

Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones - Part 1

by Steve Evans

Steve Evans explores the profound message of hope and revival found in Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, emphasizing the need for repentance and God's power to restore life to the seemingly dead.

Duration: 32:44

Scripture: Exodus 3:10, Exodus 13:17, John 7:37, Acts 1:8, Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones. He emphasizes that God uses ordinary people for His purposes, as seen in the life of Moses. The preacher highlights the importance of addressing sin and repentance in our lives and churches, as evidenced by the numerous chapters in Ezekiel dedicated to judgment and the need for cleansing. He encourages believers to have faith in the power of God's resurrection and to come alive in Christ. The preacher also emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and empowering preachers and Christian workers.

Transcript

Let's turn now then to The Valley of Dry Bones, Ezekiel 37. It's one of the most well-known passages in the Old Testament. And I've got really, this passage has got a message from a cemetery, from a graveyard, if you like.

We often make jokes, don't we, about graveyards and death. It's our way of coping with it. And we call it sometimes gallows humour, don't we? You know, the humour, the jokes when a man was going to get hanged, that sort of thing.

Gallows humour. I found one example of it. A lady who was buried in Elmwood, this is a true fact, buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Burlington, Vermont, in the United States.

And on her gravestone this was written. She lived with her husband 50 years and died in the confident hope of a better life. And what about this one? A lady called Iris Benbow lost her husband.

And she requested that the stonemason carved on his gravestone the words, rest in peace. When the will came through she found that he had terribly left all his money to his mistress. So she went to the stonemason and asked him to change the carving.

He said this is impossible, the words have been chiselled, I can't change that now, they're on the stone. But he said there is a gap on the bottom, I can add to it. Okay, she said.

Underneath, rest in peace, add, she said, until we meet again. I'm sure he wasn't looking forward to that. But you know, Ezekiel's graveyard experience was no joke.

It was a spiritual revolution. Remember where he was. Ezekiel wasn't in Israel, he's a Jew.

He was in Babylon, Iraq today. He was in exile. He was amongst God's people who had been taken into captivity, they'd been captured, defeated, broken, and expelled from their land.

They were out of the land of blessing. They had no temple in Babylon, of course, neither in Jerusalem. It had been ransacked, burnt, razed.

And there they were, as it's put in one of the Psalms, by the rivers of Babylon. There we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion. Now in fact, the only bit of that, that temple was actually rebuilt, as you know, and the only bit left of it now, the second temple, is the Wailing Wall, or the Western Wall, and we had a text message from my sister and her husband yesterday, they were visiting the Wailing Wall yesterday in Jerusalem.

That's all that's left of it. But at this time with Ezekiel, they had nothing left at all, there was nothing there. And there he was in Babylon.

The walls of Jerusalem, he knew this, were broken down. And the nation was terribly divided. Israel in the north, Judah in the south, and the rest of them taken away into exile.

They seemed to be a finished nation. And in that situation, God calls a man. He calls a prophet, a young priest, he was a priest, called Ezekiel.

He was 30 years of age. And perhaps before we need to go any further this morning, we need to apply this to ourselves and say, are we perhaps in a valley of dry bones? Is our land like that? Is our church like that? There's many churches presumably represented here this morning. Is our vicinity like that? Is this a message to us? Are our individual lives like this? Are we outside of blessing? Outside of the land of blessing? Or are we in the land of blessing? Where is your valley of dry bones? You are impossible situation, because it was an impossible situation.

I'm driving down this valley that we are at the end of here, the Tevi Valley. And as I was thinking, coming down, I passed the homes or the places assorted with some great men of God, and some great revival times. Passed the home of Evan Phillips on the edge of Newcastle Emlyn there.

He was involved in two revivals, 1859 and 1904. He was a minister in Newcastle Emlyn. In fact, I'm preaching in the church he was brought up in this afternoon now, Tapas One.

He was the grandfather of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' wife. He was the minister that Evan Roberts sat under when he was anointed by God and lived in a house ten houses away from him on that same row in Newcastle Emlyn. It was there that Evan Roberts had that vision of a hundred thousand people for God in Wales.

Just down the road, Martyn Lloyd-Jones himself and his wife lie buried in the cemetery. When you think of these great men and these great things that happened, great blessings that came, you say, dear me,

what's there now? Do you know what that chapel is now in Newcastle Emlyn? Where Evan Roberts sat and was ministered to mightily at that time? Where Evan Phillips, Martyn Lloyd-Jones' grandfather-in-law, preached powerfully? Do you know what it is now? It's a chapel of rest. It's a chapel of, dare I say, dry bones.

