

"Ezekiel: Spiritual Rebirth" **Ezekiel 37:1-14**

Introduction

One of the most serious symptoms of corona infections is a decrease in the level of oxygen in the blood. It is not obvious from the outside. If you don't have enough oxygen, your body may be suffering, but even you don't notice it. This is why people are increasingly purchasing pulse oximeters to measure oxygen levels. The pulse oximeter is easy to use because it can be measured by inserting it over the fingertips. It is said to be a Nobel Prize winning invention. (Mr. Takuo Aoyagi, who actually invented it, was nominated for the Nobel Prize.)

What is the state of our faith and spiritual health? It's hard to know, just as it's hard to know the oxygen saturation level in our blood. Today we are going to focus on the prophet Ezekiel. I would like to focus on chapter 37 in particular, and consider our spiritual regeneration and health. It is the work of the Holy Spirit by God's grace, so it doesn't matter what condition we find ourselves in. We can breathe again, be renewed, and be regenerated.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2 And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." 4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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 may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. 11 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 is lost; we are indeed cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. 14 And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD." I Will Be Their God; They Shall Be My People

It's a startling Bible passage, an amazing vision! First, we too can lose our spiritual health like a dried up bone. If we turn away from God, we will become spiritually dead and our

soul will dry up. Secondly, even if you are like a dry bone, you can be resurrected by the Word and the Holy Spirit to live a new life. Thirdly, let's look at the life and walk of the new man who has been resurrected. As the whole book of Ezekiel tells us, he will live in hope "here and now" in anticipation of the coming city of God.

Ezekiel the Prophet

Ezekiel was a priest who was called to be a prophet at the age of 30. His name means "God will strengthen" in Hebrew, and the name itself is prophetic. He was actually taken into captivity in Babylon in 597 BC, the same year that King Jehoiachin was taken into captivity. The news of the complete collapse of Jerusalem and the Temple was heard in Babylon, where he was taken captive. He warned the people of impending doom, called them to repentance, and spoke words of restoration, comfort, and hope for the future to those suffering in captivity.

Ezekiel was about the same age or was born a little later than the prophet Jeremiah we saw last week. Jeremiah was not taken into captivity, but stayed in Jerusalem and prophesied among the people who were left behind. Ezekiel, on the other hand, was taken captive in Babylon and spoke the word of God to those who were forced to leave their homeland.

In other words, God continued to send prophets to care for those left behind in Jerusalem and the captives in Babylon. The temple represents the presence of God. However, even when the temple collapses, and even when God's followers are in a foreign land, God is present, alive, and doing His work. Eventually, restoration and hope will come.

Ezekiel is a very unique prophet. He received God's revelation through many visions and delivered his message through strange performances.

The presence and glory of God appears with four human-like winged creatures (cherubim) (chapters 1, 10). We are taken to the temple in Jerusalem in virtual reality and shown idols (chapter 8). The prophecies of the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple are also described in a vision as Ezekiel was taken to Jerusalem (chapters 40-48).

At one point he even prophesied with his own body: for 490 days he laid down on his left side, and for 40 days he laid down on his right side (chapter 4). The pain and suffering must have been great. He ate a scroll. They ate the scrolls! (Chapter 3), shaved their hair and beards, burned them, and scattered them to the wind (Chapter 5). They also shaved their hair and beards, burned them, and scattered them to the wind (chapter 5). These represent the sins and judgments of the Jews. The performance of carrying their household goods on their backs and cutting holes in the wall to pass through is a prophecy of captivity (chapter 12).

1. Dry Bones: Spiritual Death

Now, in chapter 37, a vision of dried bones is prophesied. The first thing this vision shows is the desperation of those who disobeyed God and were destroyed and taken captive to Babylon. It shows the spiritual coma of the people who were completely exhausted by the invasion, massacre, defeat, destruction, and captivity. They are in the depths of irreversible despair (death) that is beyond their control and can never be reversed.

"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 is lost; we are indeed cut off."'" (Ezek. 37:11)

My brothers and sisters, today's Word confronts us with spiritual death. Aren't you like a dried up bone? And, the prophets say that captive Israel is in a state of spiritual death. The apostle Paul even says that everyone who is in sin, apart from God, is dead.

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--" (Eph. 2:1,2)

Why do we end up like dried up bones? First, because you do not listen to God's word, ponder it, and apply it deeply to your heart and life. Just as you would die if you didn't eat, if you don't listen to God's word, ponder it, and pray it, your soul will starve and dry up. Second, if you don't humble yourself, admit your sins and repent, you will die a spiritual death. If you become proud like Israel who said they were fine and at peace, and you do not change your mind to follow God, your soul will lose its vitality.

And thirdly, if you keep trying to fill yourself with something other than God, without God, you will lose spiritual health, true happiness and deep inner joy. Because if you try to fill yourself with other alternatives when only God can give you true happiness, you will never succeed. You will be weak, exhausted, and finally defeated.

