

# (Becoming a Prophetic Church) 4. Resurrection of Dry Bones

by Art Katz

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*The sermon emphasizes the need for Israel's restoration through a supernatural work, highlighting God's sovereignty and the church's role in moving Israel to jealousy and extending mercy.*

**Duration:** 1:15:09

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 37:1

**Topics:** "Dry Bones"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses dissatisfaction with their own presentation and emphasizes the need for personal investment in the words of God. They discuss the significance of Israel's restoration and how it relates to the nations. The speaker highlights the mystery and ultimate importance of this restoration, which involves the death and resurrection of Israel as a model for the world. They emphasize that God is the author of this predicament and that Israel's restoration is not based on their deserving, but on God's mercy and the central principle of reality, the life of God.

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## Transcript

that you would give him the tongue of a pen of a ready writer and you would fill him with joy in the name of Jesus, amen. Wow, good morning saints. Well there's a text that we must not ignore that requires to be expounded by a speaker who is beside himself for your sake and for his sake.

The text requires that and that text is Ezekiel chapter 37, the Valley of Dry Bones. A classical text, rich and potent, mighty in meaning and it requires that kind of lavish exposition that only the Spirit of God can give. It can never be clinical or dry and in fact probably no two speakings about it or from it would ever be the same.

But there's no way to consider the subject of Israel and circumvent this text. So I want to read again from my seminary Bible, Ezekiel 37, the hand of the Lord came upon me and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst or the middle of a valley. It was full of bones.

He led me all around them. There were very many lying in the valley and they were very dry. He said to me, son of man, can these bones live? I answered, oh Lord God, you know.

Then he said to me, prophesy to these bones and say to them, oh dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones, I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live. I will lay sinners on you and I will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you and you shall live and then you shall know that I am the Lord.

So I prophesied as I had been commanded and as I prophesied suddenly there was a noise, a rattling and the bones came together bone to bone. I looked and there were sinners on them and flesh had come upon them and skin had 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 the breath, thus says the Lord God, come from the four winds or breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live.

I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them and they lived and they stood on their feet a vast multitude and then he said to me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They themselves say, our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are cut off completely.

Therefore prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God, I'm going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, oh my people and I will bring you back to the land of Israel and you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, oh my people. I will put my spirit within you and you shall live and I will place you on your own soil. Then you shall know that I the Lord God, I the Lord have spoken and will act, says the Lord.

Amen. So precious God breathe upon these bones and upon your congregation. That expression, my God of the spirit of life that enables us even to consider a text as potent as this and draw out from it, my God, what you will and sink it deep into our hearing and into our foundations, into our whole understanding of the mystery of Israel, the church, the last days, all those things that are intrinsic to the comprehension of the church that is called not merely to observe, but to be not merely to participate, but to be the agent of this restoration as the son of man, a prophet, prophetic company that can be commanded.

So we thank you and give you praise, my God, come and open this remarkable text in the way that it pleases you this morning and receive now our gratitude for the privilege of it, Lord, in Jesus name. Amen. Well, certain preliminary observations that this, that God is the causative agent exclusively and that the situation is so bereft of any hope from man that even the prophet himself must stagger.

When God raises the question, can these bones live that Israel is reduced to such a place that there's no prospect, whatever of recovery from any source other than God himself. And that's why the reiteration of the phrase, I will, I will, I will, I will raise you up out of your grave. I will put my spirit, I will bring you into the land.

So we mustn't lose note that this takes place outside the land. And in fact, we're told that these are the slain in the nations and then a resurrection and then a return to the land. So evidently, this is a little conflict with the usual assumption that the state of Israel is already the dry bones coming together.

And it's more a progressive work. And that subsequently flesh will be added. And then finally the spirit and Israel will be the hope for prophetic fulfillment.

But this is a much more apocalyptic scenario. This implies violence and devastation. This implies expulsion.

This implies that the profound act of God toward Israel is not in the land but outside it and in the nations. And then the return after the remarkable supernatural work on a nation that has been reduced to the total finality of death and death in so uttermost a form that it becomes dry bones. Well, I'm fanatical enough in times past when I've spoken from this text, I used to carry a bone with me and circulate it as I'm speaking, starting with the first one in the first row and they would hand it on and go through the usually small congregations.

And by the time it finished passing from hand to hand, there's hardly anything left of the bone because it turns to dust even in your hands. Dry bones, they granulate, they dissolve in powder. And so I just wanted to impact the congregation that when God says dry, he really means dry.

And that there is every reason to reduce Israel to that condition. Because Israel is a metaphor. Israel is the quintessence of man in his own hope, in his own prowess, in his own ability, in his own sap, his own juice to perform it, to establish his own destiny, his own will.

We are the personification of man, man in his own excellence, in his own ability. And therefore, for that reason and an instruction to the world, God has got to take the witness nation and reduce it until it is incapable of anything in itself. What a remarkable contrast to the establishment of the present state of Israel, which though it took place under the, what's the word, I always forget it, the oversight of God, the providence.

