

Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones - Part 2

by Steve Evans

Steve Evans emphasizes the power of faith and God's word to bring life and hope to seemingly impossible situations, as illustrated by Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones.

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Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1

Topics: "Revival", "Faith in God"

Description

Steve Evans emphasizes the transformative power of God through the story of Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, illustrating that even the most hopeless situations can be revived by faith and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He challenges the congregation to consider their own ministries and the areas in their lives that may seem lifeless, encouraging them to believe in God's ability to bring life where there is death. Evans draws parallels to the resurrection of Lazarus, reminding listeners that what is impossible for man is possible for God. He stresses the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's calling and to witness the revival of spiritual life in themselves and their communities. Ultimately, he calls for a collective awakening to hear and respond to the word of the Lord, believing in the power of God to breathe life into dry bones.

Transcript

Ezekiel chapter 37, the Valley of Dry Bones. Last week, if you remember, we looked at it and we saw that Ezekiel, this young priest, 30 years of age, was a man with an almost impossible mission. He was called to preach to a cemetery.

He was ministering to the deadest people ever. He was ministering to a defeated nation, because they were a picture, were they not, of the nation that he belonged to. He was ministering to a failed people.

And he was ministering, actually, believe it or not, to God's people, because God's people can be failed, defeated, and dead. And God said this to him, Ezekiel, can these bones live? And you know, he answered in faith, Lord, he says, you know they can. And perhaps every minister, and every pastor, and Christian worker, has to ask that question from time to time.

They have to ask, can this church live? Can these lukewarm people live? Can this deadness come to life? Can this impossible situation change? Can this area around us come alive in Christ? Now, by the way, Mount Zion, don't take it too personally. I'm not saying that this church is the deadest church ever. I'm not

saying that this is the lukewarm church.

I'm just saying that every Christian, in whatever sphere he ministers in, has to ask that question. Can this happen? Can God bless in this situation? It's not just for me as a pastor, this is for you in your situation. This is for you and your family.

This is for you in the village where you live, of the town that you work in, the place where you work, the nation that we've been brought into by Providence. Can these bones live? Well, you know, anything that God does seems impossible to us. And faith in God believes God for the impossible.

I like to think a lot of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. You know what happened, don't you? He waited until Lazarus really was dead, if you know what I mean. He said, come and heal my brother Lazarus.

They sent the message to him, our brother Lazarus. He's very, very ill. And Jesus waited several days.

He didn't go there. And Lazarus, in the meantime, died. He'd been, was it four days, in the grave.

He waited until Lazarus was really dead, till there was a grave. And then he called him out of the grave by name. Lazarus, he said, come forth.

And he came. You see, he was teaching the people at that time, he's teaching Mary and Martha, that what is impossible with men, is possible with God. And don't we need to learn that lesson time after time after time.

Don't we always think that the situation that we're in, is impossible. But my family situation is impossible. But the area around here will never respond.

There's a song we sing, I don't know if you know it. I don't think we've sung it here. Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible.

He does the things that no other can do. There's a little poster up in the back room, here in the vestry. It says this, what God has done anywhere, he can do here.

What God has done for anyone, he can do for you. What God has done at any time, he can do now. We need to write that in our hearts, you know.

We tend to think of these great men, somebody asked the panel a question on Sunday. All these great saints of the past, they're on a great high, you know. And the answers was given, were they always like that? The answer was given of course by the panel, of course they weren't.

They were flesh and blood like you and me. Some of them were depressives by nature. They were more sensitive to the need of God, Stuart Pell told us.

God used them, mightily blessed them. What God has done for anyone, he can do for you. Do you believe that? I'm glad one person does.

What God has done anywhere, he can do here. What God has done at any time, he can do now, today. And so Ezekiel was told, prophesy to these bones.

What, what a message. Preach if you like, to bones. Prophecy didn't, doesn't just mean you tell the future, okay.

It includes that very often. It means declare, preach to them, proclaim, tell them, prophecy to these bones, tell them that they're gonna live. You see, God was appointing him to this work.

I don't know what work he's appointed you to, but I'm sure of this, he has appointed you to a work for him. There is no such thing as an unemployed Christian in the terms of spiritual life. You might be unemployed on this earth, we have great sympathy for people who have, but there's no such thing as an unemployed person in the kingdom of God.

God has appointed you to a work for him, but if he has appointed you, he must also anoint you. With the appointing, comes the anointing. You see, the appointing was to an impossible work, but the anointing of God makes the impossible possible.