You know what I mean. There's no life there now. A handful meet in the vestry.

I'm preaching there sometime later on in the year. Six people perhaps. It's a Welsh service.

That's the sort of dry bone situation we're now in, in our land. And I want to ask you this morning, personally to begin with, are you, and are we then, in the land of blessing or are we in the wilderness? It happened to the children of Israel, remember. They were not in the land of blessing for all those years where they should have been.

We are told in one of the Old Testament books that they were brought out of Egypt to be brought in. Sometimes we are brought out and we don't get brought in to the fullness of blessing. Many didn't get there.

Most didn't get into Israel. They died, they perished because of unbelief. But you know, faith gets you.

Faith in what Christ can do for you. Gets you into the land of blessing. Faith in God.

Now here's, this man of God, this is my first minor point. A man of God appears, called Ezekiel. In that situation, it's the worst situation you can ever be in.

He calls a young priest, godless, 30 years of age. Only 30. And he becomes a prophet for the nation.

Staying a priest would have been easier. Staying a priest, he would have had prestige. Out of recognition.

They accepted priests, but they persecuted and killed prophets. Prophets were despised. Prophets were, by the way, unpredictable.

You didn't know what they'd do next. They were a bit odd. They were a bit different.

They were certainly holy men, in touch with God. God calls this young man, 30 years of age. And I often think how often God calls young men, and women.

And a young man becomes a prophet. It's happened in our own land. I'm just speaking about Wales.

Please forgive me. I include other countries as well, England and others. A few weeks back, 30, 40 of us went on a trip, and we went to see some places associated with revival in Wales, in the 1700s.

We visited the home, the farmstead, where William Williams, the hymn writer, wrote 800 or 900, I think, of his hymns, including Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, and so on. We went to the place where Howard Harris was touched by God, in St Gawes. Anointed by God, in the tower of a church there.

Baptised in the Holy Spirit. He didn't use that term, but that's what happened to him. And Daniel Rowlands, we didn't visit his places.

We'd been there before, some of us. All of these men were in their 20s. William Williams, I think he was 21.

Howard Harris, 20. Daniel Rowlands, Church of England then, a minister, under 30. I can't remember his actual age.

1859, 100 years later, a man comes back from America, called Humphrey Jones. He's a Welshman. He'd emigrated.

He'd been touched by God out there. He comes back to Wales. He'd been in contact with the disciples of Moody out there.

He comes back to Wales, comes back to Aberystwyth, starts a movement which affects David Morgan, another minister in that area. Between them, they evangelise, they bless Wales, and 100 or 200,000 people are added to the church. Evan Roberts, 26.

Let's pray, brothers and sisters, that God will call young people to speak to this generation. We were talking about it in our deacons' meeting on Thursday night. We need to pray for breakthrough amongst the young people.

We need to see God raising up leaders from amongst the young new generation. By the way, he also uses old guys as well. Why are you laughing? He uses Moses at over 80.

80 to 120, the last third of his life. Moody used to say about Moses, he took 40 years thinking he was somebody. Then another 40, God teaching him he was a nobody.

And then the last 40, God using a nobody. That's what it's all about. God uses a man of God.

He calls this man into this situation. And he takes him into a valley of dry bones just to show him what the situation was like. That's my first point.

The second point is this. He gives him a message from God. Here's the message.

Now by the way, I've been reading through this book in the last few weeks. Most of us know chapter 37, the valley of dry bones. It's lovely, isn't it? As Paul correctly mentioned.

Chapter 47, the river flowing from the temple, blessing wherever. Oh, wonderful. But you know, there's about 30 chapters in it, which is all about judgment.

All about sin amongst the people of God. All about the need to repent. It isn't all resurrection from the dry bones, you know.

It isn't all flowing in the river. We love that. We should.

But there's also a preaching and a prophesying, a declaration against sin. There's judgment involved. Chapter after chapter after chapter of it.

Why? Why has God recorded 30 odd chapters of that? I'll tell you why. Because sin has got to be dealt with. In our lives, in our churches, in our land.

Sin has got to be confessed and cleansed. You've got to be washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You know my favorite hymn.

Would you be free from your burden of sin? There's power in the blood. Power in the blood. Would you or
evil a victory win? There's wonderful power in the blood.

We've got to get there. We've got to know the cleansing that comes. I'm not talking about coming to Christ.