Who said that? Oh, praise the Lord. Under the providence of God is not the same as the explicit will that pertains to Israel's final restoration. It's a providence, it's an approval, it's a necessary step toward that fulfillment, but it is not the thing in itself.

So it doesn't take place despite God or when his back is turned, it is serving his purposes, but it is largely the work of man himself. Human prowess, Zionist ability, Jewish finance, political connections, and the fortunes of history and time that God himself breathes upon to establish it, not that it should succeed or even survive, but to set in motion the process of consternation and aggravation on the part of neighbors and other nations that finally reaches a crescendo of violence, of expulsion that brings the whole house of Israel into its graves. So this is a remarkable text that has components and suggestions of that which is literal, that which is metaphoric, that is allegorical, that is symbolic, and it's a whole remarkable composition that we need to thread our way through and unfold.

But we must take note that these are the whole house of Israel and that they are slain and that they are in their graves, implying a violence against Jews worldwide and in the nations from which they must be raised by the action of God himself, and that he would employ an agent called the Son of Man is something that needs to occupy our attention because I take the prophetic liberty to suggest that that is a symbolic picture of the church in its prophetic constituency in the last days that will be the agent of Israel's restoration, which is completely in keeping with the whole mystery of Israel and the church, as is expressed by Paul in the Book of Romans, that through your mercy they may obtain mercy, that the function of your salvation is not to be consumed upon yourself but to move them to jealousy, that from the very first stroke the whole advent and the rising up of a church of Gentiles by the grace of God to be brought into the salvation which was exclusively Israel's is largely for Israel's own sake. Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid, Paul says, speaking to the Roman church, but through therefore salvation has come to you so as to move them to jealousy. Right from the first, Paul strikes the note of the reciprocity, the reciprocal relationship between Israel and this new entity called the church, that

the one without the other is incomplete and cannot even come to the completion of God's intention except in the reciprocal relationship that God in his wisdom has ordained.

The church that is not related to Israel and has that nation's restoration as its principal focus loses the whole purpose of its own being, its own cosmic theocratic purpose and of necessity, therefore, must have its life and activity in another kind of context that is less than other than God's intention, and therefore the church falls into either being an institution or a culture, a Sunday supplement, but it loses its apostolic reality, its apostolic purpose for being if it does not take into its consideration the purpose for which God had ordained it from the first, to move them to jealousy and in the end to extend mercy that they may obtain mercy, in the process of which, in the requirement of which, we're called out from ourselves and into a larger place, as I hope to show you from this text, that requires our own resurrection. We cannot fulfill our obligation to that people out of mere evangelical obligation or charismatic sentimentality or any other kind of human thing from us. Don't you understand that this whole text implies that the remarkable supernaturalness of God and that Israel is reduced to the state of complete inertness.

Whatever happens to something of dry bones has got to come from outside it and not from it itself, because the issue at hand is the issue of humanism. It's the issue of man. It's the issue of human presumption and arrogance to think that it can and it will and it shall perform and establish even so much as a state, let alone the nation that is to be the prophetic glory and bless all the families of the earth.

That can never be the issue of any human accomplishment, even by Jews. I want to underline that, because you think that we have some kind of magical endowment and some superior enablement humanly. Well, it's true that there's a remarkable brightness to be found in that people, and they are estimable in their human attainments, and that's exactly why they must be brought into the place of death, and death of such a kind that God is not fishing for an extravagant metaphor when he says dry bones.

In fact, the key verse in the entire text is verse 11. When they themselves say we are cut off, we are without hope, then God acts. Our bones are dried up.

Our hope is lost. We are cut off completely. It waits for the acknowledgment of the nation itself that it is capable of nothing.

And I ask you, students of history, can you show me any instance, even in the recent past of the Nazi Holocaust and the decimation of six million Jews, that this acknowledgment has ever come forth nationally? Has there ever been a moment in the history of the people of Israel, and in modern times, even in the debacle of the Holocaust itself, in which the nation has ever made this confession for which God yet waits? I think he's not only waiting for it from Israel, he's waiting for it from the church. When we ourselves will say we are cut off, we are as dry bones, not that we can't perform services and establish programs and provide a modicum of blessing, but in terms of the calling of God and the apostolic and prophetic requirement of the church. It's like Abraham being, was it, 99 years old and looking at his body as good as dead.

Have you ever felt that sense of inadequacy? Have you ever said with Paul, who is sufficient for these things? I know you haven't, because you've never had the occasion that would require it until you took the mystery of Israel to your heart seriously and began to realize what is the magnitude of our calling as the church to be the salvific agent of God for Israel's redemption. For if Israel remains a pile of dry bones, how shall the thing that Paul spoke in Romans 11 be fulfilled? What shall their return be but life from the dead? We cannot even begin to estimate what it will mean for the nations, their ecology and spirituality, their

morality, when a nation of priests comes into their midst and that the law shall go forth out of their Zion. What, how will it affect the whole tenor and composition of life when that nation is restored from the dead? Paul says it's nothing less nor other than life from the dead.

