

JJ¹

Mass graves are a sad reality in our world. Sometimes mass graves exist because a disease was running rampant through a land. People were dying so quickly, and the disease was spreading so rapidly, they had no choice but mass graves. But the worst of the mass graves are those dug to try and hide something terrible. Mass graves like those found in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, Communist Russia and the Killing Fields of Cambodia. Just those three examples add up to millions upon millions of murdered people.

Could you imagine standing in one of those? It would be terrible to see it, but a vivid reminder of the evil of those who did it to them. In a way, that's what Ezekiel sees in this vision from the LORD. The LORD brings Ezekiel to a valley completely filled with very dry skeletons. But this scene is even worse. This mass grave wasn't created at the hands of a madman. No, it was suicide—spiritual suicide.

Ezekiel wrote these words, not sitting at the Temple in Jerusalem, or in his house. No, he wrote these words in exile in Babylon. He, along with what was left of the Kingdom of Judah, were hundreds of miles from their homes and ruled by a man who cared nothing about their cul-

ture, religion, hopes or desires. To prove his conquering might, the king of Babylon even destroyed the Temple! The Temple, the one thing more than any other outward example of the Jews being God's chosen people, was gone. The place where God made his presence known among his people, was leveled. And for so many, the structure upon which they placed false hope, security and confidence, didn't exist any longer.

Why had all this happened? Why were thousands and thousands of God's chosen people dead from battle, famine and starvation? Why were tens of thousands more now in captivity? Why is God's holy temple destroyed?

Unrepentant sin.

They laughed in the face of God when he threatened judgment and exile and thought they could get away with it. Their faith was only skin deep. They thought that so long as they continued to go through the motions of devotion to God, they'd be just fine. Therefore, God took away the things they really trusted in—their country, their pride, their temple. They thought they could abandon true worship and faith in the LORD and everything would be okay. They thought the words of the prophets wouldn't come

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

true—words which the LORD spoke long before, when their ancestors first entered the Promised Land. Yet, everything the LORD warned would happen if they did not repent, did happen.

There they were. Exiled in Babylon. Very dry bones, slain by their own sin. Spiritually dead and hopeless: “Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off,” they cry out.

Friends, we dare not be so bold as to think the same cannot or will not happen to us! Ezekiel’s vision of a valley filled with very dry dead bones vividly holds before our eyes the reality of what our sin does to us. Our sin which we can so easily ignore in our hearts and lives is drying up our bones! This valley of dry dead bones shows us the truth behind Paul’s words which we heard in our second lesson: “...if you live in harmony with the sinful flesh, you are going to die...” (Rom. 8:13).

It is the same warning of judgment God gave to Adam and Eve, and we ignore it just the same! Every sin in our life is like planting a seed of death into our hearts. And when those sins are purposeful and deliberate and against the knowledge of the truth, then we’re watering and fertilizing those seeds of death.

One of the most fertile seeds of death we plant in our hearts is the same seed so many in Israel planted in their hearts too. They took the truth that they were God’s chosen people and used it as a reason to be spiritually careless and lazy. Outwardly, they still brought their sacrifices, and did the required things, but they compromised their faith by refusing to listen to God’s Word and following the ways of this dying world. Finally, they killed their faith.



Through faith in Jesus as our Savior, we have been made God’s people. Yet, if you think you can keep living in sin or satisfying your sinful pleasures without consequence, then you will kill your faith. You will commit spiritual suicide. Then all that will be left is just a skeleton of a child of God. You might still look like a child of God outwardly, but all real spiritual life will be dried up, dead and

gone! If you are unwilling to open your eyes and see your own dry bones in this valley, then you are bound to suffer the eternal exile and mass grave of hell.

Now that we have seen our dry bones lying in that valley, it’s important that we don’t fall into the other sin of those Israelites in captivity—the sin of doubt and hopelessness. Israel cried out: “Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.” After the devil

has convinced us to sow the seeds of death in our hearts and lives, he comes with the sucker-punch—the lie that our unfaithfulness destroys God’s faithfulness and promises. Our sin kills our souls and ruins our relationship with God and therefore our personal possession of God’s promises, but our sin cannot destroy God’s faithfulness and promises (2 Tim. 2:13).

Look again to that valley of dry bones. Where man is powerless, dead and hopeless, the LORD is strong to save, gives life and restores hope. “I am going to open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and when I raise you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will come back to life. I will settle you on your own land, and you will know that I am the LORD. What I have spoken I will do, declares the LORD.”

What should have marked the beginning of eternal death for his people, the LORD chose to act and raised his rebellious people to spiritual life. He restored them in their faith by again making the promise that he would bring them home to Israel. He restored them in their faith by promising that he will still bring the Savior into the world through them. He restored them in their faith by promising

not just a spiritual resurrection, but also an everlasting physical resurrection.

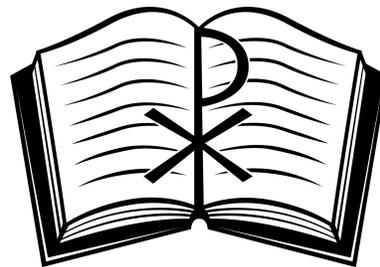
The LORD asked Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these dry bones come back to life?” Ezekiel left it all in the LORD’s capable hands. The LORD said he would do it, and that is exactly what he did.

Friends, the LORD has done the same for you! Because he kept his promise of the Savior, we can know beyond a doubt that the LORD’s promises are reliable. The LORD breathes life into dead and dying hearts by pointing us to our Savior. Our

Savior who not only became the dry bones you and I deserve to be, but also rose to life. At your baptism, God made you a recipient of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. God made you his child. If you are straying, or if you have strayed, God

promises that he will take you back. He will take your dry spiritual bones and make them alive again. Don’t refuse the life he longs to give you! Can your dry bones live? God’s answer is a resounding—YES!

And friends, don’t refuse the life God calls you to live in thankfulness to him. As we heard Paul say this morning: “...if you live in harmony with the sinful flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. Indeed, those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery so



that you are afraid again, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we call out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself joins our spirit in testifying that we are God's children. Now if we are children, we are also heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..." (Rom. 8:13-17).

Fellow dry bones, the LORD has made you alive in your hearts. He has rescued you from the mass grave of hell. He has given you his Word so you would know him and believe in him. No matter how deep the valleys of life are, whether we dig them ourselves or not, God breathes life, comfort and hope into our hearts. And through his promises he also breathes into our hearts the strength we need to leave our lives of sin and throw the seeds of sin right back in Satan's face.

Sometimes we look around us in this world and it can feel like we're standing in the middle of a mass grave. We're surrounded by a dying world. We see our own sin and what we deserve. We long to be free from this sinful world and our sin. It feels like we've been left in exile. Well, friends, just as the LORD to settle his people of old back in their own land, he promises the same to us who believe in him. One day, the LORD will take us to rest in our own land—heaven. On the

Last Day he will call our dry bones out of our graves, and then, at long last, there shall be **NO MORE DRY BONES!** Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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