So I want to ask you this morning, are you aware that you've been appointed by God, like Ezekiel was? You might not have to come and stand in the pulpit like I have, like I am. You might not have a public ministry, but you have another ministry. Whatever it is that God has called you to.

I don't know what it, I wouldn't even mention things. It can be a whole host of things. I know a lady who never ever prayed in the prayer meeting.

She was always there. She was almost there until she died, and she never prayed out loud in the prayer meeting. I never heard her once.

She wasn't that sort of person, but you know, she had a ministry. She used to go around that village where she lived, not very far, very far from here, and she used to take an apple pie or something else, a loaf of bread, regularly for years, and she wasn't doing it so they can, people could say, what a good lady you are, Annie Jones. It wasn't that.

It was her ministry. God had called her to it. God blessed that ministry she had.

She prayed a lot. It was the days when you didn't have all these satellite Christian channels, you know. So she used to turn on the radio every night to Trans World Radio.

Still going, I think, to Trans World Radio, and she used to get her spiritual food from that. She had an appointment. She had a ministry from God, and so do you.

But I want to ask this to you as well. When you're aware that you have been appointed by God to something, in the village where you live, in the office where you work, whatever the people you meet in your family, aren't you aware that you need an anointing as well? Ezekiel had that. He had been anointed by God.

That's why at this Pentecostal Sunday, if you like, the Sunday of Pentecost, we should be aware of that. But God anoints us for work. He wants every Christian to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's why Paul says, and writes it, be filled. Keep on being filled, he says, with the Spirit. Now what was the work that Ezekiel had? Well, first of all, he had to preach.

It was a prophesying ministry he was given. We're not all given that, but he was. He had a prophesying, preaching ministry to these dead bones.

You know, preaching is important, it's unique, and it's essential. Now I don't believe that our services here should be sermon-centered. Worse still, they shouldn't be preacher-centered.

That's not worship. You even get that in good Bible-believing churches. You get people going into a service all dead and flat all the way through, and then somebody preaches, and they get a little bit of a lift, and you go, oh, that was a good word.

That's not worship. We mustn't be sermon-centered, or preacher-centered. We must be Christ-centered.

The central focus of this meeting, on all our meetings, must be Jesus Christ. So where you're sitting in the gallery, or down in the pews here, you're aware of Christ, all the time. You're looking what somebody else is wearing.

You're wondering about the lunch you're gonna have later on. You're centered on Jesus Christ. When we get that, when we get there, you know, we'll be where God wants us to be, because he's the central point of heaven.

When you get to heaven one day, you know, you'll be centered on Christ. No need of a light in heaven, we're told. The light of that world is Jesus.

He used to sing some years ago. Now having said that, we mustn't downplay preaching either. I was reading an article this week.

I picked it up in a magazine in the bookshop here, and it was saying, the article was dealing with, do we need to revamp preaching? Do we need to change it all now, that we're into the 21st century? And various examples were given. Some were, some were sort of more saying, no we don't, we just preach to the power of God upon us. But others were saying, yes we do.

For a post-modern age, one example was given. One minister was quoted far, far away from here. He, when he was teaching, say, about the dietary laws of the Old Testament, as he was preaching, he would cook hamburger in front of the congregation.

I'd never thought of that. I'm not going to either. And so on.

And other examples were given. I've just given you one. And to me, you know, this whole idea is simply gimmicky, trendy, waffly, and to be honest with you, it's patronising, it's patronising as well.

To think that people kind of understand something about the dietary laws of the Old Testament, but not eating unclean meats and so on, by simply being told it. You have to have hamburgers made in front of you and things like that. And there were loads of different examples like that.

Weird, wacky stuff. It's as if people say, well we've discovered after 200, 2000 years, that we've been doing it wrong after all. We shouldn't have been preaching like that.

We should have been doing this. Somebody quoted, oh it was Gareth Evans, he quoted Tozer, and we quoted it a few times on Friday night. Tozer wrote this, great man of God.

When you see the latest fad in Christian circles, turn around and run the other way as fast as you can. It's good isn't it? The latest fad. They seem to be coming every 18 months these days.

The latest fad, the latest in thing. Jesus said this, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he said, because he has anointed me, praise God for that, he has anointed me. One of the things was to preach the gospel.

You see, when preaching is with the anointing of God upon it, you won't need anything else. Now I do believe that we must be creative and attractive in the way we preach. I don't believe we should be boring, God forbid if I am, forgive me.

But we shouldn't, we shouldn't aim at almost being heavy and all the time. We should be flexible in the way we make Christ known. But this is what we need more than anything else.