If their falling away has brought blessing to the Gentiles, what shall their return be but life from the dead? But they've got to return and they've got to come out of death themselves in order to bring that life. But the last note that we have is in history to which Israel is presently moving as the noose tightens both in the land and outside it of the threat of physical violence, which can hardly be contained and hold your breath till the next bus explodes or suicide bomber and that the wall that has been erected can be bridged in a moment by tunneling under, going over or devastating it. Isn't it remarkable how precarious that nation is, that there's no mountain range to protect it, no vast body of water, that it's so close to its enemies that seek its annihilation, that it takes only a few minutes and even in some, not only jet planes and bombers, but by missile seconds to traverse the distance that would destroy entire cities and the entire land by germ warfare or gas or atomic, all of the lethal things, the weapons of mass destruction, cannot be contained.

You cannot build a defense against them. You can only hope that through the treaty and negotiation to defuse the enemy, to keep them from the employment of those devices that would mean certain death. I want to say that Israel's geography and defenselessness is not a geographical accident, but a planned intention of God, that the nation must be defenseless and it must make God its high tower and its fortress or it is without defense.

Can you see? Of necessity, God has so stacked even the geography of the land and the nature of last day's technology to make that people absolutely defenseless, except that they are in a relationship of trust with himself. So God is no longer just some kind of a Shabbat Saturday consideration or the issue of keeping kosher and being fastidious in the details of the law, but is the issue of survival. The reality that that's got to be known as the Psalmists set forth God as defense and high tower and place and refuge is not the rhetoric of the Bible, but the actuality that God himself can become to those who are in that kind of relationship by faith with him, that he is actually our defense and we shall not be moved.

Got the picture? Well, I don't know if you got the picture because how many Christians are in that relationship that the Psalmists continually reiterate, not as a piece of prose or poetry or special kind of language, but as the statement of reality to which they have come. So if we're to move them to jealousy, not the least of the means is that we ourselves will demonstrate that we know God and have found God as that kind of refuge and that kind of defense in the face of a world that is freaking out and that any moment can bring devastation of kinds that heart and only a decade ago could not even have been imagined. And yet there are numbers of Christians who are hoping for the progressive amelioration of Israel in the land.

Yes, they're upset and disappointed at certain of the tendencies that Israel is expressing the use of torture with a captured Hamas terrorist in order to extract information that would save Israel from another unnecessary bombing. What do you do? You're just required to employ expediences to avoid the catastrophe of wholesale death when you have a man who may know something about it and is not going to share it over a cup of coffee, but under the duress of torture so that the Jerusalem Post and other publications and periodicals coming out from Israel and Jewish publications in America are already discussing the probity, the sanity, the moral necessity for the employment of torture. Who could have ever thought that Jews would be reduced and brought to a place to take that kind of consideration seriously, that even if there's a degree of efficacy and value in the employment of torture, even to the issue of the survival of the state by such a means, what does the state itself become morally? Can you guys follow

that? There's a point of no return when you have to employ expediencies of a kind that brings such an erosion to the moral character of a nation that even if the crisis should pass, the loss is irrevocable.

It cannot again be retained. God is the author of this predicament, you dear saints, and you've got to know it and understand why it is that the noose is tightening and why Israel is even now being brought to a place of irrevocable disaster and the death and being slain and being in the grave and being reduced to the bones that this text describes. How else shall God's promise to Abraham be fulfilled that we ought to be a people who will bless all the families of the earth? Notice, not impress.

You would have been satisfied with that if Israel could have, by progressive amelioration, been brought to an improved condition by which it might have impressed the nations. But God says, no, my intention is not to impress but to bless. And the issue this morning and the issue anywhere with God is the issue of resurrection.

If this speaking this morning is not out of that life, if we are not moving in that reality, there's no way that we can raise those dry bones by anything that we're commanded to speak to them. Resurrection is the issue. Resurrection is the prime statement of God's glory, and he reduces Israel to a place to which he had reduced his own son through death.

That he would be raised by the glory of God, which is to say his power, out from death and be made to ascend on high to a place of exaltation even at the throne of God. If that is the route by which the Lord himself attains to his exaltation and primacy in the world, by what means shall Israel attain to hers except by the same route of death and resurrection? And if that's the requirement for Israel, the nation, what about the requirement of the Israel that is the church? Shall we fulfill our destiny and come into the fulfillment of our calling apart from the necessity of resurrection? It's not a doctrine to which God is asking us to subscribe and to amen its correctness. It's a mode of being to which he's asking us to live and to fulfill the remarkable mandate and requirement that is made of us that cannot be performed out of our humanity, however well-meaning.

Resurrection is the heart of the matter because it's the issue of God. It's the issue of glory. It's the issue of the triumph of God in supernaturalness over all that is celebrated in the world that has to do with man.

So the redemption of Israel in the land can never be a humanly achieved proposition, but by its very nature requires a total divine enablement tantamount to creation itself out of hopeless chaos. Isn't it a remarkable parallel? What's the word? A paradigm that the very reality by which the cosmos came into being, God brooding over the chaos and moving by his spirit and speaking brings forth creation out of death, destitution, and chaos, and that the same God who was the creator at the inception of the universe is the same God that will establish Israel by precisely that means again. Because the issue is not Israel's success, but the glory of God as creator, redeemer.

