

## Pentecost

Today is the birthday of the church. Typically, on this day, we read from Acts the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter about the Holy Spirit descending and filling the apostles with the promised Comforter. We may read on and remember the first gospel sermon as Peter spoke of the outpouring of the spirit of God and called the crowd to repentance. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Acts is offered as a suggested text for this Sunday in the Lectionary. However, another text is also offered. A text from the Old Testament. I explored this text and realized that there is a message about the power of the Holy Spirit found in this text. So, today, we will be looking in Ezekiel to find a message that may still have meaning for us in the times we live.

I invite you to turn with me to the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel. Some of you may be thinking; “Isn’t this the dry bones scripture?” Yes, it is.

Ezekiel was a prophet who warned Judah of their coming destruction. Judah had turned away from God and were soon to taste the wrath of God. In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, Ezekiel sees various idolatrous worship practices taking place in Jerusalem including sun worship (8:16-17). In chapter 9, God shows Ezekiel the coming punishment. In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel, we see the image of the glory of God leaving the temple (10:18-19).

The image of God’s glory leaving the temple evokes the image of death. In James 2:26, we are told **the body without the spirit is dead**. Judah without the glory of God will face destruction. Even with the promise of doom, God offers hope. When we reach the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter, we see the image of lifeless bones in the valley.

**The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. (Ezekiel 37:1-2 NASB)**

Dry bones are an indication that the death has been long enough that the tissue has decayed and the bones have been in the weather long enough to dry out. From our understanding of medical science, when all we have are dry bones, there is no chance for resuscitation. We cannot hope to reanimate dry bones into a living being. Against this backdrop of dried bones, God asked Ezekiel a question.

**He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.” (Ezekiel 37:3 NASB)**

God asked Ezekiel if those dried bones could live and Ezekiel answers with diplomacy. He allows that God knew the answer to the question. God tells Ezekiel what to say to the dried bones.

**Again, He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.’” (Ezekiel 37:4-6 NASB)**

God gives Ezekiel the words to say. God wants Ezekiel to tell the dried bones that He (God) will bring the bones back to life. The bones will be once more covered with flesh and skin and the breath will be given to them. The Hebrew word used for breath in this chapter is רוּחַ rūah (roo'-akh) may be translated breath as it was 27 times in the King James Bible or spirit as it was 232 times in the King James Bible. This is important for us to understand that God will breathe His spirit into these bones and they will live.

So, Ezekiel spoke the word that God told him to say and things began to happen.

**So, I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. (Ezekiel 37:7-8 NASB)**

As Ezekiel spoke, the bones moved and connected. The process allowed the bones to become fully assembled bodies. However, there was still no life only dead bodies that had been reconstructed from the dried bones.

**Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, 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 come to life.’”” So, I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezekiel 37:9-10 NASB)**

From the scene of death and destruction, God had restored life. The life was not restored until the spirit of God was breathed into the bodies.

God now explains the image of the reanimation of the dried bones to Ezekiel.

**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 has perished. We are completely cut off.’ Therefore, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.’” (Ezekiel 37:11-14 NASB)**

The dried bones are the whole house of Israel (both Northern Kingdom and Judah). They had turned away from God and worshipped idols. They had chased after every perverse pleasure and ceased to follow the laws of God. God caused His spirit to leave them. Assyria captured the Northern Kingdom and later Babylon captured Judah. They were scattered and were like these dried bones. God is presenting the image of hope to the whole house of Israel. God will bring them back as though they were called from their graves. **I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life.**

What does this have to do with Pentecost? When we recall the events recorded in Acts the second chapter, the Holy Spirit entered the apostles and they were no longer cowering in seclusion. They stood up and boldly proclaimed the good news of God sending salvation through Jesus the Christ. A new life blossomed in them and the church was born. We find that timid Peter, who had denied Jesus on that Thursday night (pre-dawn Friday) received God’s spirit and he came to life.

For us, here in 2021, we need to understand that too often we have been turning away from God and following idols just as surely as the children of Israel. Our idols may not be carved stone and wooden figures but we follow other things that take the place of God.

For those who missed the Wednesday devotion from a few days ago, I recall the word honor. We are told in many places throughout the Bible to honor God. It may be good for us to understand that word honor. The Hebrew word most often translated as honor is כָּבֵד כָּבֵד kâbad (*kaw-bad*).

The meaning literally to be heavy. In a bad sense (burdensome, severe, dull) or in a good sense (*numerous, rich, honorable*); causatively to *make weighty* (in the same two senses). If we

honor someone, we give them the proper weight or respect. To honor God, we give Him proper weight in all areas of our life.

The result of not giving God the proper weight in our life is that we have allowed whatever we give the greater weight to become our idol. The life that replaces God with anything else will soon see God's spirit leaving just as surely as we read in Ezekiel 10:18-19.

We read earlier that **the body without the spirit is dead**. We may continue to live as a worldly creature but we are spiritually dead. The pity is that this spiritual death may infect not only an individual but the church or the nation. When this happens, we need to do two things; repent and return to God, and earnestly pray for God's spirit to return to us so that we may be made alive once more.

I recently read that an outside force that breaks an egg brings death while an inside force that breaks an egg brings life. In similar fashion, the cares of this world that break into our lives will bring death. Yet, allowing the Holy Spirit to spring forth from within will bring spiritual life. Just as surely as God's spirit brought life to the dried bones so will His spirit bring life to us.

The words of Jesus tell us the importance of the spirit when He said: **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. (John 6:63 NASB)**

As we remember that today marks the day that when God's promise revealed by the prophet Joel was fulfilled. The words of Joel are repeated by Peter when he addressed the crowd on that Pentecost.

**“It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29 NASB)**

It is time we all need to pray for God to send His Spirit to bring new life to us, our church, our community, and our nation. We need to reach out to God in prayer as the chorus of the song “Come, Holy Spirit” tells us:

***Come, Holy Spirit, Dark is the hour, We need your filling, Your love and your mighty power; Move now among us, Stir us, we pray, Come, Holy Spirit, Revive the church today! (Come, Holy Spirit written by John Peterson)***