

What is The Lord speaking to the church? It's an exciting yet fearful time and we're ready to get back to the old routine – of work, home, school, shopping, church, friends. More and more people are waking up to a new normal and finding a new pace. This pandemic is the first crisis in 80 years that is captioned with the word "world." We had WW2 in 1939-1945, WW1 in 1914-18, and the Spanish Flu in 1918-1920.

There is another world event that was the greatest history changer ever. John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus. John proclaimed Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, when troubles came to John's life – when he was put in prison and separated - he began to doubt what he had been sure of. So he sends word to Jesus, "Are you the Expected One?" Jesus told the disciples to answer with what they see and hear. **Matthew 11:2-6** *The blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.* John was perplexed and questioned Him because God wasn't doing what they thought He would...but the world would never be the same. Today is a world-altering event. When these remarkable changes take place that seem so out of all control, then the wise turn to Almighty God and ask for wisdom! We stop and pray for wisdom.

Prayer: We come to You and to Your throne, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. You declare that if we need wisdom that we ask – so we ask You now. We don't understand all the details but we ask for Your wisdom for Your church, for Your representatives – for wisdom to know about these times and to know what the Church would do. Be our teacher! Amen!

Ezekiel 37 is the story of the valley of dry bones. The problem was the destitute, the dead (the dry bones), and a promise from God of restoration that went beyond the past and beyond what anyone could hope or dream of. The children of Israel had been taken into captivity out of Israel – were made slaves and even executed. Israel was vacant. Life as they had known it was over. The vision in **Ezekiel 37** was a prophetic picture of what had happened and what God intended for the future.

The prophet Ezekiel was instructed to walk through this valley of bones – a scene of deep bones, carnage, death, and lost dreams. Then God asks in **verse 3**, *He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."* Ezekiel didn't want to second-guess but had a response of faith, having knowledge from God yet not assuming anything but the very best... *"Lord, You know."*

God presents the prophet with a problem – a problem not to be solved by man's ingenuity, science, hard work, or money. God didn't ask Ezekiel whether He could do it or if he knew if God could do it but God asked if it could happen – could dry bones come back to life? This is beyond resurrection – it's a reordering of life.

As we look forward in these times to the other side of the virus, God is calling His church to look beyond that to see a greater calling to the church. It is not just about hoping for a solution and washing hands. God is at work in these times. God's best work is creative – causing something to come out of nothing and renewing what is worn out. We need it today!

Ezekiel 37:4 God tells Ezekiel that he will be God's voice and will command the miracle. God is coming to the church of Jesus Christ today, with all of our activities, and calling us to speak the Word of God to this world and declare what God is saying – it's the one thing we can do. Ezekiel would be God's voice. Today, the church is to be God's voice – speaking of the love of God, of God's peace, and of Jesus' resurrection.

Soon we will celebrate Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit. This didn't happen as a point in history but recognize it was for right now. Jesus rose from the dead and He sent His Holy Spirit to breathe on us and to give us power in this world.

Verse 7-8 *So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.*

Ezekiel was to speak over these bones and he did. How terrifying to see...scattered bones shaking, skin coming on these dry bones, muscle and flesh start growing. Yet, Ezekiel didn't hide and neither did the people of God.

In the early church, death and persecution were known to be the result of a decision to follow Christ. Over and over, Christians refused to back down but spoke prophetically that Jesus was alive, that His Word was true, and that His Spirit would empower them to go through even the worst. Examples of great persecution: Julian stuffed into a bag with snakes; 2 men taken as prisoners, feet pierced and dragged through the streets; Agatha scourged, burned w/ irons, beat w/ hooks, laid on glass and hot coals to die; Theodora imprisoned for refusing to sacrifice; a Bishop tortured, whipped, boiled alive. The church does not make alliances with the world in times of disaster. The church is to be the prophetic voice of the Lord going forward – to proclaim where real life is.

Verse 8-10 *...but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, "Prophesy 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 come to life.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.* "Breath" in Hebrew means both breath and spirit. Insert the word "Spirit" for the word "breath." *There was no Spirit in them.* God is much more interested in breathing His Spirit in than breathing just breath. God's Word still brings life and His Spirit empowers us to come together as the Church of Jesus Christ.

Worldwide events bring about worldwide change. Worldwide disasters change the order of life. When the world asks what will happen? Quote Ezekiel and say, *Lord, You know.* I don't. We don't know, but we understand that God is at work and He has called His church to be His messengers in this time of disaster. Are we willing to be an Ezekiel in a valley of dry bones in the days ahead? In this story, there is God, Ezekiel and another player – the dry bones. The dry bones came back together as soldiers in the kingdom of God. **Verse 10** *An exceedingly great army.*

Where do we find ourselves? The dry bones need life. God is offering life and restoration, healing, forgiveness. God's best words are restorative – taking what is broken and useless and bringing it back to its original intent. God's best work is creative – bringing new life – breathing His Spirit into the dead to bring life. Jesus came to give life.

Romans 10:9 *that if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Confess with your mouth means to have it in your mind. *Believe in your heart* is the emotional part allowing that truth to resonate in your heart. *You will be saved* means that God will breathe His Spirit into you and you will be born again.

*Confess with your mouth. *Believe in your heart. *Jesus will breathe His Spirit into your life.

No matter what happens today, this world is just a drop in the bucket of all eternity. There is so much more for us. His promise is to be saved from our sins, from guilt, from the lies of the enemy, from shame, and to be made into a child of the King and to have an eternity in Heaven.

Prayer for 'You will be saved'... ***Dear Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. I believe that on that cross You took my guilt, my sin, and my shame and You died for it. You faced hell for me, so I wouldn't have to. And You rose again to give me a place in Heaven, a purpose on Earth, and a relationship with Your Father. Today, Lord Jesus, I turn from my sins to be born again. And now, God is my father, Jesus is my Savior, The Holy Spirit is my helper. And Heaven is my home. Amen.***

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1. What is surprising in the valley of dry bones?
 2. Do you know of other early church lives being persecuted? Can you even relate to them? What are examples of persecution today?
 3. Name one or two circumstances of your life that you can insert the prayer, "Lord, You know. I don't."