Redemption is recreation out of destitution, out of chaos, out of collapse, out of death in which there's no prospect of human fulfillment at all. That's the way I felt yesterday morning and to some degree this morning. And that's the way any man who's called to speak from the holy pulpit feels when he has to open his mouth and standing before God's people in behalf of God and to commence speaking.

It's an awareness of total human inability. It's death again. And someone wisely said, every true preaching is another resurrection and another raising of the dead.

In fact, this word today, this morning is not intended for your edification understanding, although it has that aspect, but for your resurrection. It's a word that must first bring you into death and then raise you. That's what a true holy ghost spirit inspired word of resurrection power is that must be characterized in our own proclamation and preaching.

If one day and soon we have to speak a word that will raise them, which if that crisis was upon us now, however precious you are and heads and shoulders above many, you're not yet capable of addressing the dry bones. In fact, some of you are not even capable of seeing the dry bones or be willing to see Israel reduced to that condition because your own human sentimentality and desire for an easier solution to the predicament of Israel that would not require death prevents you. You're not yet taken up with the jealousy for God's glory that can only be fulfilled and demonstrated out of death and resurrection.

You would much prefer a solution for Israel that does not require so severe an alternative. So there's yet, there's a death waiting for you in that area of your own humanism, because that's what that attitude is. It's humanistic.

It is self-sparing. The identification with Israel to avoid being reduced to that place is really the extension of yourself. You yourself don't want to face such calamity, such eventuality, either personally or congregationally.

You would rather succeed and yet retain your humanity than be brought to death in it to move into a transcendent realm beyond anything that can be affected by man in his well-meaning attention aided and abetted by the Holy Spirit to be brought into being a resurrection phenomenon, a son of man company that can be commanded to speak and to address those bones, though you balk. That's why the whole statement begins with the hand of the Lord coming upon me. He brought me down and out and into the valley of dry bones by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the midst of the valley that was full of bones and led me all around them, and there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

To be prophetic is first not to speak for God but to see as God. The prophets were called seers before they were nabi, before they were proclaimers. You can't proclaim in any contradiction with what you're not first willing to see as truth.

Prophetic seeing is a remarkable kind of perception that most of the church knows little about, and I've just come from an episode at our own place at the conclusion of a convocation where I was required to make a final address based on a perception of a reality brought by another speaker who preceded me, who was the co-author of one of my books and a Jewish brother and one with whom I've been in relationship more than a quarter of a century, and make him the object of my final statement and critique at the cost of his embarrassment and humiliation because it was necessary for the edification of the church who was impressed with the outward and external mastery of this man in his teaching and proclamation from the book of Romans to show them that though the content was impressive, the delivery was not out of the life of God but out of the life of man and out of the realm of soul, that however much it has impressed you, it is facetious and is not the ground upon which God would establish his church and call for its use in the last days and out of his life and not out of the church's soul. It was an expensive presentation, and I'm still paying the price that I will continue, which is another aspect of propheticness is the reproach that the man of God bears because what he sees is so unique and what is required to address is so unusual that the best of saints, especially because they are best, will be offended by that obedience. And I'm saying these things not because there may be here and there a sprinkling of men called to this calling, but because the

church itself has this calling.

The church itself is called to propheticness. Its constituency, its knit, the fabric, the makeup, the density, the quality of its life must be prophetic or it's not the church. It's got to be a son of man company, and the heck of it is this.

It's not some individual virtue also that God is going to summon to address the bones. It's going to be a corporate statement of a people who are in agreement, who see as God sees and can be commanded to speak when God requires it and speak not out of well-wishing, I hope it works, out of human effort, but out of resurrection of authority and power itself, because they have been dealt with in the areas of their own lingering humanisms, especially as it hides itself in the attitudes with regard to Israel itself. For their sentimentality, humanism, idealism, insinuate themselves in a way that we can hardly identify and recognize it.

In fact, we will be applauded for it because it seems to be so commendable that you have this affinity for Israel. Yes, but whose affinity is it? Does it issue out of the heart of God, out of a love that cannot be offended against, that is ultimate, that requires nothing for itself in return, or is there some symbiotic kind of a thing going on, an affection and esteem for that people by which somehow your own esteem is linked and joined and that you derive a benefit from this kind of symbiotic relationship with Israel that you can't even recognize and for which you will be applauded, especially by Jews. And yet, ironically, it is that persistent human thing, however impressive and attractive, that keeps us from the totality and the reality of God and the life of God, which is the power of God, that alone can raise those bones from the dead.

Can you follow me, you dear saints? You'll not hear this from another thousand speakers. We are the enemy, not in our carnality, in our spirituality, not in our indifference to Israel, in our identification with Israel, but it's an identification that issues out of our humanity, out of our sentimentality, out of idealism, and not out of a union with God and his love for that people, which is altogether different and other than what issues for man out of their own humanity. Can you understand that even if we could get ourselves together to be commanded by God to address the bones in the moment that he requires it, I can tell you that when that moment comes, you're not going to feel like it.

