

Can These Bones Live?

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Psalter: 281

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1–14

Psalter: 259

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 37:1–14

Psalter: 123

Psalter: 141

No doubt each one of us has been following the news of the economic situation in the world and particularly on Wall Street in New York City. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fluctuates so much, causing concern not only to investors but also to many of us who worry about the future of the economy, about our jobs, and our financial futures. These are indeed reasons for concern.

Those of us who have access to any form of media cannot avoid another issue that is also a reason for concern: the political situation in North America. We are all bombarded by political statements from various ideologies, all promoting their own cause; and we as Christians look at the cause below the cause. We look at the Christian cause and we look at the ideology of the various individuals that are running for office. We are often very concerned, are we not, about the political and moral situation here in North America? As we see the various political ideologies and recognize the relative scarcity of consistent Christian values, we wonder what might happen in the near future.

Clearly, economic and political challenges are many at present, but let's go a little deeper. What about the moral situation in North America? Politically, there are major issues, but we know that many of these are motivated by socioeconomic and cultural undertones of

immorality or godlessness. We are facing many financial, political, and moral troubles. But, as Christians, we need to look even deeper at the *spiritual* state of society. What is the condition of souls?

How many souls do you pass on the way to church? You no doubt pass many houses and cars full of people. When you go to the grocery store, or mall, or airport where you see crowds of people, what is the state of their never-dying souls before God? It is either spiritually dead or it is being spiritually recreated, alive through the Spirit.

And what about our own souls? What is the condition of our spiritual life, our walk with God? Is it strong? Is it vibrant? Or is it dead? Are we still outside of Christ? Are we still in a state of spiritual deadness?

How about your own family? Maybe the Lord has given you spiritual life that desires after Him and pants after Christ. What about your children? What is their spiritual state? Some of them, perhaps, outwardly display that they are not Christians. Others perhaps are what we call “serious-minded,” but we know that being serious-minded is not enough for salvation. If you die serious-minded but outside of Christ, you will go to hell! I know people who go to church week after week, year after year, decade after decade and still profess, “I am not a Christian in my heart.” They hear the message but somehow it doesn’t awaken them and give them new life. What is your own spiritual state?

When we consider these things, we recognize that the spiritual crisis in America—even in our various churches—is of far greater importance than other outward concerns like our political or financial future. What is your spiritual state before God today? These things are woven into this message, and we will return to them.

I want to focus on Ezekiel 37:1–14, carefully considering each verse. First we will only read verse 3, which is the pivotal point in this passage:

And he [God] said unto me [Ezekiel], Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

My theme is the question: *Can these bones live?* I have three main thoughts to consider: (1) the battlefield of bones; (2) the Spirit of prophecy; and (3) the promise of the Lord.

The Battlefield of Bones

Who is Ezekiel the prophet? The book of Ezekiel is one of those Old Testament books that, in our private devotions or family reading, we might stumble through without fully understanding its background and context.

Ezekiel is both a prophet and a priest, speaking in particular to the children of Judah but also to Israelites who were exiled. He began his ministry around 597 B.C. and prophesied for about 20 years, until around 577 B.C., during which time the nation-state of Judah, centered in Jerusalem, fell to the Babylonians. So Ezekiel's prophecy starts by predicting the fall of the southern kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem, to the Babylonian conquerors. He then ends by giving comfort to God's people who are in exile.

Chapter 37 is near the end of Ezekiel's prophecy (assuming the book is in chronological order), likely written during or immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is speaking to God's covenant people in a state of destruction, despair, and despondency in a foreign land. He aims to encourage, comfort, and give hope to the exiled people long after the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom to the Assyrians.

Though the financial and political situations might be bad in North America, consider the situation for these refugees in Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was burned, the stones were cast down, the people were in exile, and nothing was left—all to fulfill prophecy. Their sins brought judgment upon them and they were

reaping the results. They had very little hope of being returned to the land or of being restored as a nation.

God, however, is highlighting His sovereign power and ability to work a mighty revival. This is the first of several prophecies in chapters 37 and 38 that focus on how God will make a difference in the lives of His people. These prophecies give us hope today as we understand the context of that day and realize how God’s Word applies to us in the same way. This is a passage meant to encourage us.

