

DRY BUT NOT DEAD

A SERMON

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“O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” Ezekiel 37:4

I PURPOSE this morning giving first *the history*, and secondly, *the mystery of these words*. First as to their historical or literal meaning. It stands thus; that the penalty of violating the old covenant under which the Jews where was death. But the question arises, what kind of death? Not the death that we died in Adam, for that was already passed; therefore it could not be that; nor the death of the body, for all men are already under that penalty; nor the second or ultimate death, because that second death belongs to ultimate judgment; nor was it spiritual death, for there is no such thing as the seed of incorruptible life when once brought into the soul dying. Here then are three deaths; namely our death in Adam, the death of the body, the second or ultimate death, and yet that the penalty consisted not in any one of these deaths. And this is an important matter for us to understand, in order to get the real meaning when we come presently to the mystical part of our subject this morning. You recollect in the 18th of Ezekiel, that when a man turned from his righteousness, and did that which was wrong or wicked, he was to die; but when after that he again turned from his wickedness, and did that which was right, he was to live. Now when he turned from his righteousness, and did that which was wicked if he died literally how could he again after that return from his wickedness to righteousness, and live? And if it meant literal death, how could the man after having died through his wickedness comeback again to righteousness and live? If it meant the ultimate death, how could man come back out of hell; and again, practice righteousness and live? Therefore, you observe that the death there spoken of is not any one of these that I have mentioned. Now the Lord says, “Why will you die, O house of Israel?” But that death, I say, was not the death we died in Adam, for that was already passed; nor the literal death of the body, for all men, as I have said, are under that; nor the ultimate death, for there is no return from that; nor spiritual death, for there is no such thing in existence; yet the Lord says, “why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live you.” And yet in our day men take up these scriptures, and speak of them as though they were gospel. All scripture is given by inspiration, and is all profitable, but is not all gospel; certainly not. What then was the death of the Israelite? Death there meant severing from the land of promise, severing from the city of Jerusalem, severing from the temple, the mercy-seat, the presence of God, and those advantages they had by the Lord making them free, and making them above all other nations; the death that they died was a severing from all these. And so, when they were taken away into Babylon, they are represented as dying; and they are represented as

lying in an open valley as dry bones, or in the grave, for seventy years; and then at the end of that seventy years the resurrection takes place. But what kind of resurrection? A restoration to their land; so that they had not died literally; of course a great many of them had been put to death, but they had not died literally as a people; but they had died in the sense there intended; and their restoration to their land, and their reorganization as a nation, and their re-establishment in their land, in their city, in the temple worship and the advantages thereof, this is called the resurrection. So, you observe that these dry bones were not literally dead; but only dead to the land which they had before possessed, dead to the temple, dead to the mercy seat, dead to that national distinction, and those advantages and privileges which the Lord had bestowed upon them. This then is the kind of death that they died; their death was ecclesiastical and their restoration is the kind of resurrection which they experienced. The prophet therefore called upon these, bones to do what they were capable of doing, namely, to hear the word of the Lord. "O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord;" as though he should say, when you were in your own land you listened to the words of men, to the words of false prophets, and by those false prophets you adopted false gods; and by adopting those false gods you turned your back upon the true God, you forfeited your right to the land; and now you have been banished, and scattered, and been dead in that respect for seventy years. Now then after being scattered, and coming into this death, this severing from your land, by hearing the words of men, now, "O you dry bones hear the word of the Lord." I thought I would make this clear by way of introduction, because remember that although we have the Bible, none but God himself can teach us the true meaning of that book; that book contains such a variety of ministrations and circumstances one way and the other that unless a man be taught of God he is sure to make use of the very scriptures themselves as the way of his own confusion, the way of his own destruction, the way of his own eternal ruin.

After these few remarks then I will notice first, *the persons here called upon to hear the word of the Lord*; "O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord;" and *I will secondly show what they are called upon to listen to*.