I can't think of any moment to which I have been called in the service of God in 40 years that I've ever felt like it, including coming here, including beginning here, including this morning. It's a remarkable conundrum that is not at all accidental that the greatest requirements of God come not when we feel like it, but when we feel less like it, when we're not feeling spiritual, when we're not inspired, when the spiritual adrenaline is not flowing, then God requires the obedience because he doesn't want to be in any way beholden to you or anything that issues from you or from me as a requisite for his expression. We have got to be dead even in the thing that we covet and desire.

We want to be fitted, and we want to feel that sap flowing and the excitement and the inward thing that would give us a little flourish, a little takeoff. But to begin from ground zero as stone-cold dead, not an iota of inward excitement or inspiration, and to begin and open your mouth as I've done this morning, it's a reenactment of the central drama of the indisputable and irrevocable nexus of reality, the principle of God himself, death and resurrection, again and again and again to as many as will. And there's not many who will.

That's why we have a whole generation of men with the gift of gab and the anointing of human personality that know how to do it and can perform it at will. I'm always suspicious of any man who runs to the platform

and is ready to go and is just Mr. Poisonality in the moment, rather than coming as a snail, reluctant and unwilling, feeling like you're nothing but the embodiment of death itself and capable of nothing. We've got to taste death, saints, not just once, but frequently, if not continually.

And that's why our whole community, after 10 years of the greatest struggle in northern Minnesota, living beneath the poverty level with 55 or more souls dependent upon God and forbidden by him to make our need known anywhere, at the very generation and time when the prosperity message was at its height and glass cathedrals were being built everywhere, we were languishing and our tongues were sticking out for the merest subsistence for life in subarctic northern Minnesota, where winter is nine months of the year, 20 below zero. 10 years of that struggle. And just when we're beginning to succeed and see daylight at the end of the tunnel, God requires the death of the community, the dissolution of the entire thing, ministry and all, and to vacate the property, the 160 acre farm that God had given, and to be dispersed to wherever the Lord would direct and allow that property to languish and be accessible to the vandals and to the weather without any explanation for the requirement of our expulsion, which heightens the death.

You got the picture? I keep asking. Can you follow that? Can you understand the divine logic that requires it from prophetic men and a prophetic community has got in itself in some measure to experience the kind of thing that has yet to be the experience of the nation itself, of expulsion and exile, so that when we shall speak to it of restoration and recovery, as we now can these many years later, after three years in the grave, we do not speak out of a sense of academia or abstract principle, but out of the reality of having been brought both through expulsion and restoration, death and resurrection. And every day is another enactment in one measure or another, including now.

You're not going to come to this in a final moment if you're not consistently in this reality in all your moments. If you're unaccustomed to death and resurrection and have shunned it and continue to live and act and serve God out of your impressive humanity, when that moment comes, you'll be totally unable to meet it, because however well-meaning your intention and however impressive you're speaking, those bones will not budge until they hear a word of resurrection authority and power itself. By a faith that believes for that, for when the prophet himself was taken up, down, and out and into those bones and circulated among them to get the grit of that death into his eyeballs and into his innards, the Lord mocked him and tempted him and said, son of man, why do we hear this so frequently in this text? Son of man, son of man, you sweating, palpitating piece of humanity, you charismatic darling that woos them by the thousands, can you now believe that those bones could live? Lord, thou knowest.

This is beyond my charismatic faith. This is beyond even my New Testament prophetic ability that so many have lauded and applauded, which serves the purposes of Charismatica beautifully. You can have all kinds of conferences and maybe even receive a personal word of prophecy.

But when you face the issue of Israel as dead and dry and hopeless and inert, in that moment, you'll recognize how fraudulent, how shallow, how deceptive was your own assumption of your propheticness that served the purpose of your charismatic culture, but cannot serve the purpose of this apocalyptic destiny. Got the picture. And maybe God gave the charismatic thing, not that it should continue or be embellished like flaying a dead horse, but that it should be brought to death and not clutched and that we would be afraid to let go.

And isn't that the history of the church? Everything that God has given is clutched so that when the next wave comes, it's resented and resisted by that people who have been received the previous blessing and

that don't want to relinquish that to go on to this. Relinquishing is dying. Not that it was not good, not that it was not given, but it wasn't given to be maintained and held.

It was given to yield and to relinquish and give up and die to it, even though it has now become so familiar. And you want to retain it. And God says, if you don't let go with that sentimentality, that disposition, that attitude, which does something for you, it's a subtle form of self-exaltation.

It attests to your spirituality that you have this regard for that nation and that people, when others are just increasingly hostile and anti-Semitic, you don't want to let go. You would want to clutch that sentimentality, which is the greatest obstruction to the receiving of the life of God, which is love. And I'll tell you what, if you could even summon the faith to speak to those bones, but it's not a faith that works without, with love, they'll not move.

You see the requirement? See the ultimacy of the crisis that Israel, in her death, presents to the church, called to be a son of man company. That is to say that the pockets of opinion and differences between us, which we can overlook if it doesn't agitate and cause strife, will impede our speaking with one voice in the moment that God will require it. There has got to be an agreement that is more than ceremonial or compelled.

