



Back to Life – Part 1

Resurrection and Ultimate Reality

For the next three weeks, we are going to take a break from our series in Acts, **Sent**, and spend some time looking at various resurrection stories in Scripture as we approach Easter. One very well-known passage concerning resurrection can be found in the book of Ezekiel and it reveals that resurrection is the absolute reality of the Christian experience. We do not speak simply of Jesus' resurrection as being the Christian's ultimate reality, but also our *own* resurrection which is promised to us in the Scriptures. Ezekiel 37 demonstrates that for anyone to become a Christian, they must be brought back to life, or in other words, resurrected. To use Jesus' words to Nicodemus, to be a Christian you must be "born again." The vision pertains to Israel specifically, but it has implications for the Church as well.

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Life updates?
- What is something we can be praying about this week?
- What is something we can praise this week?



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- Are you familiar with Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones?
- What do you think of when you hear the phrase "spiritual death?"
- What do you think of when you hear about "the resurrection?"

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NASB)

37 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of ones. ² He had me pass among them all around, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and behold, *they were* very dry. ³ Then He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "Lord God, You Yourself know." ⁴ Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'You dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' ⁵ This is what the Lord God says to these bones: 'Behold, I am going to make breath enter you so that you may come to life. ⁶ And I will attach tendons to you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you so that you may come to life; and you will know that I am the Lord.'" ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a *loud* noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, tendons were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'The Lord God says this: "Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, so that they come to life.'" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the entire house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says: "Behold, I am going to open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴ And I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord.'"



Death is Our Beginning

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the natural condition of all mankind has been death. After eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God set forth this judgement against Adam and every succeeding generation:

Genesis 3:17-18 (NASB)

Cursed is the ground because of you; With hard labor you shall eat *from* it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; Yet you shall eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

To put it another way, death is quite literally our beginning historically, the consequences of which we now deal with today in our everyday lives.

Our bodies are fragile flesh struggling against the harsh conditions of a cruel world whose very ground is cursed because of our sin. We toil in vain because no matter how hard we try, our bodies are destined to wither and deteriorate. They break down and decay over time until we simply can't hold on any longer. The one thing every person has in common is that they will eventually die, their body left to rot in the ground, returning to the dust from which it was formed.

The vision given to the prophet Ezekiel calls to mind the original judgment against man in the Garden. It reminds us that the ultimate fate of all mankind is to die, nothing remaining but dry, dead bones with no hope of restoration. That the bones are dry indicates these people have been dead for a long time, their past lives but a distant memory. Dry bones are actually a metaphor for a downcast or broken spirit in other parts of Scripture, such as the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV)

²² A merry heart does good, like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.

Not only is physical death a certainty, but spiritual death is our reality. We live in a world surrounded by people dying every day, but the greater truth revealed in Scripture is that we are already dead though we yet live. Spiritual deadness manifests itself in sin and evil in the world. When you pass someone who knows not Jesus, they are a dead man walking; not simply destined to physically die, but without God's intervention, destined for an eternity in Hell.

The story of the Fall is greater than Adam and Eve simply eating fruit they weren't supposed to. Their act of disobedience spiritually separated them from God, and in turn



the rest of humanity after them. The proper consequence of such rebellion is described famously by the apostle Paul:

Romans 6:23 (NIV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death...

That death is a wage paid to us means that death is something that is rightfully earned because of something we have done. Because we have fallen short of God's standard, we are worthy of condemnation. We do not deserve mercy from God whom we have willingly rejected and disrespected. The vision given to Ezekiel concerns the ethnic nation of Israel in particular, and as the Church we can tend to view Israel as so distant from God in their actions that it borders the unthinkable. However, in the same way that Israel is nothing but a valley of dead bones, the same goes for us today. We sin and don't allow God to sit on the throne of our hearts. We aren't dead yet, but death is coming; it is just waiting for God to give the word.

The question for us is the same as it was for Israel in Ezekiel's vision. "Can these bones yet live?" The Jewish people, the chosen people of God, were promised the blessing, the presence, and the comforts of God, yet they still chose to go their own way. At the time of his writing, Ezekiel was exiled from the land of Israel along with the rest of the Jewish people in Babylon for 10 years. To be clear, the Jews sought a return to their homeland. In the next passage of Ezekiel 37, the vision describes the Jews living forever in a reestablished Israelite kingdom where David will be their king. In the same way, the vision of the valley of dry bones is in some sense a literal event. All Israel, at least those who are saved spiritually, will be resurrected in the last days, same as the Church, to rule from the kingdom overseen by Jesus Himself.

So how can the dead live again? How do we live again, not just physically, but spiritually?

Death is Not the End

Ezekiel is commanded by God to prophesy, to preach to these dry bones he sees before him. God says that He will cause breath to enter them, and they shall live. He will restore their flesh and their skin, and fully resurrected they will know that He is God. It's these words that Ezekiel speaks to the bones, and in response there is a great rattling that is said to overcome the valley as the bones jump and bounce around, transforming back to life as flesh and blood envelopes the bones and returns them to their former living state.

To be clear that it is truly God and God alone who gives new life, God tells Ezekiel to prophesy once again for breath to enter their bodies, and in response breath pours into the valley from the four winds. The reference to four winds is probably meant to indicate that it comes from every direction; it is inescapable, all encompassing, and all-powerful.



The imagery of breath entering Israel's resurrected bodies recalls the Creation story in Genesis.

Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

⁷ Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

This resurrection is patterned after the creation of Adam. In the same way God brought to life the first man, God will resurrect those who are saved. Although God reforms the physical bodies in Ezekiel's vision, they are not truly alive until God gives them breath. In the Hebrew language, the words for "wind," "breath," and "spirit" are identical. In other words, the implication is that people are resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit of the living God.

God makes what is dead live again. This is the ultimate reality of the Christian life, and the answer to the world's great problem of death. Though we may physically die, the Scriptures promise a future resurrection where our soul will return to our physical body and be transformed into something glorious. However, this great resurrection unto eternal life in God's kingdom is only promised to those who are saved. How then can someone participate in this resurrection of both spirit and body? How can someone have assurance in this life that their soul is secured by God?

New Life is Offered Through the Messiah

As we've already mentioned, although Ezekiel's vision specifically refers to the resurrection of Israel, the Church will also participate in a resurrection in the last days. The New Testament assures us of this fact:

1 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

Verses like this demonstrate where the certainty of the resurrection comes from: Christ's resurrection. Jesus opens our graves because God first opened His own. Jesus took upon Himself our sins on the Cross and so was paid the wages of death that were due to us in our place. Because of this substitution, death no longer has any power over someone who repents of their sin and places their faith in Christ. In the same way that Jesus rose from the dead, we who have been spiritually renewed will also rise. Spiritual life leads to future physical life.

The promise of the resurrection is more than simply receiving new bodies. Ezekiel's vision, as well as the following passage about the eternal kingdom, represents His people living with God in His direct presence. Not only are we given new life, shown by the opening of graves, but Israel is given a place to call home where God resides with them. These promises can only be realized through Christ even if Israel didn't realize it



at the time. Unfortunately, even today Israel has yet to recognize Jesus as their God, but Ezekiel assures us one day this will change.

According to Jesus:

Romans 5:21 (NIV)

²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Only Jesus Christ has the power to resurrect us. Resurrection is the ultimate reality of the Christian life, and you are called to this same resurrection by recognizing Him as Savior.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- What is the Valley of Dry Bones and what does it represent?
- What does this vision mean for the Jewish people?
- How does this vision relate to the Church?
- What is the link between spiritual deadness and physical death?
- How does Jesus' death and resurrection secure us of our own resurrection?