I. Now the first is, *The persons that are here called upon to hear the word of the Lord*. What would be your inference from the text? Why, you would say, the persons here spoken of, the persons that are called upon to hear the word of the Lord are persons that are dead in trespasses and in sins, represented by dry bones; this is what you would say naturally. And again, you would be almost tempted to say, can these dry bones hear the word of the Lord? I know you would say so; I see what it is; it is a very solemn representation of our state by nature; and that the persons here called upon to hear the word of the Lord will mean sinners, they are dead in trespasses and in sins. Now would not you think this? I know this would be the conclusion of many of you; and yet in coming to that conclusion you would be as wrong as the Bible is right. The persons here spoken of are persons that are not dead in trespasses and in sins¹. The persons here called upon are not dead in trespasses and in sins. I am aware that this is the view almost universally taken, and people make sure that they are right. Oh yes, that is it, they say; they are dead in sin, and we call upon them to hear the word of the Lord. That is their conclusion; but they are wrong; the persons here are not dead in sins; they are persons, if we take it mystically, that are regenerated; they are persons that are alive from the dead, they are persons that are conscious of their condition. Where is your proof? I should not make such assertions without proof. I have been for many years a lover not only of

¹ We are often taunted with the question, did not Ezekiel prophesy to the dead bones? We answer, no they were not spiritually dead bones.

God's truth, but also of God's own interpretation of his own truth; and I come to the 11th verse of this chapter, and there I get the key; the Lord himself explains it; these bones are the whole house of Israel. The Lord said to the prophet, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel;" not the whole world, but "the whole house of Israel;" here is specialty. And "they say, our bones are dried;" that is what they say; and it is the truth. Is that the language of the man dead in sin? I think not. "Our hope is lost." Is that the language of the man dead in sin? I think not. And "we are cut off for our parts." Is that the language of the man dead in sin? Certainly not. The persons, then, here called upon to hear the word of the Lord are persons, as it will presently prove itself to be, that are interested in God's promises; for the word they are called upon to hear is nothing else, all through this chapter, then a succession of promises to the same people. First then, it is a people conscious of what they are; "our bones are dried;" that is the man. What shall we understand by this? That as the Israelites were not literally dead, but only relatively dead, so here is a sinner quickened into spiritual life; and he sees and knows that by his fall in Adam such is his condition, as a sinner that his bones are dried; that is to say, he is conscious that his original state of youth, and life, and holiness, and righteousness, and strength, and peace, and possession of everything he had in the first Adam, that it is all destroyed: he feels he is, as it were, a dry bone. He says, what am I? I have nothing but death within me; I am nothing but a poor skeleton; I am a poor sinner; sin has consumed me, sin has destroyed me, sin has made me worthless; a dry bone, that is a worthless thing; and so, the poor sinner sees that he is worthless, a poor worthless thing. And not only destitute of anything that is good, but also helpless; how helpless is a dry bone; and so, a sinner. feels he is helpless, and he sees he can no more help himself than that dry bone in Ezekiel's vision can form itself into a man; that he can no more alter his state, he can no more do anything towards recovering what he lost in the first Adam, or acquiring what there is in the second Adam, than that bone can form itself into a man. Thus then the man called upon to hear the word of the Lord is the man that is thus made conscious of his state as a sinner. When the soul is quickened, and the fiery convictions of the Eternal Spirit lay hold upon that soul, the sinner becomes convinced of his utter destitution of anything that is good, his utter worthlessness and helplessness; and he says, Here I am as a sinner considered merely a dry bone; I am fit for nothing, apart from Christ considered, but the consuming fire of God's eternal wrath. That is the man that in my text is called upon to hear the word of the Lord. How is it with us, my hearer? Is this the light in which we see ourselves? Have we been brought to see and feel that our sinner-ship is such that it has spoiled us, peeled us, deprived us, and made us worthless, helpless, made us everything that is repulsive? What is the language of the living concerning the dead? "Bury the dead out of my sight." And when the dear Redeemer's name is brought in, when the Eternal Spirit brings in the Redeemer's name in all the achievements of his death, it buries then that old Adam, it buries sin, it buries the curse, it buries death itself; they are gone, and the soul springs into new and eternal life; its bones shall be dried no more forever. Again, these persons are not only conscious of what sin has made them, how worthless, how helpless, how destitute, how wretched they are as sinners, but they are also hopeless; "Our hope is lost." The best hope you ever had in your life; if God has taken your Pharisaic hope away, your false hope away, and has brought you to see and know that you cannot have the least particle of hope in him by any worth or worthiness of your own; and that you are brought to feel that hope is the gift of God. Hence, what gave these Israelites hope in this chapter; what gave these dry bones hope when they said, "Our hope is lost"; what gave them hope? Why the promises that God here gave to them. And so, you will find if you are taught of God that nothing but the promises of mercy that is in Christ Jesus can give you hope. For instance, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." Now if brought to feel that you can have no other

