Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

**Introduction**

The Bible is full of prophets who have visions. Most of these come directly from God, by which I mean God has something original to say. Like in Acts 10 when Peter sees the tablecloth full of non-kosher delights come down and is told to eat. The message of that vision is rather direct, even if it takes Peter a but to accept it. Ezekiel is a book full of such visions. It opens with the wheel in the sky. Every UFO person’s favorite passage. Although Ezekiel doesn’t think he’s seeing aliens, just the Heavenly Throne on the move. Zeke will see the shekinah – the Glory of God that filled the first temple – rise up and leave that temple stage by stage. Likewise the end of Ezekiel are three visions of a new temple. Interpreting the visions is at the same time really easy. It is hard to miss the import of the glory of God leaving the temple. But it is also really hard. Who are they intended for? What are there limits? The visions assume familiarity with the covenants and what God has said before. If you are picking up Ezekiel to read, please do not hesitate to send me a text or email. And I don’t exclude myself from that counsel. The time I taught the book of Ezekiel I had three commentaries on the desk at all times. Usually open.

**Text**

But the Field of Dry Bones is somewhat unique. I usually say the God doesn’t like to answer questions directly, and almost never answers “why?” questions. I think for a lot of people that might be the leap of faith moment. God tends to reveal himself – whether in Word or in the person of Jesus. He is the initiator, and ours is the response. Do we believe, or do we doubt? But the vision of dry bones is God responding.

You have to get to the end of it, to understand that. “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold – more colloquially – look here, they say, ‘our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.’” The vision is God answering the common felt position of all Israel. And it is probably best to take this as a summary at the time Exile. Babylon has won. They have crushed Jerusalem. They have torn down the temple. They have deported the last heir of David who lives in captivity at the whim of the Babylonians. Feel free to read some of Daniel into this. They are being tempted by the ways of Babylon. Most bow down to the idols. Better than the fiery furnace. This is the end of Israel. Which the poetic amongst them talk about this continued after-existence as bones having been cut off from the living body. How do you worship Yahweh without the temple? How is the covenant still real without an heir of David? How living in the midst of the idols of the world do we live?

Even Jesus would say things like, “When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. (Matt. 16:2-3)” And what he meant was of course we can interpret the signs. His point when he said that was that the Pharisees and Priests had seen all the signs that Jesus did. They knew who he was. They just didn’t want to see it. It’s too scary. It demands change. It is easier complaining about being cut off, about being dry bones. God did this. It’s his fault. And now we are hopeless.

**Christology**

And this is God’s response to that type of complaint or lament. Recognizing it is fine. “These bones are the whole house of Israel.” But these bones are the working of the Lord. And this is the LORD who works by death and resurrection. Prophesy to them, say to them, “Thus says the LORD GOD. Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, oh my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.”

Yes, you live among the Idols of the World. Yes, the glory of the old order might have departed, but the covenant still stands. And you will know that I AM. You need not worship on this mountain or that mountain, but in Spirit and Truth. For that is what the LORD God seeks. Those who fear him who worship HIm in Spirit and Truth.

We shall know this when I open your graves. Which He has done. Jesus lives, death’s reign is done. We shall know this when I put my Spirit within you. Which he has done. Pentecost is real. You have been baptized and sealed with the Spirit that abides. You shall know that I AM the LORD. And we should. We can see the signs.

**Moral**

But there is a very important point is how God gives this vision to Ezekiel. God asks, “Son of Man, can these bones live?” And Ezekiel’s response is the less than sure “O Lord God, you know.” Which gets to the deeper part of that question. What does it mean to live? From where is our life?

And God tells Ezekiel “prophesy to the bones, say to them, you dry bones, here the Word of the Lord.” And as he does this the bones come together. God’s Word is action. When he says it, things happen. Like sinews and flesh and skin to cover. “But there was no breath in them.”

When we go to God with laments like dry bones, this is so often exactly what we envision. God, stich us back together just like we were. We remember the life of earlier times. We remember full houses and joyous songs. We remember the pomp and circumstance and how it made us feel. Put all of that back on as muscles that have atrophied, and sinews that have snapped and skin that looks attractive. Remake that. “But there was no breath in them.” The life is not in what we think. Those things are the outward signs of life. But they are not the living breathing life itself. We know, we’ve seen places that look heathly but are white washed tombs. That have no breath in them. The world blows and they immediately go in the direct the world blows. Being cast about by every wind of change.

The God of death and resurrection want us to know that we do not live by bread alone. The life is in the Spirit. “Son of Man, prophesy to the breath, prophesy…breath on these slain.” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived. Take not your Holy Spirit from me, but restore until the joy of your salvation. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right Spirit within me. Don’t just recreate that zombie that has no life. But Breath from the four winds. Hear the Word of the Lord and life again. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Should we not be cut off and dry we must seek that Spirit and that breath.

**Eschatological**

Those who live, those who are resurrected by the Spirit here are called an exceedingly great army. And I think the martial image is warranted. Because God would tell them to settle, build houses, pray for the peace of the city, because you are going to be there. God resurrects his Israel in the midst of the world. And she is surrounded and tempted by all the same idols. God does his work if front of everyone. So that nobody has an excuse. The life is not it us, it is from God. And He will call his people.

And his people are not hopeless but are the very people of hope. Because you God lives. And he calls forth and calls you to live. And he places his Spirit in you. And he promises “I will place you in your own land.” Today, we live in the midst of this old world. We are called to be that army. Contending with Satan, the world and even our own flesh. Today we are called to garrison an embattled beachhead of the Kingdom. Something that always looks like it will be pushed back into the sea.

But even the sea will one day give up the bones of it’s dead. Tomorrow, “I will place you in your own land.” Tomorrow no longer an army militant, but one triumphant. In a new heaven and a new earth. Christ reigns. He sits at the right hand. “I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Then you shall know that I am the LORD. Today, we live by faith. Tomorrow, we shall know. Amen.