Fourthly, we can cover up their spiritual condition with their words and behavior. We can even deceive ourselves. We think we are healthy Christians because we worship, read the Bible, serve, and lead. But the truth is that we are spiritually dried up and separated from God. So today I would like to ask you to evaluate your own spiritual health.

2. Spiritual rebirth

And no matter how spiritually dead you are, God can make you new. There is hope for regeneration and healing. Israel will be given a new heart and will be restored as God's people.

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy 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, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'" (Ezek. 37:4-6)

When the word of God is preached and God breathes (spirit), the soul comes alive. It begins to trust God and start a new life. The key is prophecy, or hearing the word of God, and receiving the breath (spirit) that God sends. The key word is "breath". In the Old Testament, "breath", "spirit" and "wind" are all expressed in the same Hebrew word "ruach". Therefore, it has traditionally been interpreted to indicate the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating people.

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy 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 breath on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army." (Ezek. 37:9,10)

When the whole world was created by God, the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) covered the whole earth like a hen protecting her chicks (Genesis 1:2). When God created man, He breathed into him the breath of life (Spirit). The Psalmist says that when God sends His Spirit, man is created. Genesis 2:7, Psalm 104:30.

"Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Gen. 2:7)

"When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." (Psalm 104:30)

Ezekiel's special emphasis is on the renewal of our hearts and lives by the Holy Spirit, who works the power by which God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible also alludes to the resurrection of the dead, but the primary meaning is that God's Holy Spirit will remake our desperate hearts and lives, which are on the verge of spiritual death.

The writer Hiroyuki Itsuki said something interesting. He said, "In Japan, where there is no God, there is no last resort, no matter how lonely you become. There is no concept that God is the only one who will not abandon you. In the West, God has the role of 'the one who loves us no matter who abandons us.' In Japan, there is no monotheistic God as an absolute deity, so we have to live a life without God, so to speak. Perhaps the depression of people in Christian cultures is different from the depression of a godless people.

When you are spiritually regenerated, you begin to have a new sense of life. This is because we walk with a sense of security that is protected by a God of forgiveness and restoration, an identity as God's people, and a worldview that lives by God's plan. Jesus also compared spiritual rebirth to the wind, and at the time of his resurrection, he breathed on his disciples and said, "I am the wind that blows.

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when we had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:21,22)

Now God will accomplish among us through Jesus Christ what Ezekiel prophesied. Receive the Holy Spirit that God is breathing on you.

3. Regenerated Life

By the way, for what purpose is our life spiritually regenerated? The rebuilding of Israel was prophesied for the captive people. They would return to the Promised Land and the nation would be restored. Don't we need hope of healing and restoration, not only for the Corona disaster, but also for those of us today who are surrounded by various hardships?

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord." (Ezekiel 37:14)

When the captives are released and return to their homeland, they will testify to the grace and truth of what God has done. Then the world will know the holiness of the Lord's name. In this way, God uses us, who have been renewed by the gospel of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to manifest the splendor of the Lord. It makes life worth living and joyful.

Notice that the work is not done individually, but through a group (community) that has

been transformed by the Spirit of God. When the dried up bones were brought back to life, it was a "very large group". In this way, you and I can be used as the Kingdom of God, the family of God, and the community of Christ.

Ezekiel's prophecy resonates with the last book of the Bible, Revelation. Just as Ezekiel had a vision of God's glory with four strange man-like creatures, so do they appear in Revelation. Just as the battle between Magog and Gog and God's judgment is described after the prophecy of Israel's restoration in chapter 37 (chapters 38-39), so too is the battle and judgment of Gog and Magog prophesied as the final battle in Revelation 20. Revelation 20 prophesies the final battle between Gog and Magog. This shows the spiritual battles and trials that God's people will have to go through, and the hope of deliverance from them.

The book of Ezekiel, chapters 40-48, contains a plan of the rebuilt temple and a blueprint of the new city of Jerusalem. It is reminiscent of the description of the completed Kingdom of God prophesied in Revelation 21-22.

"The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There." (Ezek. 48:35)

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." (Revelation 21:10,11)

God has a wonderful drama of salvation in store for you. Your suffering will not be in vain, and even though you will pass through spiritual death, it will not be the end. The story of God's real and present work in our world is clearly revealed by the prophets (in the Bible).

This month we are emphasizing our Community Groups. The groups are a close community of regenerated people studying God's word, experiencing the gospel, encouraging each other's lives, praying for each other, and serving for the manifestation of the glory of the Lord's name. Everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike, needs such a community.

The Holy Spirit is renewing our personal lives. The Holy Spirit is restoring our troubled communities and transforming them to be filled with the love and righteousness of Christ.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father. Lord, ruler of the world. We praise your holy name and glory. We have died spiritually apart from You, and we often live unhealthy lives through sin. Forgive us, for we repent now and turn to Christ. Fill my thirsty soul like a dry bone with the Holy Spirit. Lead us by Your Word to walk in faith in You. Unite us in love and make us a community of Christ. May we witness to the excellence of the gospel and proclaim the drama of God's salvation to this world. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.