We need men and women who preach with the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon them. Paul wrote somewhere else about people, how are they going to get saved, and he said, how shall they hear, he said, without a preacher. No, I don't mean just what people call a good word, I'm, I'm, I'll be honest with you, I'm a little bit fed up, you know, when I hear people saying, and it's not said here, and they say, well that was a good word.

They've been in a dead service, I'm talking about evangelical people, they've been in a dead service with dead singing, dead reading of the word, dead fellowship, dead evangelism in their churches, but they get a good word. They're depending upon a lecture to get them going. That's not what the Bible tells me about in the New Testament.

Paul says, we preached, he says to you Thessalonians, with a Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. We preached with the power of God upon us, and he knew it. He didn't have to, he didn't have to make hamburgers for them, he didn't have to give them a nice little lecture, tuck their spirits up, he preached with a Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

And you and I can know the power of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit upon us, sent down from heaven. Baptists can, evangelicals can, Pentecostals and Charismatics can, Calvinists and Arminians can, anyone can preach with the power of the Holy Spirit upon them, if they humbly receive from God. But you can preach without that as well.

You can come into a pulpit, and you can preach in the flesh, you can preach at people, you can be condemnatory, you can miss out on the love of God, shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. But you know, having said that, we can and we must know the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon us as well. As we preach, as we listen, you need to be anointed to listen.

And Ezekiel did just that. Can I suggest to you my friends, that you pray for the preachers of Wales and England, if you're from England, pray for the preachers of God to know this anointing. Because my fear is that many of us don't.

So Ezekiel prophesied and preaches to the deadest congregation ever, to these dead bones. But he does so in faith, with a hand of God upon him, the Spirit of the Lord empowering him. He had resurrection in his heart, you know, before he saw it outside with those bones.

Do you know what I mean? Jesus said, I am the resurrection, I'm the life. If you've got Christ in your heart, you've got resurrection in you. You've got life in you.

You've got resurrection life in you. Ezekiel 36, the chapter before this, I'll be reading it this morning, says, I'll take out that heart of flesh, and I'll give you that heart of stone, and I'll give you a heart of flesh. Do you know what a heart of stone is? Hard.

Do you know what I mean? You sit, you sat in meetings, hard. You read your Bible at home, perhaps, hard. You try to pray, hard.

Dry. God says, I'll take that away from you. Ask me.

I'll give you a heart of stone, heart of flesh, instead of the heart of stone. The end of our Ezekiel 36, it says this, once again, God says, I can't understand this. I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel, and do this for them.

Isn't that amazing? God says, I will yield, I'll give in, I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel, God's people, and do this for them. Well, there Ezekiel begins his message. This is what he says to start with.

Hear the word of the Lord, he says. He doesn't say anything else. Hear the word of the, hear the word of the Lord.

Now, what could Ezekiel have said to those bones? He could have said this, you know, I think I might well have said something like this. Hey, dry bones, you need some calcium tablets. Dry bones, you need an x-ray for osteoporosis.

Don't worry, dry bones, I'll get you out of this mess now, or just wait, dry bones, until Gwangwili is at a look at you. Dry bones, let me start putting you together. Ezekiel had nothing like that to offer, nothing human.

Dry bones, he said. Hear the word of the Lord. God's saying something into that situation.

God is doing something. God is speaking. Dry bones, that's your only hope.

It's going to happen. Ezekiel knew it. God had told him.

God had said, I'm going to, I'm going to bring life into them. I'm going to put flesh on them, tendons, skin. It's my spirit.

Dry bones, Ezekiel was saying. The ultimate revival is coming. You know, we try everything else, don't we? The bones are still dry, very dry, and still dead, and then God takes hold of somebody.

It isn't always the preacher, you know. God takes hold of a man or a woman. In the congregation, perhaps here tonight, today, God uses that person of faith, in what he can do, to bring life, where there's death.

Hear the word of the Lord. That person will be praying at home. Praying for the word of God to bring to that situation of death.

Might be the whole of Cardigan. Might be the whole of West Wales. Mary Campbell was one of the panel on Friday.

She was saying that back in the, was it the 70s? Many prophecies were given, that God was going to move again, from the southwest, throughout Wales, starting in that direction, with incoming, with the prevailing winds, you know. And she said this, at that time, amongst the Baptists in Pembrokeshire, there were virtually, or hardly any, Bible-believing folk, evangelical. She said, now in the Baptist church, they all

are.

Every person in appointed ministry in the Baptist churches, in English Baptist churches in Pembrokeshire, are Bible-believing and evangelical. Stuart Bell was saying, he didn't know that. He's a, he's an Anglican minister in Aberystwyth.