hope in any other way, such a scripture is encouraging. Then again, "He that seeks finds"; but then you must seek by faith, and not by works; you must seek by the right way, seek by the truth of God, and by the Christ of God, and by the order of the mercy and the grace of God; you must seek in this way, by prayer: "he that seeks finds." Then again you will find that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and your feeling you are a poor sinner, a lost sinner, that you are by nature without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world. Conscious of this you are called upon to hear the word of the Lord; "O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord;" And this is a test, too, as to whether you are taught of God, and whether your false hope be taken away or not; because if your false hope be taken away, you will be glad to listen to that word by which we have a living hope, by which we have that hope that is sure, by which we have that hope of life, and of salvation, and of eternal glory, which never can be lost. These are the persons. Again, "we are cut off for our parts"; they were cut off. So you will find that as the flaming sword turned every way to cut Adam off from ever regaining by his own works any standing with God, so you will find that the law of God is spiritual, and you are carnal; you will find that you are cut off, that you can never by anything you can do regain the favor of God, nor have any standing with God, nor have any fellowship with God; and thus you will find that you are from what you are as a sinner utterly and entirely cut off. Now these things must be personal matters, as well as the things I shall presently advance. Hence then, my hearers, is it so that we have been brought to feel ourselves as sinners, such sinners as indicated by these dry bones; such sinners as to make us feel that apart from the grace, the mercy of God we have no hope; for it is as much the work of God to take our false hope from us as it is to give us a true hope. You will find that you cannot take man's false hope away from him. You will find that everyone has a hope; no man is without hope. The poet has well said, as far as that matter is concerned,

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

And so, everyone has a hope; but then it is a false hope. But when God takes that false hope away, and makes that man feel what he is as a sinner and then rolls his eternal mercy into his soul, and brings him acquainted with the way in which God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; then that man begins to have hope, and not before. Thus, then these dry bones are persons not dead in trespasses and in sins; as they were persons not dead literally so in the mystic sense they are quickened. And hence the Lord did not say to the prophet, Can these bones be made alive; but "Can these bones live?" Why did the Lord speak in this way? Why, to meet the very feelings of the people themselves; as though the Lord should say, That is just what they are saying to themselves. The poor sinner says, I wonder if I can live; I wonder if there can be mercy for me; I wonder if there can be salvation for me; I wonder if there can be eternal life for me? And the prophet's answer accords with the answer of the Christian; the answer that the convinced sinner, the sinner that is in earnest about the salvation of his soul, would give; the prophet says, "O Lord God, you know;" obliged to leave it with God. Ah, I like to see the sinner brought to that. Lord, is there life for me? You know; I do not know. Lord is there mercy for me? You know. Is there salvation for me? You know. Is there eternal glory for me? You know. Is there a place in that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, for me? Am I included in that sweet promise, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you? I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself;" shall I be one of these? Lord, you know. People tell us we need not trouble ourselves about that, but we should do that which is right, and so settle the matter. Ah, that would be settling divine matters by

human authority and by human doings; that would be a one-sided settlement; it is a very poor settlement for you to settle the solemn affairs of your precious soul without God; a one-sided settlement, the Lord not in it: the Lord has not spoken, has not brought home the word with power; so that you have settled the matter, it may do for the deceived soul; but where the sinner is made conscious of what he is in the way there represented as the dry-bone, as without hope, and as cut off, he feels the matter lies with the Lord; and it can never be settled to that sinner's satisfaction until he hears the word of the Lord in that way that these dry bones did hear the word of the Lord. The Lord help you to think of these things, to read the Scriptures; and try what your minister, has said, whether he is right or wrong, and think about the matter. You will meet, especially, some of you young ones, with a great many delusions when I am no more; and it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and that the loins be well girded with the truth; it is a good thing to be firmly shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; it is a good thing to have the breastplate of Christ's righteousness well braced on; it is a good thing to know well how to use the sword of the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication; watching thereunto with all perseverance; for if we pervert the Scriptures, alas, alas, for the fearful consequences thereof; but if we are guided unto the truth, and handle the matter wisely; then we shall find good, infinite good, eternal good, unlosable good; and the Scriptures will the more you understand them be dearer and dearer to you. "Why will you die, O house of Israel?" Apply that to sinners now! Why, it is no more applicable to sinners now than the Levitical priesthood is a part of the New Testament dispensation; it belonged to a temporal dispensation, and has passed away forever to return no more.