Let’s look first at verse 1: “The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley.” The first question we must answer is this: Who is the Spirit of the Lord? The Spirit is the active agent in this verse, not the prophet. The prophet is being moved by the Spirit. We start by understanding the “hand of the LORD” and the “Spirit of the LORD” who is acting.

The word *spirit* in Hebrew is identical with *breath*. *Spirit* and *breath* and *wind* are different words in English, but they are the same word in Hebrew. Think about this passage with that insight. Verse 1: “The *spirit* of the LORD.” Verse 5: “Cause *breath* to enter into you [the bones].” Verse 8: “There was no *breath* in them.” The same word in the Hebrew is used in verses 1, 5, and 8. The same applies in verse 9: “Prophesy unto the *wind* [or the *breath* or the *Spirit*]...and say to the *wind* [or the *breath* or the *Spirit*]...come from the four *winds* [or *breath*] and *breathe* on these slain.” These are all the same word in Hebrew. We will come back to this fact.

So who is the Spirit of the Lord? The Lord’s Spirit in the Old Testament is rarely so clearly described, though He is certainly present. However, in books like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, we find future-looking references of what the Spirit will do. It is the Lord’s Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, almighty God, the Spirit of the Lord, and

the Spirit of Christ as we learn in the New Testament who is the One moving the prophet in this chapter.

What about the second phrase, “The hand of the LORD”? This too is a very important phrase that sets the context for this passage. “The hand of the LORD,” particularly in the Old Testament, refers to God’s power at work in the world. It is none other than God’s Spirit of power who is actively working in the world through Christ. We find Him at work in Acts 11:19–21 where “the hand of the Lord” was with the disciples and the believers, and there was a great revival in the city of Antioch.

These two very important phrases at the start of this passage set the tone. The Spirit is working with the prophet and brings him to this battlefield of bones: “...and [He] set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.”

The “open valley” of verse 2 can be interpreted as a wide open area, perhaps a flat area in the midst of mountains, which would be a likely place for battles to occur; a place where large armies could fight each other with swords and other implements of war. This passage pictures the place where two armies had fought. A great massacre had occurred, and the dead bodies were left unburied on the ground of the valley.

So Ezekiel receives a vision of a battlefield filled with bones and skulls, a gruesome sight to imagine. We perhaps have seen pictures showing Cambodia’s killing fields, bones from a regime that was so merciless, or of Hitler’s concentration camps in Germany. Heaps and heaps of skulls turn our stomachs. Do you find this vision repulsive? This is its intended effect—to make us recoil. In verse 2, the Spirit caused Ezekiel to pass around them, almost as if the prophet is taken on a tour past skulls and other bones. A ghastly atmosphere of death permeated the place. Our attention is drawn to the horridness and the finality of this massacre, perhaps of thousands or millions of people. The prophet saw the stark reality of death.

At the very point when this vision is starkly before him, what does the Lord ask Ezekiel? Verse 3 says: “And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?” What an incredible question! Imagine what it must have been like for Ezekiel to walk around these bones, and then be asked by God, “Can these dead, very dry, sun-bleached bones live?” It is like a rhetorical question in the negative. It is impossible, is it not, for these bones to come to life again? The only obvious answer is no. But this is the question asked by Almighty GOD, the covenant-keeping LORD of the Old Testament, the triune God of the promise in the New Testament.

Ezekiel knew, and we today know, that all things are possible with God. So how does Ezekiel reply? Verse 3 says: “And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.” Was this an evasive answer? If you are asked a pointed question and you deflect by saying, “Well, uh...” you really don’t answer the question; you barely give a response. “O Lord...thou knowest” could seem evasive. Or possibly it is an indifferent answer? Or perhaps it is an answer of wonder and trust? Ezekiel evokes the covenant-keeping name and actually puts together both the almighty God and the covenant-keeping name LORD. “Oh Lord, sovereign LORD, sovereign keeper of the covenant, thou knowest.” Ezekiel gives an answer of faith in the covenant-keeping and sovereign LORD. “Oh LORD, thou knowest all things, that it is impossible, but that all things are possible with Thee.”