We have got to agree with God as well as see with God, so that our personal opinions that are in any way at odds, one with another and with him, will prevent that one speaking alone that raises the dead. Talk about the unity of the body of Christ. Talk about ecumenicism.

Talk about all of the queasy, shallow attempts at outward and superficial external harmony, bear hugs and back slaps on the platforms with priests and turnaround callers, as if that represents the reality for which God waits. I want to tell you this, dear saints, and I'm not expecting you to understand it in the hearing, but you'll have the tape to consider. The unity for which God waits, that makes the one word that he shall command a word that will raise the dead, will not be obtained without suffering.

That agreement, that coming to eye to eye, that being of one mind and one heart and soul, that characterized the church is the issue of the cross. And I'm speaking out of 30 years of community experience, and I've heard more scripture quoted in people supporting their opinion and validating their view than I can begin to say. And yet someone else equally has another opinion in which he can find scripture to fortify, and there's the church with its variable and diverse opinions, but not of one mind, one heart, and one soul.

God is not going to stamp us out off of a production line. He's waiting for and seeking and working to obtain an agreement of mind and heart and will by which opinion and differences and the uniquenesses of our individuality have got to be submitted to the cross. There's a process of death that must come to the church if we are to be the agent by which life will come to Israel.

Can I say it any more clearly? It's got to be a willing death. God has found us out and cut us off at the pass. What? We profess to be concerned for Israel and the Jew? Then are you willing to allow me my dealings with you of a kind and in areas that you would not have suspected even existed, let alone need to be identified and met in the power of the cross, which never is pleasant at any moment and yet required.

And where is the greatest working out of this depth of sanctifying process? It's in the church as community, not in the church that is the mere amalgam of souls who will come together for the purpose of

a service and sit alongside one another but not be with one another. Got the picture? Can you see it? Community is not a little ideal alternative to church. It is church.

And there, the friction, the intensification of life, the issues that arise are stupefying. You spit your guts out. You didn't know that the finest Christians can be such a vexation so long as you met them only on Sunday and midweek service.

But when you live with them continually as a community of believers, my God, what a shock of the truth of their condition. And the worst and most horrible is the revelation of your own. So I don't believe that a Son of Man company is going to emerge out of the framework of our contemporary church, that even because of its numbers must be essentially impersonal and deny the Lord his opportunity for the sanctifying work that only takes place with the frequency of relationship in the intensification of life that community is.

And the great obligation of the leaders of the church today, in my opinion, is to move it from its present configuration, however much the services are enjoyable, into that framework of life, for the want of a better word, core community, where this sanctifying work of dealing with our privatistic impulses and opinions and individuality and all of the kinds of things that impede that oneness that God waits for as a Son of Man company will be obtained, where the death can work, that life can go forth. The issue of Israel is not Israel. The issue of Israel will be inert, dry bones, incapable of anything, and acknowledging for the first time in its history that we are cut off.

We are without hope, even though our national anthem is Hatikvah, the hope, but it's not a hope in God. And every false hope that is essentially rooted in man, rooted in state, rooted in institutions, rooted in tradition, rooted in whatever, needs to be brought into death. And that's what Israel represents as a demonstration of God's awesome cosmic principle by which all nations must be instructed at Israel's expense, as well as Israel herself, for she is the epitome of man in his self-sufficiency and ability even in the generation of his own false hopes.

So there's a word that follows Ezekiel 37.11, and that word is therefore. The moment that God hears the acknowledgment from the nation, we are without hope. We are cut off.

Then God turns to the Son of Man and says, now prophesy to these bones. So I prophesied as I had been commanded. And we're not accustomed to being commanded.

It's not part of our American charismatic Christian culture to be commanded. And so if we're offended and cannot bring ourselves to be obedient to command, we may falter at that very moment. The prophet prophesied as he was commanded, and so must we also.

And I want to say, unless we are being brought into a place of obedience to commandment, we'll not find it in that moment when that moment shall come. And that's why this text is given now to prepare and fit us to be the agent of Israel's restoration, to be the agent even as in the same moment historically, the nation is being fitted for the death to which it must come. And the glory of God be revealed when those bones are raised up out of their graves and be brought back to the land, and then you shall know that I am the Lord.

When I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, unless Israel knows that I am the Lord, what is the purpose of Israel? And how can there be a fulfillment of its own calling to the nation, nations, unless it knows that I am the Lord? It's not a superficial knowledge. It's not a rabbinical knowledge. It's not a theological knowledge.

It's the knowledge of the God who raises the dead, who makes those things to be which were not. Until the nation knows that God in that way, how can it bless all the families of the earth? In that day, you will know that I am the Lord who has spoken. These things raised you up out of your graves by a word and we'll put my spirit within you and you shall live and I will place you in your own soil.

Then you shall know that I, the Lord have spoken and will access the Lord. You'll be able to compare and I will place you in the land as against your own attempt to establish yourself. You'll see the difference when God himself is glorified in the remarkable supernaturalness of establishing his people in his land by his own power, through his own spoken word and the issue of his spirit as against the attempt of men, humanly, politically, and militarily to establish themselves.