Now these persons were willing to hear the word of the Lord. And see! how this accords with what the Savior says as the Shepherd. He says, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice:" Here they are called dry bones; the same persons mystically; O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

We now come to the word we are to hear; the word stands all through in the shape of positive promise. First, it is *a word of union*; secondly, *it is a word of organization*; third *it is a word of inspiration*, fourth, *a word of triumphant association* and fifth, *it is a word of glorious ultimate destination*. The prophet prophesied as he was commanded, and then came the union. "There was a noise and behold, a shaking, and the bones came together; bone to his bone." Just so the sinner: he begins to have hope; there is something moving, there is a joyful sound; I shall be united to Jesus Christ after all, there is hope after all; I shall be made one with Jesus Christ, for he is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone; and to be brought to him and united to him is indeed, for bone to come to his bone. there the people of God are all brought together. And perhaps the apostle might allude by way of contrast to this old covenant death by severing, when he enumerates in the 8th of Romans a great many things, things future as well as things present, and then comes to the grand conclusion that "there is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Now the favor of God that was in Canaan, there was separation from that; but from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus there is no separation. There was a great noise. Why, the Savior's name makes more noise than anything else; it comes in and makes such a noise, make such a claim, and sounds forth so joyously, that it puts my sins, and doubts, and fears, and the enemy, to silence; and hope springs up, and you begin to feel union to him. And there was also a shaking, a trembling. Ah, such an one says, Now I am afraid lest I am taking what is not mine; there is rejoicing with trembling; I am such a poor creature; I am still afraid; a great shaking, a great trembling, a great fearing. But these bones coming together, bone to his bone, will also mean union of soul to the

people of God; and that is a good sign. You know what the Savior says, "He that receives one of these little ones in my name, receives me." And if you meet with a poor sinner who is conscious of his state, as these dry bones were, and is in earnest about his salvation, and can give some little account of real soul trouble, real soul work, you feel a union of soul to him. And then the Savior says, "He that receives one of these little ones receives me;" and thus you come together, bone to his bone; you are severed from Egyptians, Moabites, Amorites, Babylonians; you are severed through grace from that body; and you are joined to that body to which, through grace, you now belong, even the mystic body of Christ. When I look back at the time when I repeated a number of prayers out of a miserable, dead prayer-book; when I look back at that religious slavery, really, I say, what a fool I was; and I was ten times worse at the end of it all than when I began. But when the Lord showed to me that Jesus Christ was the end of the law for righteousness, that his blood cleanses from all sin, why, my soul fell in love with him; the minister that I had heard sank like lead in the mighty waters; he went down, gown and all went down together. I used to sit there and think, Ah, if I had as much religion in the whole of my body as that dear man has in his little finger, I should be happy; but away it went; I heard him once after that; and oh, poor dear man, he seemed to me to be out of the secret altogether; down he went, and down went the people, and the whole of it; and then I wanted to know where I could find a people with whom I could feel oneness of soul; and I found then what I find now, that they are not quite so numerous as autumnal leaves; I found that however men may despise it, it is a fact, that "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." And from that union to Christ I have never been moved, and I believe separation to be an eternal impossibility; there is no such thing as separation; once in the Lord, in him forever; thus, the eternal covenant stands. But it is a word also of organization. "I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin." Well, say you, I daresay we shall have something fanciful here; what are you going to make the sinews to mean? Why, that which the sinner is by the grace of God, forming the soul by the grace of God, that is what I take the sinews to mean. What are you going to make the flesh then? The same thing. What are you going to make the skin to be? Why, the same thing. 33rd of Job; there is the poor sinner brought down like a dry bone, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers; but "if there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him, and says, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth." Ah, when your soul is formed by the grace of God, you will be strong then. The physical power of the human body, indicated by the sinews, is truly wonderful, but it is a mere nothing in comparison of the strength we have in Christ Jesus. The muscle, indicated by the flesh, is wonderfully strong, but it is a mere nothing in comparison of that strength we have in the Lord our God. And the skin of course is expressive of the completeness of the work. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." And again, "he will beautify the meek with salvation." And it is said of the Lord Jesus Christ, in Solomon's Song, that he is white and ruddy; the whiteness there means holiness, and the ruddiness means health. How sin and sickness go together; holiness and health go together. And so, if I become formed in Christ Jesus, he becomes my sanctification and my health, and I have by his un-tarnish-able holiness eternal health. But third, this word is a word of inspiration. Here they are alive, conscious of their state; here they are united to Jesus Christ, and here they are formed like him; there is a great deal of Christ about them, but still there is a want of freedom, there is a want of liberty; we are obliged to hold the Gospel glass to their lips to see if they breathe or not; there does not appear to be any breath; there is breath, but it is so weak it is hardly perceptible; so the prophet said, "There was no breath in them." The prophet, you

