

032623 Sermon "Hear the Word of the Lord" Ezekiel 37:1-14

The story is told about a little boy who was flying a kite. It was a windy day, and the kite kept going higher and higher. Finally, it got so high that it was out of sight. A man passed by and saw the little boy holding onto the string. The man could not see the kite, and he asked the boy, "How do you even know you have a kite up there?" The boy replied, "Because I can feel it."

Although we cannot see the Holy Spirit, we should be able to sense His work in our lives changing us into the image of Christ.

After many years of rebellion and idolatry, God allowed His people, the Israelites, to be taken captive by the empire of Babylon. This was a dark and discouraging time for the Israelites. Their temple, their land, and their nation had been lost. It was during this time that God gave a vision to a prophet named Ezekiel.

Actually, Ezekiel urged the people to repent on their sins. In the past 200 years, other prophets continued to urge the people to repent. Despite all that, the Israelites were so focused on pursuing the things of the world. Then, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon invaded with his army. The city was filled with cries. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah is chained away with both of his eyes pulled out by the Babylonians. The once beautiful temple in Jerusalem has fallen. Many young people were taken as slaves. Many people were killed.

This tragedy continued for seven years and all the valleys were filled with dry bones. Ezekiel was living in captivity and he prayed earnestly to God every day for his country and his people. One day, God shows a miraculous vision to Ezekiel. The vision that Ezekiel saw was incredibly hopeful despite the current tragedy he was living in. The vision is the center of the book of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel's vision, the Spirit of the Lord took him to the middle of a valley filled with dry bones that were scattered all over the place. God spoke to Ezekiel and asked him, "Can these bones live again?" Well, Ezekiel didn't know what to say. "O Lord," he said, "only you know the answer to that."

Then God spoke to Ezekiel and said, "Speak to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord says: Look! I am going to put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you and you will come to life, then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

So Ezekiel spoke just as the Lord commanded, and as Ezekiel said the words of God's prophecy, a great rattling sound filled the valley. The bones of each body came together and connected themselves to form complete skeletons. As Ezekiel watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones, and then skin formed over the bodies. But there was no breath in them; there was no life in these bodies.

Then God commanded Ezekiel to speak a prophecy to the winds by saying, "Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies that they may live again!" As Ezekiel spoke these words, breath came into their bodies, and they all came to life. There in this valley, a vast army of living men stood before Ezekiel!

Then God explained to Ezekiel that the bones in the valley represented the people of Israel: dried up, out of hope, and out of life. Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to Israel: "O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to rise! I will bring you out of captivity and back to the land of Israel! When you return you will know that I am the Lord! I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again! You will return home to your own land!" The Lord told Ezekiel to tell the people of Israel that, when this all comes to pass, they will know that it was the Lord who caused these things to happen and that the Lord had fulfilled His word.

Charles Spurgeon was England's best-known preacher of the past 200 years, also known as the "prince of preachers." He said, "If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God's Word into our sermons; even if we paraphrase it into our own words, it must still be his Word upon which we place our reliance, for the only power which will bless men lies in that."

In 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." This tells us that if you proclaimed that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior and live a life following Christ, the Holy Spirit is living in you! However, there is a difference between the Holy Spirit in us and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Even if we believe that Jesus Christ is our Savior, we can still live a life that has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that those are called people who grieve the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:30 says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Also, the Bible says do not quench the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 says, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil."

When Jesus was on this earth, he habitually prayed. Jesus also often went to the synagogue and read the scriptures. What does that mean? 1 Timothy 4:8 "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." To be full of the Holy Spirit is not a complete phase, but instead a continuing process. Even if it were filled, if it is not being poured into, it will run out. **Therefore, we must have the desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

Dr. Paul Brand was speaking to a medical college in India on Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." In front of the lectern was an oil lamp, with its cotton wick burning from the shallow dish of oil. As he preached, the lamp ran out of oil, the wick burned dry, and the smoke made him cough. He immediately used the opportunity.

"Some of us here are like this wick," he said. "We're trying to shine for the glory of God, but we stink. That's what happens when we use ourselves as the fuel of our witness rather than the Holy Spirit. Wicks can last indefinitely, burning brightly and without irritating smoke, if the fuel, the Holy Spirit, is in constant supply."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, I pray that you will continue to be in the supply of the Holy Spirit. To do that, hear the word of God. Respect the word of God. Read the Bible. Daily. Today's Word in Ezekiel reminds us of a Psalm we know well. "He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me." Yes, it is the 23rd Psalm. God teaches us to be the true life and the good shepherd. Like David, like Ezekiel, let's depend on God, training our lives in the Word of God and in prayer and receiving daily supply of the river of living water. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you and your family, and your business, and your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.