

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: RAISING THE DRY BONES

Key Verse: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Key Thought: Spiritual Renewal

Ezekiel was a 25-year-old priest from the family of Zadok, when he, along with the king and 10,000 Jews, were taken to Babylon in 598 BC. Five years later, in 593 BC, Ezekiel was called into the ministry. Ezekiel's name means "**Strengthened by God**," and there can be little doubt that the visions he was given during his 20 plus years of faithful ministry were used to challenge and strengthen his fellow exiles.

The ministry of Ezekiel was marked by a series of visions. One of those visions will be the focus that I speak of today. The "**Vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones**," is a very familiar passage of Scripture. I have heard it used to preach about the need for revival in the church. That is a valid use of this passage. Yet, we need to remember that God is not speaking to the church in those verses. He is speaking to the nation of Israel. He sees them as a dead nation. He promises this dead nation that a day will come when He will raise them from the dead and use them again for His glory.

When Ezekiel received this vision, he found himself surrounded by the bones of the dead. Everywhere he looked he saw dead people. He was commanded to preach to them. And he was commanded to pray over them. When he obeyed the Lord's command, **Ezekiel saw those dead bodies brought back to life. He saw the Lord's grave on display in that graveyard**, and that is the thought I want to focus on this morning. Like Ezekiel, we are surrounded by the dead.

Everywhere we look there is evidence of the spiritual death that dominates our world. And, like Ezekiel, we have been sent out to tell the dead that they CAN live.

From where Ezekiel stood that day, his task must have seemed impossible. Yet, he obeyed God, and the Lord blessed his efforts. From where we stand today, the task of reaching those who are dead in sin also seems like an impossible task. If we will do as the Lord has commanded us, we will also see Him bless our efforts.

I want to take these verses today and preach for a few minutes on Mission Impossible: Raising dry bones. I want you to see some truths that speak to our call of preaching the Gospel to a world filled with the living dead. Consider these truths with me today.

I. A SHOCKING REVELATION

If we are going to sense the great need of the world around us needing to hear the Gospel, we must have a clear grasp of the condition in which the world finds itself. The vision Ezekiel saw was of a valley full of dry, scattered bones. It depicted the desolation, destitution, and devastation of Israel. Until we have a similar vision of the world in which we live we will not be stirred to action. We need to see what Ezekiel saw when he looked out over that valley of dry bones. It is the same vision we need today as we look out over a lost, dead world.

A) He Saw Death - The bones speak of death. Since so many bones were in one place, it may be that Ezekiel saw the aftermath of a great battle. If that is the case, it must have broken his heart. One of the worst insults a Jew could suffer was to be denied a proper burial. Here is a valley filled with the bones of the dead.

Defeated by their enemies and left to rot where they fell. Ezekiel saw a vision of death on a massive scale. What do you see today when you look at the world around you? Although the people around us may be living their lives, working their jobs, enjoying their hobbies, raising their families; while they may be charming, intellectual, reasonable, and apparently fit, if they do not know Jesus Christ, they are spiritually dead. Paul tells us that until the Holy Spirit quickens men and women to spiritual life they are ***“...dead in trespasses and in sins,” Ephesians 2:1***. This can be true of your husband, your wife, your parents, your children, your friends, your neighbors, or your coworkers. While they may be full of life physically, they can be dead spiritually.

We should pray and ask God to open our eyes and help us see the world around us as it really is. That was what Jesus said to His disciples, ***“Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”***

John 4:35

B) He Saw Devastation - The bones Ezekiel saw were ***“very dry.”*** They had been on that valley floor, under the merciless heat of the sun, until they were drained of all moisture. In that dead, dry condition, they were fit for nothing but to be gathered and buried. They were absolutely useless.

We need to recognize that this is the very condition of the lost who live around us. In Romans 3:12, Paul writes,

“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Romans 3:12

The word “**unprofitable**” means, “**to be useless.**” This verse reminds us that the lost sinner is useless to God. They are unprofitable in the sense that He cannot use them for His glory.

We should ask the Lord to open our eyes and help us see the devastation of the world around us. The lost are trapped in sin, and they cannot escape. They are spiritually dead and devastated by their sins. Look at the family ruined by drugs and alcohol. They need someone to tell them about a way out. Look at the family destroyed by sexual sin. They need someone to tell them about a better way. Look at that family that seems so happy, yet they are headed to Hell. They need someone to warn them and to point them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we understand where they are, we will not be moved to reach them with the Gospel.

C) He Saw Defeat - “**...behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost...**” The nation of Israel was defeated and had reached a place where they saw no way out of their captivity and no hope for their future. In a sense, they were not living; they were merely existing. Ezekiel saw their hopelessness and was moved by it.

The Bible describes the lost around us as

“...having no hope and without God in the world,”

Ephesians 2:12

The hopelessness in the world is easy to see. The restlessness of the nations, the upheavals in our culture, the horrible condition of our economy, and the constant threat of war, all speak to the fact that people feel hopeless. When there is peace in the heart, there is rest in the life. When peace is missing, hopelessness reigns.

