

Ezekiel Chapter 37 v 1 - 14

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to read together now from God's Word in the Bible, and Roger has asked me if we could read from Ezekiel chapter 37. Ezekiel and chapter 37, if you have one of the church Bibles, that's page 868, and if you don't, it's another page. Okay, so Ezekiel chapter 37, beginning at verse 1, reading through to verse 14. Here is the Word of God.

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, Son of man, can these bones live? I said, Sovereign Lord, you alone know. Then he said to me, prophesy to these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.

I will attach tendons to you, and make flesh come upon you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them, and skin covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, prophesy to the breath, prophesy, Son of man, and say to it, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, come, breath from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them. They came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast army. Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the people of the Israel. They say, our bones are dried up, and our hope is gone. We are cut off. Therefore, prophesy and say to them, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, my people, I'm going to open your graves and bring you up from them. I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that

I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.

We're going to come to a time of prayer, particularly praying for the needs of our world and of our nation. Many of you will have seen again the two particular tragic events. One in Cuba, where there was an airplane that crashed. 110 people have been killed, and three are very critically injured. And then, sadly, once more in Texas, in Santa Fe, where a school was attacked by a pupil, killing 10, many, many others injured. So let's come to prayer. There's other matters too, but let us see God, the God of whom we've been reading, the God who brings life in the midst of death. And let's pray.

[4 : 2 3] Good. Well, it really is good to be here. I'm very grateful to Peter. I always feel a bit guilty that he labours away all year round, and then we all come from the Whitby Gospel Music Convention, and bless him, he vacates this place for me. But thank you, Peter. And it's a joy to be with you all again, I must say.

We've had a good weekend. I must say the guys, they're on form, aren't they? So I thought perhaps, rather than ending with a final hymn that's printed here, which is a good one, we might have another piece from them. So they're, yeah. Yeah, they've just put up their fees, which naught multiplied by a million is, anyway. So we'll listen to them at the end as they bring the service to a close. The Word of God has been preached in all sorts of places, hasn't it? It's remarkable. Of course, churches and cathedrals and synagogues and mosques. Do you know, I know somebody who has had the great privilege of preaching the gospel in a mosque, but that's a different story. Amphitheaters, sometimes on television, radio, theatres, cinema, pubs, clubs, hotels, and B&B; this morning. In the open air, of course, on the beach, in fields, in parliament, in marquees, and from boats, in aeroplanes, etc. It's not what one could go on as to where this word, this gospel has been proclaimed. But I think the most unusual place of all has to be in the Valley of Dry Bones. Here is Ezekiel, this rather maverick prophet, though I do think mavericks make the ministry. And I'm very grateful for the quirky preachers who are faithful to the Word of God. Well, Ezekiel was such a man. He was called by God by the river Chebar in Babylon to preach the Word, and that's exactly what he did. And I think we probably know that he went through some unusual experiences. He had some very challenging works to do for the Lord. He saw unusual dreams and visions, etc.

But on this occasion, this has to be special. The death of any individual is a tragedy. And it's usually the work, the process of time. And for these bones to have got into the state that they were in, that they were covering this valley, dead, dry, decaying bones, after death, another period of time must have elapsed for them to have got into this state. But it was a picture from God for Ezekiel of the state of the nation of Israel. Over centuries, idolatry, and God hates idolatry. Idolatry had set in. And always after idolatry, hot on its heel, you'll get immorality. And yes, they'd turn to immorality. I read in my quiet time this morning that a father and a son would be sleeping just with one woman in the book of Amos. Things had become very, very bad in the nation. There was a sense of self-sufficiency. There was crime. People frightened to go on the streets at night. There was false religion. The Sabbath day was no longer regarded as a holy day, but just any other day to do business and to do one's own work. They got themselves into a repulsive condition morally and spiritually. And lying all around, unburied, were the savage, the sad ravages of death, long exposed and open to all. If one looked, one could easily despair. And that would be a rational response. And to have the notion of hope when you saw all this, it would seem absurd. And yet, here comes the question to Ezekiel, can these dry bones live? God is the God of the living, yes, but he is also the God of the dead.

If I can put it like this, God is interested in the dead, the spiritually, morally dead. So Ezekiel is taken to this place, this valley of dry bones. Before him and behind him and beside him are all these dead, dry, decaying bones. And then God comes to Ezekiel and says, Son of man, Ezekiel, can these bones live? Now, what would you say? This is almighty God speaking to you.