Consider situations in our own lives: not just the present financial crisis surrounding us; not just the moral decay of our nation, the onslaught of sin and evil that we see around us, the temptations that bombard us. Let’s look a little closer—at our church, to our own ministries. Maybe you are one of the workers in the Sunday school program or some other ministry, such as the jail or prison outreach, and your hands are hanging down right now in discouragement because the work just goes on and on without any visible results. Maybe as a mother you are

praying for a son or daughter who seems to be going in the wrong direction. Maybe your time is limited and you would like to spend time with your family. Whatever ministry you are involved in takes work; it involves significant commitment for the activity itself, and there are often considerable preparations and other sacrifices as well. Yet these investments often seem wasted.

We are dealing with spiritual issues here in this chapter. This is not a literal prophecy; it is a spiritual matter. So the question comes to us just as it did to the prophet: can these bones live? The discouraging situations in which you find yourself—at Sunday school where the children may be misbehaving, or speaking with an unsaved coworker—can often be such that you ask, “Can these bones live?” How can this sinner ever be given new life? How can this hopeless situation be turned around? How can my life be made conformable to the image of Christ when I live like this, when I have these sins plaguing me, or these temptations bombarding me? How can I ever get through to my wayward son? It seems like there are no opportunities for communication. How can I make him understand and change? Can these bones live? Is there any reason for hope, or is hope as dead as these dry bones?

How can we as a church be a witness in this community when there are so many things testifying against us? People might say, “Oh, they are just rich people with nice cars. They don’t care about us.” Or maybe our own inconsistencies stand in the way. It may be the hardness of those we reach. How can we do mission work? How can we do evangelism when both we and they seem so dead and lifeless? The question comes to us as it came to Ezekiel in this battlefield of bones: Can these bones live? Is this even possible? How can life be given to spiritually dead people?

Now some have interpreted this prophecy literally, saying that this event would actually happen at some

point in time after Ezekiel received this prophecy. The people of Judah (and/or Israel), they say, will be returned to their own land. Some say this has already happened, either with the return of the exiles from Babylon before Christ, or perhaps more recently when Israel returned to Palestine in 1948. Some have suggested a future literal meaning of these words. Others have applied these words to a different contemporary fulfillment. For example, a group of refugees today may try to read these words literally for themselves.

Most biblical commentaries, however, reject such literal applications and say the meaning of this prophecy is spiritual. This is a much safer answer, especially because of what God Himself says to Ezekiel in verse 11: “These bones are the whole house of Israel.” These bones represent the spiritual reality of the state of the church in Ezekiel’s day. The same application can be made about the spiritual state of the church in our day: spiritually bankrupt, spiritually dry, or even spiritually dead.

Why does God give this prophecy through Ezekiel to His people? It is to encourage God’s people in exile to stop looking at their literal circumstances—the deadness and hopelessness of their present condition—and to start looking in faith to the sovereign LORD and to place their trust in Him, causing them to desire Him. The meaning is the same for God’s people today.

So as we consider situations in our own life and the ministries that God has given to each one of His people, we look at this prophecy not just to focus on the hopelessness of the battlefields in which we find ourselves. We are encouraged to look away from this hopelessness, and to look away from ourselves and the circumstances. Instead we are encouraged to answer in faith with Ezekiel, “O Lord GOD, thou knowest.” Will my son return again to the faith? “O Lord GOD, thou knowest.” Will I be able to speak Thy Word to the children in Sunday school or the inmates at the prison? “O Lord GOD, thou knowest.” Will

my witness be used in such a way so that many people are added to Thy church? “O Lord GOD, thou knowest.”

God can change a dead stony heart into a life-breathing, living, faith-demonstrating soul. Ezekiel knew this to be true, so he very intentionally demonstrates his faith in the sovereign Lord. “O Lord...thou knowest.” Ezekiel cautiously places his hope in this reality because he knew the LORD, and he knew the power of the Spirit of prophecy.