Again, we need to ask the Lord to help us see the hopelessness of the lost who live around us. Yes, they act out in ways that are ungodly and that are sometimes frightening. Yes, they are opposing God, the Gospel and godliness. But they are hopeless, and it may just be that their actions are a plea for help. I pray the Lord will give us a burden for the lost who are dead, devastated and defeated in their sins. I pray that we will tell them about a Savior who died to save them from their sins. I pray that we will be burdened by their condition to the point where we do more than talk about it. I pray that we will come to the place where we will go to them and tell them about the only true source of hope.

Illustration: In the 1700's a little man in England, a cobbler by trade, who kept a map of the world on a wall of his workshop so that he could pray for the nations of the world, became burdened for a definite missionary outreach. When he shared his burden at a meeting of ministers, he was told by one of the senior men of God, ***“Young man, sit down. When God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without your help or mine.”*** But William Carey did not let the fire of his enthusiasm be dampened by such a response, and eventually he left the shores of England for those of India, where he engaged in pioneer missionary work, doing exploits for God AND MILLIONS WERE SAVED !!!

II. A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

As Ezekiel looked over that valley of dry bones, God spoke to the prophet and told him what to do. Ezekiel was shown that he had a personal responsibility to that valley of dead, dry bones. I want you to see this because the same responsibility that rested on Ezekiel's shoulders then rests on our today.

A) He Was Commanded to Preach –

“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’”

Ezekial 37:4 NIV

Ezekiel was commanded to preach to a valley filled with skeletons! Nothing could be more foolish or ridiculous than to preach to a bunch of dry bones.

When God, in **verse 3**, asked the question, “***...Son of man, can these bones live?...***,” Ezekiel's answer was “***“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”***” You can almost hear the hesitation on the part of the prophet as he considered the utter futility of his assignment. There can be little doubt that Ezekiel was overwhelmed by the sight of all the death, the devastation and the defeat he saw represented by those dry bones. Anyone who sees the true condition of a lost world can understand Ezekiel’s response for, humanly speaking, what is more difficult than to confront a world of lifeless, useless, and hopeless men and women with the word of the gospel? Yet this is the clear obligation of the church. He says,

***“so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”***

Isaiah 55:11 NIV

Only through such preaching will there be,

“...a noise,...a shaking;...bones coming together, bone to his bone,”

Ezekial 37:7

It is only the Word of God which can produce such miracles,

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12 NIV

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ “***...because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.***”

Romans 1:16

What does a lost world need? They do not need to hear about our church, our denomination, our preachers, our opinions. They need to hear the Gospel of grace. They need to hear the truth that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save sinners. They need to hear that He rose again from the dead to save all who will come to Him. They need to hear that there is hope, love, life, and salvation in Jesus Christ. They need to hear about Him, and it is our responsibility to tell them.

B) He Was Commanded To Pray –

“...breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

Ezekiel 37:9

With the preaching there may be a noise, a shaking, a coming together of bone to bone, and even the appearance of muscles and skin, but the Word says “***...there was no breath in them,***” . Ezekiel had preached the Word of God to the bones. They had the appearance of life, but they were still dead. They needed the touch of God before they could live. He was commanded to pray that the Lord would breathe on them and make them live.

Through preaching people may be convinced of truth, but they will remain mere corpses until the Spirit of God breathes upon them.

Undoubtedly, this is why our Lord told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were spiritually endued with power from on high (**Luke 24:49**).

Then came the day of Pentecost when there was

“...a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind...,”

Acts 2:2

and at once their preaching ministry was vitalized. As they spoke, dead men and women came to life.

This is still God's method of bringing the purpose of the gospel to fulfillment. It is our obligation to see that we not only preach with divine urgency but pray with divine fervency. We must be satisfied with nothing less than the outpouring of the Spirit of God. The world of lifeless, useless, and hopeless men and women will never be changed unless the Holy Spirit breathes upon the preaching as well as upon the people.

Let us pray for the Gospel, the preachers, the teachers, the churches, the missionaries, and the witnesses. Let us pray with fervency that God will honor His Word, breathe on the lost and draw many to Jesus Christ for salvation. Unless He draws them to Himself, they will never be saved! It is our responsibility to tell them, and it is our responsibility to pray with urgency that they might be saved. May God give us eyes to see the condition of the lost. May He give us ears to hear their cries. May He give us a heart that feels their pain. May He help us see them like He sees them, so that we will develop the kind of burden for them that dwelled in Him.

III. A SUPERNATURAL RESURRECTION

In response to the preaching and praying of Ezekiel, the Lord moves in power. Several amazing things take place when God brings the dead bones to life.