And you look around, can these bones live? You want to say no, but it is God asking this question. But if you're about to say, well, yes, you think, no, that is ridiculous. So a true diplomat, he says, Lord, you know. I've no idea, but Lord, you know. And then God says to Ezekiel, now, I want you to preach to the bones. Now, if you can't imagine what that is like, do have a word with Peter afterwards and say, well, how does it feel sometimes to preach to what appear like dead, dry, decaying bones? He'll tell you, I'm sure. And, but anyway, Ezekiel begins to preach. He prophesies. And as he does, there's a movement and there's a rattling and bone starts to come together to bone. So how is it? The foot bone joins to the ankle bone, the ankle bone to the leg bone, the leg bone to the thigh bone, et cetera. And suddenly, there is standing all around Ezekiel, an army of skeletons. Well, what would you do? Well, he just keeps preaching. And as he preaches, yes, as he preaches, suddenly these skeletons are covered with, with tendons and muscles and skin. And now there is an army of corpses. It's almost even more scary, isn't it, than it was before. And then God speaks to him and says, Ezekiel, speak to the wind, the breath. It's the breath of God. Speak to the spirit. And Ezekiel speaks to the wind, the breath of

[10 : 32] God, the spirit. And the spirit comes and transforms that army of corpses into a mighty living army. What a dramatic vision. It's incredible. And of course, it's speaking about the nation of Israel.

But there are principles here which I think apply. Such is the power of preaching in the hands of God that it can bring new life where there was death. And such is the power of God, the Holy Spirit, that when he is at work, he can transform a valley of dry bones into a mighty living army.

Putting it the way I often think in my sharing the gospel with others, the word of God, which is what Ezekiel preached, plus the spirit of God equals new life or new birth. Well, if that is the principle on which God was governing the nation of Israel, he uses that same principle to govern all of humanity.

His arguments, his instructions in the word of God are not just for a people of one time, therefore a people of all time. Think of this nation at the beginning of the 18th century.

Drunkenness, debauchery, dishonesty. If you've ever seen Hogarth's sketch of them just reveling in a drunken stupor and even a child falling from, from suckling from a mother's breast because she's so drunk, she's so inebriated. Such was the state of our nation 300 years ago. And you think, you know, can amid such squalor and poverty and deprivation, can dry bones live? But we know what happened.

[12 : 21] God raised up an army of faithful believers. We know the name Wesley and Whitfield, but there were many others. John Nelson in Yorkshire who went round fearlessly proclaiming the word of God.

And what happened? Well, they say under Wesley, 100,000 people were converted. We often think of him, but the primitive Methodists, Hugh Bourne and what was his name?

Clowns, I've forgotten his name. But anyway, they reckon under those two, William Clowns, 180,000 people were converted. And the nation was changed. Somebody said, the revival of the 18th century saved Britain from a revolution that would have been bloodier than the French Revolution.

And then the benefit and blessing of it continued for the next century or so. But what about today? And what about not just the nation? We're burdened about our nation.

But what about individuals? We look at certain people and think, can these dry bones live? I think of a very cultured, sophisticated lady in many ways, Jane Scales.

[13 : 34] She lives in Harrogate. She grew up on a farm in Kenya. Her father was a Brit, but he was out there working and doing very, very well. She was sent to various boarding schools, to a Roman Catholic convent. In her early 20s, she became a schoolteacher in a public school. And her life revolved around belonging to the golf club, going out with well-to-do boys, the tennis club, dinners, dance, the hunt ball, bridge. And if you asked her about the things of God, there was very little interest.

She was married and divorced, married again, divorced again, beginning to feel the emptiness of life. She had no time for church, but she went to fortune tellers and psychologists.

Can these dry bones live? A woman who seems to have got everything and yet it's slit through her fingers. Very cultured, yes, and respectable, but can those dry bones live?

Or Michael Clarkson. He lives today on the Wirral. His parents were freethinkers. That means they were atheists, but not just atheists who said, yeah, we don't believe in God. They were militant atheists. They spread atheistic material. They refused for their son to go to RE lessons, the scripture lessons they would have been in those days. In school, they didn't want him to have any contact with the things of God at all. And so he grew up going through his years of school, first thinking he was an atheist, eventually coming to the conclusion, I don't know that I'm an atheist. How can you say there is no God? But I'm an agnostic.