observe, appeals to these dry bones only in one case, and that is in our text, "Hear you the word of the Lord;" he does not ask them to unite themselves to Christ, to come to Christ. Jesus Christ never asked a man to come to him yet, and never will. When he wants a man to come to him, he says, "Follow me;" it is not asking, it is an effectual command; the man can no more avoid coming than the light could avoid coming when he said, "Let there be light and there was light." The prophet did not ask them to unite themselves to Christ; and I do not know that it is right to say that he asked them to hear the word of the Lord; he commanded them; the command was direct from God. "Prophecy upon these bones;" there are plenty of cemeteries elsewhere, plenty of valleys of dry bones elsewhere; ah, but they are not conscious; "prophecy upon these bones," these particular "bones," that I have made conscious of their state. But now comes this fresh inspiration, "Come from the four winds, O breath," meaning first the Holy Spirit in the universality of his power; second, that he comes with all his heart, does not bring a part of himself, but comes with all his heart. "I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole soul and with my whole heart." "Breathe upon these slain, that they may live" a life they have never lived before. And then it denotes the efficiency of the Holy Spirit, his effectual power. Are the bones to come together? So, they did come together. Are they to have sinews and flesh, and to be covered with skin? So it was. Are they to be brought into the freedom of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit to come upon them? So it was; the result was certain. But you ask what part of experience this belongs to? It belongs to that part of your experience when you are first brought into the glorious liberty of the Gospel of God; you can breathe then as you never could breathe before. But it is a word also of triumphant association. They stood upon their feet; could not stand before; always down before this. Daniel was prostrate, and the Lord spoke to him, and he rose upon his hands and his knees; and then the Lord strengthened, him and spoke to him again, and he stood trembling; and then the Lord spoke to him again, and took away this trembling. And so here the result is, they stood upon their feet. And so, we say, a man that is down in circumstances, if another man kindly put him right, we say, Ah, he put him on his feet, and he has walked upon his feet ever since that friend put him there. And so here they stood upon their feet. "He brought me up out of the horrible pit, and from the miry clay, and set my feet upon the rock; and suffers not our feet to be moved." Here we stand then; and we can fall no more as we fell in the first Adam. It is a standing where we stand victorious. "They stood upon their feet an exceeding great army looking forth as the morning, the dawn of eternity now is upon them;" there is the beginning of a light that shall never go down; and fair as the moon, the Gospel moon; clear as the sun, standing in the midst of the sunlight of Christ Jesus; terrible as an army with banners, standing in the victorious work of Jesus Christ; he obtained the victory, he accomplished the warfare, and in what he has done they stand.

See, then, the nature of the Gospel. These dry bones heard; there is no failure in this Gospel; these dry bones came together, no failure; the sinews, and the flesh, and the skin came upon them, no failure; the Holy Spirit brought them into sweet freedom, no failure; they stood upon their feet an exceeding great army, no failure; not a bone was left behind; all Israel shall be saved, all Israel shall be victorious and their universal and eternal anthem shall be, "Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ." Now, then, what was the kind of Gospel that the dry bones were called upon to hear? Was it a free-will Gospel? Certainly not. Was it a duty-faith Gospel, that some of the bones would be damned for not coming? Not a word, not a syllable about it. If you like to add such a doctrine to God's word, you must abide the consequence. Why, there is but one true Gospel, and that is the yea and amen Gospel of the everlasting God, that is in Christ Jesus, confirmed by the blood of the dear Mediator. There can be dry bones no more; they are a

conquering army, a noble army, a glorious army. Come to the 11th of Hebrews; see their achievements there, see their endurance there, and see what a cloud of witnesses they are, that it is by faith that it might be by grace, that the promise might be sure to all the seed.

It is, lastly, *a word of glorious destination*. In the close of this chapter, within the limits of four verses, the eternity of the destiny of these people is set forth in yea and amen order. "They shall dwell in the land for ever;" there is the eternity; "and my servant David," meaning Christ, "shall be their prince forever:" eternity again. "I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant;" eternity again; "and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forever more;" eternity again. "And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." When the Gospel shall come in its eternity, it will overturn the systems of men, and Gentiles shall be brought out of those ephemeral systems into that order of eternity that becomes God in his eternity, expressive of the eternity of his love, the eternity of his salvation, the eternity of his kingdom. Amen and amen.