The Spirit of Prophecy

Consider five key statements from verses in the passage that follows. First, look at the last part of verse 2: “...and, lo, they were very dry.” These bones were very, very dry. Often in evangelism, when we are hoping for a change in the person to whom we were witnessing, we look for signs of life. Yet, without the work of the Lord, the people to whom we witness remain very dry. We confess the doctrine of total depravity and we know it is true. When we seek to evangelize others in the community or try to be a careful witness in our own families, we may be tempted to expect some preexisting ability in spiritually dead sinners. But there is no hope and no life in dead sinners. Like the bones in this vision, sinners are spiritually dead and are spiritually very dry. We must look elsewhere for hope.

Second, what happens in verse 4? Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy. “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.” This verse describes so beautifully what evangelistic ministry is all about. Maybe you are striving to fulfill your parenting vows and patiently instructing your children in God’s Word, but it just seems as if you are talking to a brick wall. It seems to have no effect.

What is Ezekiel commanded to do? “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.” Evangelism is like standing in a cemetery and offering food to the first one who takes it. “Does anyone in this cemetery want some free food? Come

and get some free food.” Similarly, when evangelizing, we offer the gospel, we speak the truth, we let the dead bones hear the Word of the Lord, knowing full well they are dead and very dry. This is what we are commanded to do as Christians. It is not optional to speak with those around us who do not know our Savior. Say to the dead bones, “Hear ye the Word of the LORD.” The authority here doesn’t come from the speaker; the Word of the Lord comes with authority in itself. So command them, “Hear the Word.”

Third, in verse 6, God makes a promise. Speak to the bones, “And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live.” That is motivation for our ministry work. “I will, I will, I will,” says the Lord. We only have to share the Word with dry, dead bones. We have to look away from the situation and look to the Word and share this powerful message, this passionate truth, this gospel promise: *God will!*

Think of what this meant for the people in Ezekiel’s day. They were refugees in Babylon. Their harps were hung on the willows; they were singing a dirge, a death song, recognizing the hopelessness of their situation. Despair naturally permeated their thinking. But God says, “I will, I will, I will do all of these things.” So speak the Word of the Lord. Here is the command. Here is the promise. Here is the glorious activity of gospel witness that every Christian is called to do. Each believer who has experienced the truth of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is commanded to share this truth with others, knowing full well that nothing in them will accomplish anything.

Fourth, consider verse 8, “But there was no breath in them.” Maybe some of you are discouraged in your ministry activities. Perhaps a teacher is saying, “Children come to Sunday school; there is a large crowd every week, but there is no spiritual life there. I am unable to witness successfully, even though I speak to them, and share with

them and feel I am ministering to them in some way.” Maybe it seems as if you are plowing on rocks. You complain, “There is no breath in them!”

Ezekiel saw the bones coming together. He saw the power of the Word bringing the bones together with a great noise and shaking; he saw sinews and flesh coming upon them—an amazing sight! “But there was no breath in them.” Here, too, we must confess our dependency upon the Lord. The Word may come with power. All of the arguments may be consistent and contemporary. The Word may be exegeted perfectly. All the tactics and strategies may be employed. But all these things in themselves are hopeless; they only bring bones together.

Spurgeon has a sermon in which he refers to a church as “a crowd of corpses.” There can be impressive numbers. Yet without the power of the breath of the Spirit, there is no life.

Fifth, we read in verse 9 what the Lord said to Ezekiel: “Prophecy...and say unto the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD...” The Lord speaks this way to those who are faithful in ministry and He sometimes speaks this verse to us when we are discouraged. When we recognize the impossibilities, we return in faith to the Lord and say, “Thou knowest.” When we see some hopeful responses on our work and yet do not see lasting change, the Lord comes with verse 9 and says, “Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

Remember that word *wind* and the word *breath* and the word *Spirit* are all the same word in Hebrew. The Lord tells the prophet to prophesy to the Spirit, providing a command with a promise: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” But how can we, sons and daughters of men, have the authority to speak to the Spirit of God in that way? We know we need the Spirit;

without the Spirit giving life, the bones are dead, without breath, and Spiritless. The situation is completely bleak without the Spirit and spiritual life.