I don't really believe that there is a God. I don't know, but no, it's not for me. He was bright. He went to Liverpool Veterinary School at the university there to study veterinary science. This bright, agnostic, and as far as the things of God concerned, ignorant young man. Can these dry bones live? Or from Liverpool itself, Keith Chambers. A big, big guy. When I met him, he sort of towered above me. He was about my weight, but that's my fault, not his. And covered with tattoos. This big, big chap. Well, what was he like? Well, he was into peddling drugs, into gun running, into violent crime, into Harley Davison's. He was a biker, and he'd got the big, big hairy beard, you know. And he went round as if he owned everything. Just a violent and vile man. Can these dry bones live? Well, what's the principle we find in Ezekiel chapter 37? It's the Word of God, plus the Spirit of God, that brings new life. So what happened to this young woman teaching in a public school? Jane finds herself one day just sitting in the school staff room, and they're just chatting, and she just happened to notice that on the table, you know, dirty cups of coffee, you can imagine the sort of scene, there was a Christian book written by a young woman called Johnny Erickson. When

[16 : 53] Johnny was 17, she had a diving accident and ended up paralysed from her neck downwards. And there was her autobiography as a fairly young woman in those days, but she looked at it and she said, oh, whose is this? And one of the other teachers said, oh, it's mine. If you want to borrow it, borrow it. So Jane took the biography of Johnny Erickson, and she read it, and she brought it back and gave it to the teacher. I found that really interesting.

You haven't got anything else like this, have you? And the teacher said, look, there's a book here I've got called The Hiding Place. It's about a family in Harlem, in Holland, who used to hide Jews in the early part of the Second World War to keep them safe from the Nazis, but then somebody turned traitor and they end up in Ravensbrück concentration. You'd enjoy, you'd enjoy the book. So Jane took away The Hiding Place, and she read and enjoyed that.

So she took it back and gave it to the teacher and said, I've really enjoyed this. Anything else? And the teacher said, look, why don't you listen to these? And she gave some recordings of an American preacher, Chuck Swindoll, and said, listen to these. I think you'd find them very, very interesting. And she did listen to several of them. And then she came to a sermon on the cross. It wasn't particularly preached to non-Christians, though here was Jane, a non-Christian, listening to it. It was preached to Christians, a meditation on the fact that Jesus Christ had come to earth to go to a cross, to die, to carry on himself our sin. Dying that we might be forgiven.

Dying that we might be reconciled to God. Dying that all that would cut us off from God might be blotted out. Dying, yes, so that he could become Lord, not only during time, but throughout all eternity. And do you know, in the privacy of her home, it seemed as though she was a million miles away from thinking about the Lord. And actually, what she'd seen in the Roman Catholic convent and one or two visits to church had put her off. But nevertheless, in the privacy of her own home, those dry, dead, decaying bones came to life. She believed. She trusted Jesus Christ. I know her.

She loves to study the Word. She loves to share her faith. Can these dry bones live? Yes. The Word of God, taken by the Spirit of God, brings new life. Well, what about Michael Clarkson? So he goes up to university. And in the early weeks of university, the Christian Union was putting on a series of events. And one of them was called the Impossibility of Agnosticism. And I thought, that's an interesting title because I'm an agnostic and I don't think it's impossible. I think I'll go along and hear this.

[19 : 41] So he goes, sits with a crowd of students and a guy stands up to speak. And he speaks about agnosticism and how God has revealed himself and how we can come to know God. But nothing convinces Michael Clarkson except, at the very end, the speaker says, I have here a booklet which I'd like to give you. If you will take it and read it with an open mind, I guarantee you will be converted to Christ. That's what he said. So Michael Clarkson thought, I don't think so. But anyway, he went up and he said, can I have one of those booklets please? And the booklet was entitled The Gospel of John. He thought it was a bit of the Bible. But he said he'd take it and read it. So that's what he did. 21 chapters. How long does it take for a young man to read 21 chapters when he's got a sharp brain? Not that long. But before he got to the end of John's Gospel, he knelt down and he asked Jesus Christ to become his Lord and Saviour. And he was transformed.

For many years he was a professor of veterinary parasitology at Liverpool University. A brilliant, brilliant man. But more important than that, do you know, he had the great joy of leading both his atheistic father and mother to Jesus Christ. Some time ago I was preaching over there and his last grandson professed to trust the Lord at one of the meetings and Michael said to me, I can die happy now. Can these dry bones live? God took the Word of God, John's Gospel, and by the Spirit of God applied it to his heart and he was changed. Well what about Keith Chambers?