It's an expensive lesson, but it's needful in view of the millennium and the eternity to which Israel shall be a statement to the nations of the reality of that God by which they were allowed to be brought into death, having been given the room to seek to establish their own reality and exacerbate their neighbors and bring about the forces of resentment and opposition and violence that finally pursues them into the grave, at which time God himself, when they come to the point of destitution and hopelessness, will raise up an answer by a people that Israel would never have suspected would have been the agent of their restoration, a Gentile church. Why does God need a son of man after all? Why doesn't he directly speak to those bones as he directly addressed the chaos and creation? Wouldn't he have then received the eternal acclamation of the nation as being their deliverer? Why does he need a son of man to fulfill a mystery of the church and Israel, that Israel will be eternally indebted to a Gentile people to have been the agent of their restoration where they would have least expected it in the mystery of God? Because they would know that this was not some technical act that God required of that which is called the church, that they could perform at their convenience. It's an act of uttermost sacrifice.

It's the result of the deaths to which they were willing themselves to be submitted, which would not have been required except for the fulfillment of this mystery. They would have been satisfied to have been a church of a lesser kind sufficient for their own services and conduct and programs, but for Israel's sake, that it might bless all the families of the earth and be the blessing of which Paul speaks. And as life from the dead, this is a people willing to experience multiple deaths in the area of their own life to be that one people, that son of man company that can be commanded and to receive a faith beyond its own ability to believe that a word that is spoken can raise the dead.

All the more because it beggars and stretches faith to the breaking because the word has to proceed from our mouths. We have to speak it and it's the word that we speak in union and agreement that will raise that dead. It's the faith beyond our faith that has got to be imparted and given when we ourselves come to the place of destitution and say, Lord, thou knowest.

And it's not a faith that will work except by love. And it's God's love, which is so much other than our own, to which we have died to the substitutes that it might fill us and that faith might work by love to obtain that restoration. And after the bones are joined and the flesh is added, there's one final requirement.

Speak to the breath and command the breath to come in, for even flesh and bones being come together is still not adequate until the life of God, which is the spirit of God and the breath of God, is admitted. Command the breath, you dear saints. Why is that given as a separate command and a final and ultimate requirement? Because that's exactly where you're likely to balk.

It's one thing to address bones and flesh and command, but to command breath is to command God, for God himself is the Ruach and the breath and the spirit of life. And many of us will then draw the line and say, no, Lord, this far, but not that further. Who am I to command you? To command the breath is to command you, and my spirituality will not allow that.

It's impolite. I'm offended that you would require that of me. I cannot.

I have too much respect for your deity. I cannot tell you. God says, unless you tell me, unless you command me, you have no part with me, because your spirituality now is the final obstruction to the ultimate obedience by which Israel shall be delivered.

You are willing to have your carnality dealt with and your humanity, but are you willing to have your spirituality dealt with? For to command the breath of God is death. Can you understand the deeps of that, where many will draw back and will not be willing to go that far, though God himself requires it, because our spirituality is the final idol, is the last thing that needs to fall. It's the last thing that we're willing to relinquish, because look what we have invested to obtain it.

We've spent a lifetime in attaining that spirituality, and God says, now bring it to death, and the act that I'm commanding you to command my breath, though it violates the deepest sensibility and what you think would be a transgression against me, is really the last hiding place of your own ego, your own vanity, your own personality, your own individuality that has taken as its last refuge, as it always will, when it can no longer hide in carnality or intellectuality, it will hide in spirituality, and it needs to be brought to death now, and what I'm commanding you to do, command my breath to come into them. The issue of Israel, which is the issue of the nations, is the issue of the church that has finally come to this ultimate place to which it can only be brought by the crisis of Israel itself, and if we had the time, and I invite you to do it at your own leisure, and look at what follows in chapter 37, is the restoration of the kingdom to this people who have been raised, and verse 24, my servant David shall be king over them. They shall have one shepherd.

They shall follow my ordinances. Be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob in which your ancestors lived, and their children and their children shall live there forever, and my servant David shall be their prince forever.

This is the eschatological climax. This is the end of the age. This is the restored nation.

This is the established kingdom. This is the greater David ruling and reigning from the holy hill of Zion forever, and I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will bless them and multiply them and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore.

My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. This is the remarkable climax of all the ages for Israel through an everlasting covenant that shall not again be broken with the people who are famous for covenant failure, covenantal failure. We'll have an everlasting covenant, and he will bless them and multiply them and honor them by setting his sanctuary among them forevermore.

My dwelling place shall be with them. I will be their God. They shall be my people.

Then the nation shall know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel when my sanctuary is among them forevermore. Israel shall know that I am the Lord when I shall raise them from the dead and bring them out of the graves and restore them to the land and give them my spirit, and the nation shall know when I have made Israel

my sanctuary and sanctified them forevermore. Lord, I am dissatisfied.

