

THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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SERMON ELEVEN -

RAISING DRY BONES

"And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest." (Ezekiel 37:3).

A DRY bone is a proof of extinct life, for bones are made only in living organisms. Israel as a nation was once a living organism full of the life of GOD. But Israel sinned, and then came decay with disintegration, until now Israel has become like a valley of dry bones scattered over the earth. Man, created in the image of GOD, was a living organism filled with the life of GOD, but man sinned, and then came decay with disintegration which has made the world a valley of bones. Now there is no process known to science by which a dry bone can be suddenly changed into a living organism. When, therefore, GOD asked the prophet, "**Can these bones live?**" the prophet was compelled to refer the question back to GOD for an answer. "O Lord God, Thou and Thou alone knowest. If these bones are ever made to live, Thou wilt have to tell us how." And in this chapter GOD answers the question as to how dry bones of all ages may be made to live.

THE PROPHET'S PREPARATION

In the first place, those commissioned to raise dry bones must have a special preparation.

This preparation is twofold:

One must see a vision of GOD and receive the touch of GOD.

In the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy we are told that he saw visions of GOD! He saw wings with human hands under them; a vision of the divine and human - the wing everywhere symbolizes divinity and the hand, humanity - the divine controlling the human, for the wings moved the hands. He saw winged creatures with:

- the face of a man symbolizing intelligence,
- the face of a lion symbolizing courage,
- the face of an ox symbolizing patience,
- and the face of an eagle symbolizing aspiration,

all under control of the divine wings. The need of every prophet of GOD is that his intelligence, courage, patience and aspiration shall be linked with GOD and be completely controlled by Him.

In this vision Ezekiel feels the touch of GOD. "**The hand of the Lord was upon me.**" The hand of the Lord symbolizes His power, and to be under His hand is to be endued with His power. The Spirit of GOD is in every Christian for life, but every Christian is not under GOD's hand for power.

The prophet responds to the touch of GOD and goes where He leads. "**The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones.**" He was willing to be led by the Lord's hand into the valley of bones. The temptation is for us to seek the garden with its flowers rather than the valley with its bones.

The prophet also responds, when GOD's hand sets him down in the midst of the bones.

Dwelling with the bones is more trying than just going to them on a temporary mission. To have bones for neighbours and companions may not be pleasant. We have a taste for the company of living people. But unless we are ready to respond to the hand of GOD which would lead us to the bones and make us dwell among them, we are not prepared for the work of raising them to life.

The work cannot be done at a distance. The millions who throng the streets, crowd the theatres, drink in saloons and revel in dance halls, shunning the church as they would the pest house, cannot be reached by the pastor in his study making eloquent sermons for his cultured congregation, nor by the Christians who meet in parlours, halls and churches for fellowship and Bible study.

Thank GOD for the men and women who gladly respond to the hand of GOD leading them to the most sinful and hopeless.

THE TEST OF FAITH

Three things severely tested the prophet's faith.

1. The bones were very many. The valley was white with them. To reach them all by personal effort was impossible. And yet the multitude of the bones did not cause the faith of the prophet to fail, for his eyes were upon GOD and he believed that GOD was equal to such a task. As we look at millions unreached by the gospel, we may be appalled, but the eye of faith sees GOD still equal to the great work of reaching and saving. No difficulty can surpass His resources.

2. The bones were very dry. There was no sign of life. Their dryness was positive proof of death. We are apt to classify people as hopeful and hopeless. We are hopeful for the child raised in the Christian family and taught in the Sunday school. We are hopeful for the amiable woman, cultured and refined, who takes an interest in Church affairs. But the poor drunken, shiftless tramp, the hardened criminal, the outcast harlot and the blatant anarchist, we are apt to regard as hopeless dry bones, if we take our eyes from our GOD of infinite power and love.

If Ezekiel had kept looking at the great number of very dry bones, he might have said, "There is no use trying to raise them to life." But though Ezekiel was willing to face the facts and would not deny the difficulties, he did not look to the bones for assurance of faith. He trusted GOD

Who made the men whose bones were before him and Who could, by the fiat of His will, remake them. To the man whose faith is in GOD alone the hopeless becomes hopeful.

3. The prophet was told to do a very foolish thing. It is foolish to speak to a deaf man, more foolish to speak to a dead man, and it is the climax of folly to speak to a bone so lifeless and formless as not to be classified as man at all. But Ezekiel was willing to appear a fool to the worldly wise. And it is by the foolishness of preaching that men are to be saved.