So when he came to Wales for almost 37, 38 years ago, he said there were six true evangelical Anglican ministers, in the whole of Wales, out of 700. That's dry bones for you. He said, today the total number of ministers dropped to 400 and something.

He said, but 70 of them are evangelical Bible-believing. There's something happening, you know, under our noses. We haven't seen it sometimes, because we've been so shut off in our own little ghettos, spiritual ghettos.

And God is doing something. Things are changing. Dry bones are hearing the word of the Lord.

You've heard the word of the Lord, haven't you? I mean, that's why you're following Christ, isn't it? Jesus said, my sheep, hear my voice and follow me. When we were dead, says Paul, we were made alive in Christ. Can you say amen to that? I hope you can.

If you're a true believer, you've been made alive. New life has come to you. You were dead, couldn't do a thing.

You've heard the word from heaven. The Lord has spoken. A new life has come into you.

Resurrection life has come into you. Power of God has come into you. You've admitted by yourself, you're just death.

You've called on the Lord to save you and help you. You've come to Calvary. You've seen the empty tomb.

You've been thrilled by it. You were playing, the ladies and gentlemen, were playing earlier, out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come. We were praying next door.

I could hear that. And I think of one verse in that, you say, out of the fear and dread of the tomb, Jesus, I come. Jesus, I come.

Well, here we are. It's happening here. You have this situation of the tombs, if you like, of death.

But you've heard the word of the Lord, brothers and sisters, haven't you? The word of God now is so important to you, if you're a believer. The Bible is. When you read it, it's not always easy, I know.

But so very often it lights up to you. It jumps from the page. It speaks to you.

It thunders to you at times. It whispers to you at other times. You just love it.

You can't get enough of it. When Paul writes in Hebrews, he says this, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Tell me, is this what God's word is doing for you? Daily, I mean now, at home, in church, as a family? Is God speaking? Are you hearing the word of the Lord? I believe Christians can go sometimes for weeks, months, even years. They're not hearing the word of the Lord.

David said, let me hide my word, your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. It might be that some of us here, you know, are sinning against the Lord. We're allowing sin to run riot in our lives, because we're not hiding his word in our hearts.

There are times when sin rages in our hearts, you know. Fires of hell can burn in our hearts. We must put them out, before they destroy us.

Somebody said something like this, extinguish hell's fires in your heart, or they'll extinguish you in hell. Hide God's word in your heart. David knew what it was to be tempted.

He said, how will, I mean, probably sexually. He fell once, we know. How will a young man, he says, cleanse his way? By taking heed to your word.

Drive on, says Ezekiel, hear the word of the Lord. Let me move on quickly. He says, I will make breath unto you.

And this comes, brings us down to my remaining few minutes, five minutes. I will make breath unto you. And this, of course, on Pentecost Sunday is most appropriate.

Do you remember when Adam was made? In Genesis, he had a body. He was a living being, if you like, he was a living body. But he only became a living soul, when God breathed into him.

He was the first spirit-filled man ever, Adam. On the early church, in the same way, there was 120 gathered in that upper room. They were a body of people, but they weren't the full body of Christ, until the Holy Spirit came.

And he indwelt them, as Ruth was telling the children earlier. It was so with Jesus, as we saw last week. He was anointed by the Spirit.

So with Paul, when Ananias came to him. Receive your sight on the Holy Spirit. And he received the Holy Spirit.

And all the New Testament believers received the anointing of God. Well, like we assume they all did. The anointing and blessing of God.

The breath of God was in the New Testament church. That's why it's so different. The power of God was upon them.

I've been reading this week, the biography of Oswald Chambers. Some of you know of him. He wrote a well-known daily devotional book, My Atmost for His Highest.

In fact, his wife compiled it after his death, from his teachings. But he was saying, he's a Scottish man, and he was living in, what's it called, Dunoon, I think it was called. A place called Dunoon.

He was struggling with sin in his life. With defeat. With impurity.

With a lack of power. With a lack of holiness. With a lack of love.

He was going on and on. And all the other people thought he was a wonderful Christian. He went through a struggle which lasted months.

He wanted God himself. He wanted to be filled with the Spirit of God. He studied.

He prayed. He agonized. One day he decided to take Jesus at his word.

He said, you've said, if you ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, he will give it to you. He won't give you a scorpion if you ask for a fish. You know the passage? He asked God in faith.

And he went to a meeting. He said, I now have to testify. He didn't feel any different.