I'm sure you can guess how it's going to work out. But how did it work out? So one day this big guy finds himself in Stoke and Trent at a biker's rally. And he's queuing up with a friend of his for a cup of tea, PG Tips. And he's had a caravan. Well it wasn't property, I know it wasn't Yorkshire tea, but it's PG Tips. And he's queuing up and you know it's daylight robbery. It's a few years ago now, perhaps 15 years ago. It's £1.50. Dear me, £1.50 for a cup of tea. Mind you, in Whitby you can get a drop of tea for that, but that's a different matter. Talk about being fleet. Anyway, we won't go down.

And he queues up and he said, that's a lot of money for a cup of tea. And a guy in front of him turns around and says, well if you want a cheap one, there's Holy Joe's Cafe down there, you get a cup of tea for 50p and a piece of cake. Well he wasn't a Yorkshireman, but it appealed to him nevertheless. And it was run by the Christian Bikers Association or whatever they call it. Anyway, he got his 50p cup of tea and his cake and they talked to him a bit about Jesus. He wasn't really interested except they said, there's a book here, it's called the Biker's Bible. And it's the New Testament, but he's got some testimonies of various bikers who become Christians. You can have one if you want. And he desperately wanted it. The trouble was, he was with a mate and he felt too proud to ask for it in front of his mate who might just mock him. So he said, no, no, not for me, thanks. And he walked away thinking, I wish I'd had it. Anyway, the next day he had to go to his motorcycle mechanic. And they got talking and found out they'd both been down to the rally in Stoke-on-Trent. And the mechanic said, oh they gave me one of these, pointing to the Biker's New Testament. If you want it, you can have it because I don't want it. And do you know, he took it and listened to this. That very night, that very night, he trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour in his little bedsit, having read Luke's Gospel.

And he came to the point where Luke describes the crucifixion and he realised, he did this for me. And he prayed and asked Christ to be his Lord and Saviour. Within a week, he hadn't met any Christians yet. Within a week, he said, I got rid of the Harley. He said, I couldn't keep it because I'd bought it on immoral earnings and I knew I couldn't keep it. And he said, all I've got now is a Triumph 200. He wasn't that impressed. But transformed, the Word of God taken by the Spirit of God and it brings new birth. It brings new life. Now we look at our nation. Can these dry, dead, almost gone now, bones live? The nation seems to be a nation that is dead and trespasses and sin. There are signs of death and decay and corruption everywhere. Morally, spiritually, we're in a wretched state, aren't we? Can these dry bones live? I wouldn't do what I'm doing now. I wouldn't speak to you now if I did not believe that if we can get out the Word of God and through prayer, pray that the Spirit of God would take hold of the Word of God, people could be converted. If God could change this nation 300 years ago, could He not do it today? But He'll do it by the same means. Preaching, proclaiming, witnessing to the Word of God faithfully. Not compromising every time there's a new law passed in our nation, thinking, oh, I will just change what the Scripture says to suit this law. No, no, no. Just faithfully proclaiming the Word of God and praying that God would use it to win precious people to the Lord Jesus Christ. But I don't want to speak to a nation because a nation's not listening to me. But I do want to speak to you. The Word of God makes it very clear that all of us are in a desperate state spiritually, dead to God. It doesn't mean annihilated, but we're cut off from Him.

[25 : 32] And yet, this same God has spoken about the time when He would come and then did come and now has come into our world with the express mission of going to a cross to die the death that should be ours.

He took on Himself our separation. In those hours of suffering on the cross, a deep darkness, a tangible darkness, descended on the face of the earth. And Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And God had forsaken His darling Son, forsaken by God so that we might be forgiven and never forsaken by God. And when Jesus was paying for our sin, He died so that everything which cuts us off from Him could be forgiven. And when He rose from the dead, He rose and ascended and then sent His Holy Spirit. God Himself can come and live in our lives. Yes, it's the risen Jesus, but the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. And do you know He gives us new hearts, new desires. Old things pass away, all things become new. A new love for God, a new love for prayer, a new love for the Scripture, a new love to be with God's people, to sing His praise, a new love for Him. And every Christian is looking forward to the moment that one day we'll be with Him.

The Bible often speaks about heaven in negative terms, that you know there'll be no sin, no suffering, no sorrow, no sickness, no disease, no death, no separation. Every tear shall be wiped away. But do you know for the Christian, yes, those are important, but to be with Jesus.