You know when you were a child, when you were 17, whatever. That's wonderful. You're cleansed then.

We need to be cleansed all the time. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. It's an
ongoing thing.

We've got to be cleansed all the time. We've got to be walking in holiness and cleansed. You know, so
often in the Old Testament, in particular, decline and defeat and captivity amongst God's people is due to
the people's sin.

I was reading this by a man I have a lot of time for, Derek Prince. He's dead now. But in one of his books,
he read this.

He wrote this. He was talking about revival. He said this.

I hear a lot of prophecies about revival. He leaves in prophetic words. He does.

And I may have given some myself. But we will not have revival until we have met the conditions. You can
prophecy as much as you like.

But the real barrier to revival is unconfessed sin. The real barrier to revival personally, church-wise, is
unconfessed sin. And so Ezekiel brings a message to the people in the whole of this book.

It's a strong message from God. Turn, he says. Repent.

Cast away your idols. Why did God give that burden to that man? I'll tell you why. It's because God wants
his people back in blessing.

See, it's not to punish them. He didn't punish them because he wanted to punish them. He judged them
because he wanted to bless them.

Because he wanted to bring them back. That is always God's purpose for his children. You say, I'm having
a rough time.

Things have gone wrong in my life. I fear I'm under the judgment of God. In a sense, it might be true.

But do you know why? It's because he wants to bring you back. It's because he wants to bless you. He
wants you and me back in blessing.

He wants Mount Zion. He wants Cardigan. He wants Wales.

He wants England. He wants you, church, to be blessed. Return, says Ezekiel.

Time after time. Come back, he says to the people. To God.

Now if you're living, or you think you're living, a fully blessed life, this message isn't for you. If you're feeling
okay with what you've got, this message isn't for you. If you're saying, well, I'm healthy.

I've got a good job. I've got enough money. I've got a nice family.

Holidays. Car. I'm being blessed.

If you think like that, this message isn't for you. Because we're not talking about that sort of blessing. We're talking about spiritual blessing.

We're talking about our spiritual lives. Our walk with God. You see, you can have all those things.

You can be a regular at church, even. You can be passing as a good evangelical, Baptist, or whatever you want to call yourself. Spiritual life can be poor.

Revival is about being revived in our inner self. In the ultimate sense, it's being brought from death to life. And that's Ezekiel's message here.

It's for thirsty people. Duncan Campbell used to say, didn't he, that there's only one condition for blessing, for revival. It's thirst.

It's thirsty for God. My third point is revival comes from God here. You see, prophets are only used, it's in verse 1, you can notice this, when the hand of the Lord is upon them.

Can you see it in verse 1? The hand of the Lord was upon me. Then he says further on, he was led by the Spirit of the Lord. This must be true of all preachers, all Christian workers, all pastors.

True of myself, it must be. I must have the hand of the Lord upon me. I must be led by the Spirit of the Lord.

Do you know what? You can stand in a pulpit and preach and not know that. We don't need so much of what we see and hear in today's pulpit sometimes. We hear eloquence.

We hear doctrinal intricacies. We hear of the biblical languages. We hear of a strong adherence to a theological standpoint or the standpoints of man.

We might even be Bible-believing and orthodox. Correct. But dead.

We need to see the hand of the Lord upon us. And the Spirit of the Lord taking us, moving us, leading us in prayer, in preaching, in everything. Don't you feel the need for that? The hand of the Lord.

Do you know, it's something real, you know? I know a little of it at times. I need to know more. The Spirit of the Lord.

What did Jesus say after he'd been down into the Jordan, been baptized? And the Spirit came upon him. He was baptized in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit of God. God gave the Spirit without measure unto him, we are told.

What's the first thing he said when he got to the synagogue in Nazareth? Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to deliver the captives, and you know it all, to lift up the downcast, to set the captives free. What's happened, Jesus? The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

The hand of the Lord was upon Jesus. In that sense. How many of you can say? How many of us can say? The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Tozer said this. A.W. Tozer. I know Gareth thinks highly of A.W. Tozer.

Gareth ministered in Christian and Missionary Alliance churches, and Tozer was a leading man in that denomination. And he said this on one occasion. Follow only the man with oil on his forehead.

Do you know what he meant? Follow a man with the Holy Spirit upon him. He didn't mean follow a man. You know what I mean.

Don't follow men who are not anointed by God. Well, where did the hand of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord lead Ezekiel? I'll tell you where he took him. Into the valley of death.