I'm not happy with this presentation. I don't know what it takes, my Lord, to be my God, but some exercise of your own life to invest these words and that text with a power that breaks through into our deeps, that the issue of Israel is the issue of the nations, that this remarkable last day's restoration out from death through a son-of-man company that is essentially Gentile and should have no reason for a willingness for sacrifice to bear deaths of a multiple kind in order to be able to be commanded and to speak in the power of your life through your faith and your love to address those bones. It's a mystery.

It's ultimate. It's staggering. And the end of it is not only Israel's restoration, but that the nations shall know.

A kingdom is established. A David is set over this restored people, and your dwelling in their midst and your sanctuary in their midst is the statement to all nations that you alone are God. It's the eschatological climax.

It is the end of the end of the ages, and it is a death and resurrection that brings it into being. First ours and through ours, then theirs, and through theirs, a statement to the nations for which Israel was intended at the first as a witness that their God alone is God. Lord, I'm praying you can join me.

Unless you imbue this text and this sharing with the power of your life, it will be as dry dust. It will be academic. It will be just a little splatter of words that bounce off.

So I'm appealing to you for mercy, because in the end it's your mercy that is revealed in the restoration of Israel, not because of their deserving, but because of what you are in yourself. This whole phenomenon, this whole restoration, the whole bringing into death of the humanism of Israel, which is the model and the statement for all the world to emulate, which is contrary to God, has got to be brought into death, that you might through it show to the world and to the nations what is the central principle of reality, the life of God, to which all are invited through the same means by which Jesus himself was raised. So Lord, I'm asking a little minuscule death and resurrection enactment even now, to whatever degree this word this morning was in your sovereign will, to get at the heart of this mystery and its ultimate final fulfillment through a church of an ultimate kind whose life is not its own, who can be commanded at your will in an obedience to which we are presently unfitted in our own individuality, and be able to speak in your authority, in your faith through your love, words that affect the bones in a way that nothing less or other can, for their speaking is your speaking.

And that's why you say at the end of this text, you will know in that day that I, the Lord, have spoken and performed this. Come on, Lord, how can you say that when you've spent all this time to tell us it's the Son of Man who speaks it? What are you trying to say now, I have spoken and performed it? Are you saying that we'll be brought to a place where you cannot say where we end and you begin, that it's no longer a Christianity where we exist as entities and you help us to serve you, that we're brought into a transcendent place beyond that, where there's such a union with you that you cannot tell where the Son of Man ends and God begins, that our speaking is your speaking, our thought is your thought, our love is your love, our seeing is your seeing, and that by such a means you have a union and a bride for the bridegroom who shares the glory of God and is adorned for the bridegroom because she's one with him in such union? Is that what you're saying? And that the only way that this bride is to be obtained is through the crisis to the church that is represented by Israel's death and could not be attained in any other way, that all these mysteries come together in conclusion, Israel's restoration, a bride for the bridegroom by the same process, the same requirement, the same death, the same resurrection? Is that what you're saying? Then

Lord, we're as good as dead to think that we're able in any way to fulfill such a destiny as that. And when we will acknowledge that death and cast ourselves upon your life, then there's hope that is hope.

Come, my God, and hear from the church what you've not heard in modern times that was continually on the lips of the great apostle. Who is sufficient for these things? We have no stomach for community. We don't want the suffering and the embarrassment and the humiliation, the frictions and tensions of life in that intensity.

We prefer the casual amalgam of saints for the purposes of services and go back again to our unmolested and unharassed privacy. We don't want suffering in relationship that makes the church the church, but for your namesake, for your glory, for the coming of your kingdom and your rule, for the restoration of a nation that you will make your sanctuary that the nations might know that you are God, we are willing. So Lord, your blessing, I pray upon these children.

And you know what they're saying? You can make a little consecration right now where you sit or kneel and tell the Lord that you're willing to be part of the son of man company that is the agent of Israel's restoration, no matter what it costs, no matter what it requires. You're willing for those deaths and you know that they're needful, that there are areas in your life that are privatistic, selfish, vain, ambitious, opinionated. You know that you'll have to experience multiple deaths to be at a place where you can be commanded in union with others who themselves have opened themselves to those deaths, that he might have a company that he can command, who can speak in his authority and in his faith with his love to bring about that restoration.

You can transact with God now because it's not for everyone and he will not compel it. It's altogether free, willing and voluntary. So I just invite you on your knees, on your chair, standing, sitting, trying to transact with this God that you're willing to be part of that formation and give him leave and liberty and you'll be astonished how quickly he will avail himself and what areas he will touch that you would never have suspected.

That is the operation of death through the cross, but the commencement of life, union with him. So Lord, transact with this people. What is the purpose of your speaking? If it is not transaction, if it is not event, how is the church to come to that formidable condition by which Israel is to be restored if it languishes and remains in its present state, enjoying its services, enjoying its individuality, enjoying its sentimental affinities, but keeping itself from the death that brings it to the place that is needful and alone through which you will work Israel's redemption? Listen, dear saints, we're not playing.

I'm not looking for altar call. It has nothing to do with my gratification. This is a moment in time whose time has come.

There's a historic something that is requiring an acknowledgment and a transaction for which God waits that is voluntary and I'm inviting you to make it.

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