification and the resurrection of condemnation. Our hymnwriter gives solemn warnings on this point.

“Ye that die without repentance,  
Ye must rise when Christ appears;  
Rise to hear your dreadful sentence,  
While the saints rejoice in theirs.”

Let not atheism mock at the impossibility of it. He who here makes the dry bones live will in the great day open every grave and “every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him.”

Now I want to speak on this aspect of it, an aspect that comes very close to us. That is, *the experimental aspect*. How often God’s people feel that that valley of dry bones depicts just where they are and just how they are feeling. With some it is more than others. Some perhaps feel they have never felt anything within but the valley of dry bones. Well, I wonder if there are any of you here tonight, and in your pilgrimage you have come to this, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.” You feel that your very soul is so withered and dried up. Some of you have seen different days, better days, more lively days. Perhaps some of you feel you never have. But this is the only thing that describes your case: “Our bones are dried,” and you feel to be so lifeless. You cannot discern any life there. There does not seem to be the movement in God’s holy fear. There is no softness of heart. You cannot feel the life you long to feel. Even your desires, if there are any at all, seem so weak and faint. You have to say,

“Hardly, sure, can they be worse  
Who have never heard His name.”

Is there anyone there tonight, feeling so withered and dried, and perhaps that prayer we have just sung suits you well:

“Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;  
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed  
In all our hearts abroad.”

“Our bones are dried.” It is only the Lord in His love and mercy that can make a difference. But you feel that death. You feel that dryness which is within. “And our hope is lost.” In one place we have it like this: “My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.” Perhaps you feel your hope is worth little, or worth nothing.

“Does Satan tempt you to give up,  
And call no more on Jesus’ name?  
Cast not away your little hope.”

Perhaps you say, “We are cut off for our parts.” Well, the Lord has an answer to this, to those who say they are cut off. “Surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.” But when you feel to be severed from the Lord like that severed limb or like that severed branch of the tree, when in your feelings the Lord seems to withdraw His face, when temptation comes, when fear and sin and unbelief prevail, then the child of God comes here: “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost we are cut off for our parts,” and if there is one case in the whole of Scripture that describes you, it is Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones.

Now how, I ask you, as the Lord asked Ezekiel, can these bones live? Do not answer it rashly. May you put it back in the Lord’s hands, like the prophet did, “Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O My people, I will open your graves.” Doesn’t Samuel Rutherford in one of his letters say something like this: “I spend all my time digging graves for Christ to bring me out of.” But we do dig these graves for ourselves, don’t we?

But sometimes it is not just that your hope, your expectation, your desire seem to be dead, but also buried. “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you in.” You know, there is one thing that will do it, and it is this: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.” What can the power



of Christ's resurrection do? What can the power of Christ's resurrection not do? O that wonderful, enlivening life from the dead.

“And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves.” Why? Because you know that none but the Lord could do it. You know that your own carnal heart could not do it, that your unbelief could not do it, that Satan could not do it. “Ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves.” To have your graves opened, to be brought out of your graves, for the dry bones did live. This is the evidence of an interest in this word. “My people.” Mine by eternal choice, Mine by redemption, Mine by calling, Mine eternally – “My people.”

“And shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live.” You think it is going to be to death, but it is going to be to life. You think it will end in everlasting death, but it will end in everlasting life. But even now, as the Lord puts His blessed Spirit in you, ye shall live. Is there one here who cries out, “Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee”? It shall only praise Thee as Thou dost cause it to live.

Well, you see, the teaching here is very clear. First of all, that the case is not only hard, not only bad, but it is impossible. That is what you feel. But then secondly, that the Lord is able to perform the impossibility. And then thirdly, that He has promised that He *will* perform the impossibility. Then fourthly, the way in which He will perform it, by the invincible power of the Holy Ghost, that divine Person, one with the Father and the Son. Now that will do the deed, and nothing else will. O that prayer, that cry to the Holy Spirit:

“Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;  
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed  
In all our hearts abroad.”

If you get a glimpse of this, if you get a touch of this, if the Holy Spirit works within you, if there is that inbreathing of divine life and love and liberty, then you shall live and you shall live eternally after the power of an endless life, that life which is hid with Christ in God.

The whole point is this: it matters not how great the death. It can never interfere with the Spirit's work in bringing life. In the middle of last night, this chapel was completely dark, black darkness. But that black

darkness could not stop the light coming in through the windows this morning as day broke. And all your darkness, however great, however gross, can never stop that divine light flowing in. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” All the death that is within you, all the death all about you, can never stop that light and life that the Holy Spirit breathes powerfully into your heart.

Then what a prayer there is here that the Lord will do it for us, reviving His own work! And what a question there is here: “Can these bones live?”! And O what a yea and amen promise there is here given in love and mercy: “I shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live”! You see, these are divine certainties. They are also divine mercies and they are divine realities. O those of you who feel to be nothing but dry bones, cut off for your parts, your hope lost and your bones dried up, may you see that there is hope in Israel concerning this thing, hope in God alone, hope in the power of Christ’s resurrection, hope in the effectual work of the Holy Spirit. “I shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live.”