Into the midst of these dry bones. Spirit takes Ezekiel into a wilderness. He gives him a walk around like a cemetery.

Why? To let him know how bad things really were. To know how impossible things were. Imagine him.

He's walking around this valley. There are bones there. They're very dry.

You can see it in this text you've read. There's very many of them. They're scattered all over the place.

There's silence there. He walks quietly around. It says the Lord took him to and fro.

It says in the Authorized Version. Amongst them all, all over the place. Have a good look Ezekiel.

He's in the middle of death. This was an army at one time apparently. Because it says that he will raise up that army.

Read it further on in the text. An army which has lost its glory and has been defeated. There's no fighting force now.

A defeated people. A great many of them have been slain. They're on the floor.

They're very dry. And Ezekiel, this is where you're going to minister. Can you think of any man being called to a worse situation than that? Here when a man is called to a church, the church likes to say, what it's got.

We've got children's work. We've got young people's work. We've got ladies' work.

We've got lovely desserts. And things like that. You say all that's good.

And we thank God for all that is good. And blessed. But here's Ezekiel coming into a situation.

The worst call ever. Perhaps in the Scriptures. Ezekiel, you're going to minister here.

The natural reaction would be to say this. Oh, nothing will ever come from that. This is the deadest church ever.

He might have thought. I remember when I was a student living in Swansea. Five of us boys sharing digs.

And one of them who became my best man, he actually became a pastor later on in Liverpool. He was a little bit naive. Most pastors aren't, eh? He was a little bit naive.

And at the top of the street where we lived, there was a chapel of rest. And he said to us one day, what sort of chapel is that? What denomination? And we just played up. He didn't have a clue what it was, you see.

And we said, oh, it's a pretty dead place, we said. You know, not much life there. But it's worth having a visitor to see you.

When you turn in on Sunday morning, 11 o'clock, you know. So up he went. And he went in and saw all these coffins everywhere and so on.

And he was disillusioned with his Christian friends for the rest of his life. The deadest chapel ever. Well, here's Ezekiel.

He's in a similar sort of place. This is the most unlikely place for a revival ever, isn't it? A Valley of Bones? Who would have thought that a revival would start there? Perhaps this is a message for you this morning. You're feeling it's hopeless, perhaps.

I don't know. You're feeling as dead as you can be. You're putting the front on.

Nobody else knows that. But you know it, and God knows it. You've got the mark of death seems to be upon you.

Silence, you know, can be golden, can't it? But it can also be a mark of death. Here's Ezekiel in the silence of that graveyard. And he knows what's happening.

The message from God to you is the message that came to Ezekiel. Here's the question. It comes in the next verse.

Son of man, can these bones live? Now, humanly, the answer is no. Ezekiel knows that. The bones are scattered, very dry.

They've been dead a long time. The valley is full of them. Impossible.

Humanly, no, they can't live. But not with God. There was another prophet alive at this time.

He was a bit older than Ezekiel. He was about 25 years older than him. Similar to Gareth and myself.

And he was living in Jerusalem. And this prophet was called Jeremiah. Ezekiel probably knew of his prophecies.

Whether he'd read them, I'm not sure. But in those prophecies, you can read these wonderful words. Jeremiah writes, is anything too hard for the Lord? And the reply is in the same chapter.

Nothing is too hard for you. And I can imagine Ezekiel standing there. He's read, possibly, probably has read these prophecies.

He certainly knows of them. And he's saying, can these bones live, Ezekiel? And Ezekiel is getting these words in his mind. Is anything, anything, too hard for the Lord? He says, Lord, nothing is too hard for you.

And it may be, believer, this morning that God is saying to you, can these bones live? I don't know what your situation might be. I don't know what it's all about. Perhaps it's in your service for Christ.

You've been disillusioned. It's really tough. The problems are too big.

Perhaps it's you personally. You feel so dry, so dead. Perhaps it's this town.

This land, there's no breakthrough. Perhaps it's Spain. Alan was referring to this passage when he was referring to Spain in the prayer meeting a few weeks back.

It might be some other country. It might be some other situation. It might be your family.

Can those dead bones live? The most impossible situation that you can think of. The driest, deadest person you can think of spiritually or situation. The deadest church.

The greatest failure. The down and out as we see it. Can they live, Lord? Can they? Can they? Notice what's happening.

This is prayer. God is speaking to Ezekiel. And Ezekiel is responding to God.

There's a two-way thing going on here. This is real prayer. Can these bones live, Ezekiel? Lord, he says, you know.