A) How They Were Activated - We read that ***“they lived.”*** Those corpses were animated, vitalized, brought back to life. As the astonished prophet watched, a valley filled with the dead came to life. The same thing can happen today as we share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord assures us that,

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.” John 6:63 NIV

Even a good, religious man like Nicodemus was blind in sin (he could not “see” the kingdom of God); bound in sin (he could not “enter” the kingdom of God); born in sin (he could not “inherit” the kingdom of God) until he was quickened to life (born again). The new birth is a supernatural event. It is a time when God raises those who were spiritually dead to new life in Jesus Christ. It is a sovereign event, and it is amazing to experience it yourself, and to witness in others.

B) How They Were Animated - They “...stood up upon their feet...” God brought them to life, then He caused them to stand before Him. While we should have a burden to see dead men and women quickened to life, we should also be concerned that they are strengthened to stand for Christ and His church. Paul expresses this burden when writing to the Ephesian church. He says,

“...For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

Ephesians 3:14-17 NIV

Let us never forget that we must pray earnestly for the lost to come to faith in Christ, that they may be strengthened by His Spirit to stand and withstand. After all, God saves people to serve Him. (***Ephesians 2:10***)

Speaking to His disciples the Lord Jesus said:

“...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

There are no unwanted people in the church of Jesus Christ. There is a place of witness, and work, for each one of us and we must see that we are led to it by the Holy Spirit.

Illustration: Ever since the close of the Second World War Japanese volunteers have been searching the island of Saipan for the bodies of soldiers killed there. Of the 40,000 to 50,000 Japanese soldiers and dependents believed to have died there only half have been found. Because of that, there will be missions in the future looking for the dead. The church, too, has a mission for the dead. Men and women are "dead" in trespasses and sins, and the church must seek them out and proclaim life in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, like the bones of Ezekiel's vision, these dead shall live!

Will you be a volunteer for Jesus and allow Him to utilize your gifts in the mission of finding lost men and women who are spiritually dead?

C) How They Were Associated - They are transformed into “***...an exceedingly great army.***” One moment they are dead bones filling a valley, the next they are a mighty, living army, ready for the Lord’s use. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring individual units into a whole. The apostle Paul informs us that,

***“...by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...,” 1 Corinthians
12:13***

Furthermore, we are exhorted to,

“...keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” Ephesians 4:3
God brings His people out of the deadness of sin to a new life in Jesus Christ. He saves them, gives them spiritual gifts, and then places them in a local church where they can work along with other resurrected sinners for the glory of God.

May the Lord help us to see that we are not to be isolated units, but that we are to

***“...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving
together for the faith of the gospel,”***

Philippians 1:27

D) How They Were Assured - ***“And I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.”*** This is a promise to the nation of Israel that they will be restored to their land, and that they will receive His blessings again.

Then He says, ***“...then you will know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it...”*** God wants Israel to know that what He is about to do is a sovereign work. He is going to do something big in them, and through them. All they must do is believe Him, and go with Him, and they will see it come to pass.

The same is true for the church. The days of God’s blessings are not over. The times of refreshing have not passed us by forever. God is still the same God He has always been, and he is still working in supernatural, sovereign ways to accomplish His will in the world.

We need to seek the Lord today, to ask Him to give us a vision of the lost as they really are, to give a burden to reach them with the Gospel, to fill us with His Spirit, and send us out into the world to tell them about Jesus Christ. God will still honor His Word, and He will still bless those who go about His work according to His will.

In closing, I want to ask when ***you look at the world, what do you see?*** I must confess that I sometimes become angry when I look at the world. I see the things people do; I hear the things people say, I notice the way they live their lives, and I see the hatred they have for God and the Gospel. Those things bother me. Then I remember, if it were not for the grace of God, that could still be me. But somebody cared enough to pray for me. Somebody cared enough to tell me about Jesus. The Lord reached out to me in grace and mercy and saved my soul. The least I can do is ask the Lord to give me the same compassion toward others that was shown to me.

Can these bones live? Yes, they can! The mission that has been given to the church seems impossible at times. But we can fulfill our great commission if we look to the Lord for the help and strength we need. They only need a witness to tell them, a warrior to pray for them and a wonderful God to draw them to Jesus. They can live, and God can use us to reach them for Jesus.

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30am

Date: March 26, 2023

After Service: Draw Me Close

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Key Verse: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Key Thought: Spiritual Renewal

I. A SHOCKING REVELATION

A) He Saw Death - *Ephesians 2:1; John 4:35*

B) He Saw Devastation - *Romans 3:12*

C) He Saw Defeat - *Ephesians 2:12*

II. A SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

A) He Was Commanded to Preach – *Ezekiel 37:4 NIV; Isaiah 55:11 NIV; Ezekiel 37:7; Hebrews 4:12 NIV; Romans 1:16*

B) He Was Commanded to Pray – *Ezekiel 37:9; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:2*

III. A SUPERNATURAL RESURRECTION

A) How They Were Activated - *John 6:63 NIV*

B) How They Were Animated - *Ephesians 3:14-17 NIV; Ephesians 2:10; Acts 1:8*

C) How They Were Associated - *1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27*

D) How They Were Assured -

When you look at the world, what do you see?

Can these bones live? Yes, they can!