God Himself, who loved me and gave Himself for me, who's been the most faithful friend, who's stuck with me through good and bad times, to be with Him, without any sort of temptation or taint of sin, spoiling our relationship, just to be with Him. Do you know if eternity was simply gazing on Jesus, it would be wonderful. But it's more than that. It's serving Him, it's working for Him.

Yesterday I, I'm not sure how I did it, but I did get up the 199 steps. They do need to put a defibrillator on every 10 steps. They mark the numbers, but come on. Anyway, but do you know, I don't know if you've been up there recently, you get up there and the first gravestone, you see, staring you in the face when you get to the top of those stairs. The first gravestone, it's totally weather-beaten, so I've no idea who it is. But you just see the last two or three lines. She had a happiness in Jesus that the world cannot give. Isn't that lovely? And every Christian feels like that. I know Him. I love Him. But I love Him because He first loved me.

[28 : 36] You may this morning be a long way from God, I don't know. But I'll tell you this, if you would consider this word, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that He died and rose from the dead. And if you will allow God Himself to take hold of that word and really apply it to your heart, you'll find the word of God plus the Spirit of God will give new life. Every Christian says, I was dead in trespasses and sin, but God made me alive. And I'm part of a mighty, living army of God's people. By grace we've been saved through faith. It's not of ourselves, it's the gift of God.

Not of works, because we'd boast if it was by works. But it's Him pointing us to the word of what He's done and then working in our hearts and us responding and saying, yes, Lord Jesus. Out of my, what is it, darkness, sorrow, night, Jesus, I come. Have you ever come to Christ like that?

Have you asked Him to forgive you, to live within you? Have you asked Him to give you new life? And if not, I would beg you this morning to call out on the name of the Lord and be saved.

Can these dry bones live? Yes, through the word of God and the Spirit of God. And you can become alive to Him this very morning if you'll call out to Him in repentance and faith. We're going to have a song from the guys and then I'm going to close in prayer. A prayer you could pray this morning if you would ask Jesus Christ to make you alive, to bring you to know God, to forgive you and become your Lord and Savior. But first of all, gentlemen. Life would be hopeless.

Life would be hopeless. Without Him I could do nothing. Without Him I'd show you.

[30 : 54] do nothing without him I'd surely fail without him I would be drifting like a ship like a ship without a sail Jesus oh Jesus do you know him today please don't turn him away oh Jesus without him how lost I would be without him I would be dying without him I'd be enslaved without him life would be worthless but with Jesus thank God I'm safe

Jesus oh Jesus do you know him today please don't turn him away oh Jesus oh Jesus without him without him how lost I would be Jesus oh Jesus do you know him today please don't turn him away oh Jesus without him how lost I would be without him how lost I would be without him without him how lost I would be without him do come along but look if this morning you've never truly trusted Christ

I'm going to pray a prayer which could be your equivalent but much more important than and uh... and uh... calling on the name of the Lord to be saved impacts one's whole eternity we don't deserve heaven all of us deserve hell but there is forgiveness and new life when we repent and believe if you'll pray with me this morning just echo these words personalize them make them your own not out loud but in your heart and I'd love you to do just one other thing if I may I'll be at the door I'll be giving out some leaflets to everybody I you know he who doesn't use propaganda is a proper goose so I'll be giving out something to people but if you prayed with me would you just write down your name as long as you're over 18 your name and postal address and just give it to me and I'll write to you this week and I'll send you a little pack of information to help you to start to go on and grow as a Christian I won't come and knock on your door I'm not going to write lots of letters to you just get this one letter from me with some helpful tips about maturing growing becoming strong in Christ but if you've never prayed to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Saviour

I urge you to do so now as we pray together I'll pray slowly and deliberately so that you can make this prayer your own Dear God You know everything there is to know about me so I want to say I am sorry for my sin and rebellion with your help I want to turn from it I do believe Jesus died for me and rose from the dead please forgive me become my Lord and Saviour and help me from now on to follow you Thank you for hearing this prayer which I pray in Jesus name Amen and Father we do thank you for our time together thank you for Peter we pray that his pastoral work would continue to be fruitful and blessed and that there'd be the joy of people coming to saving faith in Christ here in Whitby and then going on and growing thank you for the new dawn and we thank you for their ministry bless and use them not only here when they travel back to Northern Ireland as well we bless you for them but Lord you know all our needs as well and so we commit ourselves and those whom we love wherever they are we commit ourselves into your tender loving care go before us and help us to walk worthy of the high calling with which you've called us for we pray in Jesus name

Amen