And he's not saying I'm not sure. Perhaps you know. Lord, you know they can.

Your prayer is powerful. You haven't forgotten to believe in prayer, have you? I hope you haven't. I've been reading the biography lately of Franklin Graham.

Billy Graham's son. He was a rebel. Right enough.

A proper rebel. He was kicked out of two schools. He smoked, smoked and drank quite a lot.

Then he got over that. Eventually came to Christ. But during that time, he was in his third school or college.

And he eventually finished his education. They thought he'd never do that. On the day he graduated, his mother gave him as a gift.

His grandfather's, her father, his grandfather's concordance, Bible concordance, leather bound. His grandfather, by the way, was a well-known missionary called Nelson Bell. He'd been in China many years.

Great man. And she said, when you open the front page, you'll see why I'm giving it to you. He opened the front page and there was a list of all the people he'd been praying for in small writing.

Pray for so and so, so and so. He was retired now back in the States. At the bottom of the list, pray for Franklin's education.

He put the date down. August the 2nd, 1973. Franklin graduated August the 2nd, 1978.

Five years to the day that he wrote that down. What had happened in the meantime? He died and gone to glory. He never saw his prayer answered.

But don't tell me that that wasn't God answering his prayer. I'm confirming that the prayer he'd asked and written down five years before to the day was answered. He didn't live to see it.

But Franklin Graham had no doubt in his mind that his grandfather's prayers counted before God. Can these bones live? God's question to you and me this morning. And let's move on to the answer of faith that Ezekiel gives.

Dear God always demands an answer. By the way, you're thinking, dear me, he's only got as far as verse 2 or 3 out of 14. Twenty-five minutes gone.

I'm carrying on next week. I'm almost there. The answer of faith.

God always demands an answer. You can pretend you don't hear him. You can ignore the question.

You can give a wrong answer. But you know, life and death are in the balance here. Would God have revived that great army without Ezekiel's response? I don't know.

God moves in answer to prayer, said someone. And so Ezekiel responds, oh sovereign Lord, he says, you alone know. It's in verse 3. What Ezekiel is saying in effect is this, Lord, it's beyond me.

But it's not beyond you. Lord, you know if that's possible. He didn't doubt God's power.

He believed that God knew what he was going to do and when he was going to do it, and that he was able to do it. Romans 4 tells us this. God gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

You see, we've got to get there. We've got to get to the point where we believe in the God of the resurrection. We say we believe it, but in our situations, you mean.

By nature, by the way, we are dead, are we not, in trespasses and sins. By nature. We know what death is.

And it's only God's power can get life into you. Through faith. Let me just ask a question to everybody here this morning.

Have you come alive in Christ? You might be a young person. You might not have made that commitment. You might not have made that discovery, really, that God can make you alive in Christ.

You come alive because He became dead. You come to life, spiritual life, because Christ took death. Call on Him.

Ask Him to be your Savior. As Gareth mentioned earlier, ask Him to give you new life. Ask Him to wash your sins away.

And don't doubt that He'll do that. Even now in this service you can do that. Don't wait.

The message comes from the Scriptures often. Now is the time, the day of salvation. Well, Ezekiel was exercising that same faith here.

Lord, he says, Sovereign Lord, You alone know. It wasn't the despair of I don't know. It was saying, Lord, You can do it.

That's faith. With faith all things are possible, said Jesus. And didn't Wesley say one of his hymns? That faith laughs at impossibilities and says it will be done.

He's written in one of his hymns. So as you and I face our valley of dry bones, as the Lord calls to us this morning, each one of us, I'm sure of that, can these bones live in our day, in our generation, in our lives, in our families, in our church? We must reply in humble faith, Lord, You know they can. You alone know, Sovereign Lord, my life can be revived.

My family can be rescued. My church can know this resurrection power within it. My town, my village can be impacted by God.

My ministry. Not just a ministry in the pulpit, remember. We've all got ministry.

Every one of us, if we follow in Christ. My marriage. All these dry bones can live.

Lord, You know. Let's pray. Lord, You know that at best, we are dry bones, left to ourselves.

You know how often we've been defeated. You know how much we need reviving. You know, Lord, how much we need Your resurrection power to be amongst us and in us, in Christ.

We commit ourselves to You now, therefore, for that power to work within us in Your mercy. And whatever happens, Lord, in our lives, in our church, in our families, in our town, may it all be only for the glory of Him who is the resurrection and the life. Amen.

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