THE MEANS USED

The man of GOD spoke the Word of GOD in the power of the Spirit of GOD. Ezekiel was a man of GOD in that he was right with GOD and completely under GOD's control. It is well to be a man of learning, a man of position, a man of means, a man of eloquence, but it is a thousand times better to be a man of GOD.

But the Word of GOD must be spoken by the man of GOD. The prophet spoke to the bones exactly what GOD told him. In 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, we have the purpose of the Scriptures: "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [God-breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**"

The man of GOD has the whole Bible from which to draw equipment for every good work.

But he must be a man of prayer, depending upon the Spirit of GOD to use the Word. The prophet was commanded to call upon the breath of GOD to breathe upon the valley of bones, and, while he spoke GOD's Word, GOD's invisible power moved upon the valley.

Every worker in the valley of bones needs these qualifications. He must be a man of GOD, a man of the Bible and a man of prayer. He must keep right with GOD and speak the Word of GOD, while he trusts the Spirit of GOD. No valley of bones can resist a man of this kind.

THE PROCESS

The prophet spoke directly to the bones. There was no manipulation. There was no preparing the bones to receive GOD's Word. He did not try by human wisdom to articulate the bones and cover them with artificial flesh, before he spoke to them and called upon GOD to move upon them. He knew that bones have no power to receive or retain life. And yet while he spoke, there was a noise; bone came to his bone. The shaking was bone-noise. It was the rattle of death and not the voice of life. Thus dry bones often move and make a deathly noise under the breath of GOD.

When a husband for whom his wife has been praying begins to be especially mean and cruel, I expect him to be converted soon. It is the bones touched by the breath of GOD and the noise is made by the resistance of his evil heart.

When a man for whom I have been praying gets mad and swears at me when I speak to him about his soul, I confidently expect to see him converted in a few days. The bones are moving under the breath of GOD and the rattling is made by the resistance of his will.

A minister in Boston, that city of cultured bones, told us in the ministers' meeting, as he discussed the workings of his settlement-house, that his workers were not expected to speak of GOD or CHRIST. Some of the children had brutal drunkards for fathers, and, if you spoke to them of the fatherhood of GOD, they would think of GOD as like their beastly fathers. So you must go down and live with your families amongst these people and teach them what a true loving father is. Then you can teach them the fatherhood of GOD and they will understand it.

When the speaker was asked if CHRIST Who said, "**He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father**," did not reveal the fatherhood of GOD better than any earthly father could, and whether, therefore, the preaching of CHRIST to children with brutal parents would not at once reveal to them what loving fatherhood meant?

He seemed puzzled for a reply. What could he say except that he had set aside GOD's process of revealing His fatherhood and had put in its place a little scheme of his own? His scheme would require years to work and then prove a failure. In the meantime, children are dying without a knowledge of GOD, while others are growing up as heathen in their relation to GOD.

One day of teaching CHRIST to these children of the slums will do more to reveal to them the meaning of the fatherhood of GOD than a decade of looking at the life of any man who lives and shows his faults, as well as his virtues, in their midst. What every dry bone of the valley needs, first of all, is a touch of the breath of GOD. Knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, German, music, mathematics and science leaves spiritual dry bones just as they were. It is the lack of the knowledge of GOD that makes them dry, and nothing but the knowledge of GOD can restore them to life. And this brings us to

THE PURPOSE OF THE VISION

"**Ye shall know that I am the Lord.**" Twice this purpose is given. Israel herself shall know that I am the Lord, when they shall see that I have raised the valley of scattered bones into an army of living men. There "**stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.**" Not a great mob like the bones in confusion, but an organized army.

An army carries with it the idea of organization, obedience to orders and leadership under a general. The scattered dry bones of Israel shall become again a living national organism, and the effect of this transformation shall be to make other nations acknowledge the Lord.

The best books now extant on the evidences of Christianity are the living epistles, "**known and read of all men**," who were once moral and spiritual dry bones, but who are now alive and battling in the army of CHRIST.

When in Boston a young man asked me for a book that would confirm his faith. I told him to go to the Men's meeting on Sunday afternoon and listen for half an hour to the testimony of those who had been drunkards and criminals and are now sober, honest, happy husbands and fathers, with the joy of Heaven in their faces and the music of Heaven in their voices. One live Lazarus is worth forty sermons on the resurrection. Let not the number nor the dryness of the bones appall us. With the vision of GOD before us and the touch of GOD upon us, let us speak to them the

Word of GOD while we trust the GOD of omnipotent power to give them life, and we shall not be disappointed.

~ end of chapter 11 ~