So how do we have that authority to command with an oracle, “Come, Holy Spirit, and breathe”? “Prophecy unto the Spirit.” This is our prayer and this is the prayer of the Church of all ages. When we consider the bones around us and the Word within us, we prophesy to the Spirit. We say, “Come, Holy Spirit, come.” When we see the Sunday School children, when we minister in the jail or prison, when we talk to a coworker who is bringing all these endless arguments against the Christian faith, when we try to reason very carefully with a friend who has denied the truth he once knew, this is our prayer: “Come, Holy Spirit.”

This prayer includes a confession of our dependency and weakness. It is also our plea and our expectation. I like the name that the Lord uses for Ezekiel throughout the book: “son of man.” It highlights the prophet’s humanity and his weakness. It highlights our nothingness even as we witness for Christ. This “son of man” confesses his dependency upon the sovereign Lord and on the Spirit of God. Our ministries are nothing without the Spirit. Our feeble efforts are nothing without the blessing of the Holy Spirit. If we ever think they are anything more than nothing, we are wrong; without the Spirit, there is no breath in them.

This confession of dependency on the Spirit of God is also a prayer of the church of all ages. “Come, Holy Spirit, breathe, give life, give Spirit, give breath to dead bones.” That is the prophet’s duty, and if you are a believer it is your duty as well. In the New Testament, we are all prophets in the sense that we are called to speak the Word with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will bless the Word to our audience, whomever that may be. So the prophet prophesies and the Spirit comes, and then “an

exceeding great army” is raised up (v. 10) as the result of the Spirit’s revival.

We can only marvel when the Spirit works. His work exceeds human calculations, forecasts, and expectations. When the Spirit chooses to use us—sinful sons and daughters of men—we are amazed: “This is the Lord at work.” Do you, my friends, expect the Lord to work like this today? Do you expect a revival? We see the dead bones around us. This fact is undeniable. We can describe in detail all the various pieces and parts of the skeleton, I suppose, if we look at our society. But do we expect revival? Do we expect the Lord to work revival in His own sovereign time, in His own sovereign way? Are we praying for this?

As you are busy with whatever ministry is laid upon your shoulders, suppose the question came to you from the Lord, “Can these bones live?” What would your answer be? Perhaps you look at pictures of your grandchildren and pray for them every day; perhaps you count the ones who are believers and the ones who are not believers. Do you expect the Lord to work wonders? Can these bones live? Is your answer an answer of faith, a humble surrender before our sovereign God, and a confession of faith and hope in the “I wills” of the Lord? Do you cry out, “Thou Lord knowest. Sovereign God of grace, Thou knowest.” Do you have faith in the power of a gracious Savior and the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit?

Or maybe you are one of those people who are still rejecting the gracious Savior and His gospel promise, the “I will” so clearly explained in God’s Word. He says, “I will do all these things for them and they shall glorify me.” Yet you still turn away. Do you know what you are doing? When you turn away from this Savior, you are rejecting the gospel promise as it goes out—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Yet God comes with power in the Spirit, striving with your spirit year after year. Dear friend, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confess your sins and be saved. He is the One who gives life and He is the One who is striving with your spirit even now.

Do you believe the Lord can work wonders today? Do you passionately and expectantly desire to see the Lord work wonders not only here in North America but around the globe? Why not? Isn't our God almighty? Isn't He the gracious covenant-keeping God of the Bible? Isn't He the One who worked great revivals throughout history? Why can't He send revival in Africa like He did in Europe so many years ago? Why can't He transform a troubled continent with so many challenges like our own? Why can't He raise up a church from all generations, from all areas and ethnic groups? Do you expect the Lord to do great things?

I think this chapter gave hope to the people of God in Ezekiel's day. It gives us confidence and expectation in the Lord God, and it causes us to look away from the circumstances and the bones that surround us, looking instead to the sovereign Lord God who has sent His Spirit at Pentecost so that the nations may know that He is God. Let us, finally, consider this glorious promise of the Lord.

The Promise of the Lord

Ezekiel the prophet came to the people in his day with a hope-inspiring message from the Lord. This message was intended to encourage them to hope in the sovereign Lord, and to realize that only through His Spirit would their relationship of love with the triune God be restored.

