

Pentecost Sunday Sermon: May 20, 2018

Sermon Theme: The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. What He Does

2. How He Does it

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’ ”

<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ ” <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’ ”

Today we celebrate the Giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The work of God the Holy Spirit is very important. However, while the work of the Father in creating, preserving and protecting and the work of the Son in saving us from sin, death, and hell are understood well, the work of God the Holy Spirit is often misunderstood. It is often either overemphasized or undervalued today by many people. Today, we will look at that work of the Holy Spirit and we will see exactly what the Spirit does for us and how he does it. We will see the work of the Holy Spirit for what it is: the important work of God to bring us faith and keep us in that faith.

Ezekiel lived during a very difficult time on the history of Judah. Babylon had conquered Judah and was deporting the Jews into captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel was deported to Babylon during one of the early deportations. While Jeremiah was preaching repentance to those who remained in Judah, Ezekiel had an equally difficult job of preaching to the captives in Babylon. Ezekiel had to preach God’s justice and judgment on the unbelieving nation of Judah, while also preaching hope and comfort to those who had repented.

These two messages became the center of Ezekiel’s preaching. Ezekiel preached that God could not be mocked. The Lord would judge those who were unrepentant of their sin. This would include the kings of Judah, the Jewish people and any and all nations that did not believe in him.

Yet, he also preached the Lord’s desire to be gracious and forgive those who repented. There were those in Babylon who continued to believe in the Lord. To faithful people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the writing and prophecy of Ezekiel gave them a comforting message that God was gracious. When they called out in repentance, he would forgive their sin and he would bring his people back to their homeland.

The Lord often spoke to his prophets using pictures that they could understand. God did this for several practical reasons. First, the prophet would understand what the Lord wanted. The Lord’s message would be received loud and clear. Second, the prophet would have the perfect picture to use when he would call out to the people with the Lord’s message. The message would be preached loud and clear.

With this vision the Lord makes it clear what he would do for people who were dead in their sins and unbelief and how he was going to do it. **The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth**

among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

It sounds like something out of a super hero or an end of the world movie. Elijah and the Lord are walking through a valley that is full of bones. As the Lord and Elijah walk back and forth you can almost hear the crunch of the bones under foot. They are so dry and parched that they have obviously been here a long time.

Then the Lord asks Ezekiel a question that seems odd, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

The evidence is all around, the answer is clear. For people the answer is an obvious no. There is no way that bones that are dry and parched by the sun can ever come back to life again.

Ezekiel responds with the perfect answer, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” His answer is perfect because he is really saying two things. First, Lord, you know what you want to teach me by asking that question and Second, Lord, you know what you are going to do with these dry bones.

The Lord did something with those bones that Ezekiel could not have imagined would have happened. <sup>7</sup> **So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.**

<sup>9</sup> **Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.**

The Lord showed Ezekiel the lesson he wanted him to learn. The Lord can and does bring life to those who are dead in their sin and unbelief. He also showed Ezekiel how he did it. He would send the Holy Spirit to work through the Word as it was preached and taught to bring faith to those who were spiritually dead.

This is the important work of the Holy Spirit, he creates and strengthens faith through the Word.

As we look at the vision we may wonder what made these dry bones come together and live? Did they have some spark in them that just needed to come to life? Was it because they wanted to live and were just waiting for the right time?

The answer to all of these is no. God is clear in the vision, these bones are dead, dry and useless. There is no way that they can do anything for themselves.

This is the condition of sinful, unbelieving man without a Savior. Sinful man is not waiting for the right religion to come along and then they will make a good choice for God. They are not to be convinced it is time to believe. Sinful man is spiritually dead and hopeless, like these dead bones. They cannot save themselves any more than these dead bones could come back to life.

As we look at the vision it is the Lord who is at work. He shows his love for sinful man. He says that he will do something for the bones. He will do the work of bringing them back to life, he will fill them with breath.

The Hebrew word here is (roo-ack) רוּחַ. This is a very special word with a very special meaning. In the Old Testament, רוּחַ is the word for the Holy Spirit. This same word is found in Genesis 1 when God said that the Spirit of God moved across the face of the deep.

Here God is showing us the very special work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that works in the heart of dead, lifeless man to bring them to life through Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who creates the flame of faith, like the bones being brought together. It is the Holy Spirit who causes that flame of faith to grow and increase in strength, just as the bones were finally knit together and brought back to life.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith and keeps us in that faith. Whether it was at our Baptism or the day we first believed, the Holy Spirit was already there working faith in Jesus in our hearts, bringing our dead, lifeless bones to life. When we sin, it is the Holy Spirit who is working through the Word to point out our sin to us so that we can repent of that sin and not become lifeless, dead, unbelieving bones.

It was God who loved these lifeless, dead bones enough to bring them to life. It is God who loves sinful man enough to send a Savior that we might live. It is God who sends the Holy Spirit to work through the Word to bring hearts that are spiritually dead to life again. But how he did it is important, especially today. In the vision we can also learn how the Holy Spirit accomplishes his work

What did the Lord command Ezekiel to do? **“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter**

**you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup>I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’ ”**

Was there something wrong with the Lord’s voice? No absolutely not. This was part of the Lord’s answer to Ezekiel. Remember Ezekiel answered, “O Sovereign Lord, only you know.” Ezekiel was waiting for the Lord to teach him something and show him what to do.....and the Lord did. The Lord told him to preach the Word. Nothing happened before Ezekiel spoke the Word of the Lord. But when he preached that Word, the Holy Spirit worked. It was through that Word that the Holy Spirit did his work of bringing those bones to life.

This lesson is so important for today because it is the same work that God has given to the disciples and to us, his church. Today, we celebrate the very thing the Lord taught Ezekiel. Preach the Word because the Holy Spirit works through the Word when and where it is preached and taught.

As Jesus ascended into heaven he gave the command to his people to take his Word to the ends of the world. On Pentecost, he shows us that we are never alone when we are doing this work. In a miraculous and powerful way the Holy Spirit showed he was with the disciples and although, we don’t have the same miraculous sign today , we know that the Holy Spirit is also with us as we grow in faith through the Word. We know the Holy Spirit is working through us as we speak with others about Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit, not us, who will bring life to these dry bones.

May we pray that we speak the Word as boldly and confidently as Ezekiel and his fellow prophets did and as those early apostles did because we know that it is through the Word that the Holy Spirit brings people to faith. Amen.