He stood up in that meeting and he testified as to what he had done. They couldn't understand him. The Oswald Chambers, he wasn't a preacher, but he preached.

He wasn't a minister, but he preached, you see. And people thought he was a wonderful man. He said, I'm not, he said.

I need the Holy Spirit. I need the cleansing. I need the presence of God in my life.

He went from that meeting. He still didn't feel much different. Two days later, he spoke at a meeting.

He said, I gave the same message that I'd given previously. And 40 people were converted. What had happened? Without him being physically aware of it, the Holy Spirit had come.

In response to his faith, he was, as he realized that, he was more and more flooded with the love of God, he says. And that flooding that he had, irrigated thousands of others in his brief lifetime. Because he died in Egypt, ministering to soldiers in his 40s.

What did he talk about? A life of total surrender to God. Total yieldedness. I wonder, are we like that? Are we there? Totally surrendered? It's something you have to do continually, of course.

What I wonder, perhaps, is the luck in our lives. Perhaps the sin in our lives. Oh, you can't get away from those things you watch on TV, that you shouldn't watch, or the computer, or that you read, or the way you speak about people, or the gossip you're involved in, that I'm involved in.

What we need, you know, is total surrender at the cross. Total reception, a receiving of the Holy Spirit. Stuart Bell was asked on Friday evening, but they were all asked, but he answered to the question, what's the book, apart from the Bible, that has most influenced you? And he said, it's the book, The Calvary Road, by Roy Hessian.

That rang a bell with me. It's a wonderful book. I know some of you bought a copy a few years back here in the church.

There's some copies in the bookshop still. Well, actually new copies, with a foreword by George Verver. And he says this in it, you can read this book, he says, in a few hours, but it'll change your life for eternity.

Stuart Bell said that was the book that most changed him, most influenced him. What's it all about? It's about dying to self, and knowing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This is what God says, you know, dry

bones, you see, don't just need a body around them, they need breath from heaven.

And sometimes I believe, as Christian believers, you know, we've got the structure, we've got the body of believers, we've got the things that make for looking like life, but we need the breath of the Spirit of God. We sing that hymn, don't we? Breathe on me, breath of God. Do we mean it? These bones were revived.

And you know, we must remember, when they were revived, what a change. They couldn't, can you imagine those bones standing up? With bodies, and breath in them, and we're now a fighting army. Can you imagine the joy, the love, the power, the anointed witness, if you like, the spiritual battles, physical battles that they were now to fight? It's just like that with us as believers.

The Spirit of God comes upon us. In fullness, I believe. Some of us know a little of the Holy Spirit, we need to know more.

We will know joy, and love, and power, and anointed witness, and spiritual battles. You see, before this, these bones were just relics, just fossils, sort of left lying on the ground, if you like. But now, God was doing something in them.

You see, before, they were a reminder of what God had once done, they had once been an army. But now God is doing something today, in this generation. You will come to life, he says, in verse 5. When the breath of God is upon you, you're fully alive, and I'm fully alive.

You can be as dead as a dodo, as dead as the dry bones here, spiritually, you know. God can make you alive. Let the word of the Lord come to you.

Let the voice of the prophet, not me, Ezekiel, come to you. You can know the Spirit of God's power and presence in your life. Dry bones, all of us, let's hear the word of the Lord.

Let's pray. Wash us clean, we pray, through the blood of Christ, so that we can then say that you live in our hearts and lives in all your fullness, because you are the gift of the Father to the children who believe in Jesus. We accept you.

We honor you. We glorify Jesus in his name. Amen.

Let's sing a hymn, a modern hymn, which tells of the dry bones becoming as flesh. These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord, and so on. And the second verse says this, these are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh, and these are the days of your servant David, rebuilding the temple of praise.

These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as white in the world, and we are the laborers in the vineyard, declaring the word of the Lord. Let's do so, let's pray, let's sing. These are the days of Elijah, and shall be the days of retrial, of fire and darkness and storm, singing our voice in the desert dry, declaring the word of the Lord.

Before we pass, riding on the clouds, shining like the sun, on the trumpet call, lift your voice with the air of jubilee, of the signs his salvation calls. These are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh, and these are the days of your servant David, rebuilding the temple of praise. These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as white in the world, and we are the laborers in the vineyard, declaring the word of the Lord.

Before we pass, riding on the clouds, shining like the sun, on the trumpet call, lift your voice with the air of jubilee, of the signs his salvation calls. Before we pass, riding on the clouds, shining like the sun, on the trumpet call, lift your voice with the air of jubilee, of the signs his salvation calls. Let's say the grace together.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

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