The living Word of God still comes to us today for the same purpose: to inspire in us the faith to look away from ourselves and the deadness of our situation, and to hold on to that hope set before us, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One who gives the Spirit and offered His life for sinners, shedding His blood for them. He died to give hope to covenant breakers. This same Messiah gives hope to us as well, even if we have been rejecting Him for decades.

It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost. The Spirit now goes out in the world to all nations, and the Word of God comes to you today with a prayer that the Spirit will speak through it to your hearts. Spurgeon believed that Pentecost was only the first fruits of revival with the larger harvest soon coming. What expectations do you have of God? God wants to give our souls encouragement, inspiration, motivation, faith, hope, and love.

In conclusion, there are three matters to consider. First, consider *God's commentary on Ezekiel's vision*. How does God interpret this vision? We already briefly touched on verses 11 and 12, but it is helpful to examine them more in depth. "Then He [God] said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel." As we already noted, this is a spiritual vision concerning the spiritual state of God's people. Verse 11 continues, "They say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts." This is the language of the people of Israel. Perhaps we also hear that language today? "Oh, there is no good in me. There is nothing I can do. There is no way for me to be saved. The promise isn't for me." This is "Slough of Despond" thinking, wallowing along in the mire of hopelessness. These are all true statements if we honestly examine ourselves. But the Lord says to you, "You are not looking to Me; you are looking at the dry bones. You are looking in the wrong direction!"

It is as if God is saying to Ezekiel, "This is what the people are saying, but I want you to tell them something different." Look at the words in verse 12: "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." The focus here is on what God is doing. God addresses the people who are wallowing in despair and claiming that the situation is hopeless, and He promises to change the situation. They say, "We are cut off"

but God says, “I will open your graves.” God gives them hope—and He gives us hope, too.

Second, consider *God’s promise and the prophet’s responsibility*. What was Ezekiel’s duty in this passage? The sovereign Lord says three times, “Prophecy, son of man. You, the weak one, the son of man, the one who has no power, you must prophesy to these bones.” For us this means witnessing, despite our personal weakness, to those around us who are spiritually lifeless. Prophecy to the Spirit praying, “Holy Spirit come with power.” Verse 12 is God’s exhortation to prophesy to these people: to repeat the promise to them, and not just speaking to the lifeless ones who do not know the promise, but especially to His people. They need to hear the promise again when their situation seems hopeless. Repeat the promise again.

As with Ezekiel, our duty is to prophesy by speaking the authoritative Word of the Lord with boldness and clarity while having no authority in ourselves. Our duty is to speak plainly and simply the truths of Scripture with examples and illustrations, to teach it in the way and out of the way and in season and out of season, to rebuke, to correct, and to instruct. For example, how can you as a mother speak to your son who seems to be rejecting what you say about the truth? Speak with boldness and love, coupled with dependency.

In the New Testament we learn that the Spirit of God indwells all believers, giving them boldness and empowering them for witness. “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8). Witnessing begins with the Spirit, and that opens great possibilities despite our impossibility. Speak with boldness and with authority—not authority in yourself, but with humility and loving boldness *in the Spirit*.

We often fall prey to either one of two extremes in this regard. Sometimes we become bone specialists and we spend all our time examining bones: how dry they are,

how dead they are, where they belong in the skeleton. We are caretakers in the kingdom, always focusing on the problems. This is a serious danger. Then there is the other extreme, which is just as dangerous. We become physicians who create these artificial breeding machines. It is as if we try to give life to dead bones, and then say, "Look at all this life that we have created in our ministries." Both of these extremes are dangerous because both of them minimize our dependency on the Holy Spirit. They minimize our faith in the power of almighty God and His ministry through the Spirit. We should be prophets of the Lord who speak the Word with authority as the Lord's faithful witnesses.

Third and finally, let me draw your attention to *God's promise to His despondent people*. Read again the many "I wills" of the Lord. He addresses their situation in the final verses of our passage: "I will open your graves." "I... 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." The result is spiritual fellowship with the triune God: "Ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves." There is intimacy and fellowship with Christ the Lord, the covenant-keeping God. The more the Holy Spirit teaches us these things, the more He will use us in this process to teach others, and we will experience more and more this fellowship with our covenant-keeping God. "O my people...then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it."

Let us end with this trust and this hope in our gracious Lord.

