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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at Galeed Chapel Brighton; Sunday Evening
13th October 1963

"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves. And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land; then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

Ezekiel 37, v 12-14.

This and the preceding chapters no doubt literally refer to the Nation of Israel. But the most important thing is the spiritual intention of the Spirit in these two precious chapters. The chapter in general and the text in particular is a wonderful answer to the enquiry we were considering this morning. "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead; shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave, or Thy faithfulness in destruction?" Son of man, can these dry bones live?" and the chapter gives the blessed answer as to how wonders can be shown to the dead, lovingkindness declared in the grave; and faithfulness in destruction; and the Lord uses means, He did not exercise a direct act of omnipotence upon these bones, but He said, "Prophesy, son of man" and therefore, He intimates the Gospel as an appointed means for the salvation of those that believe.

Well, here we have then a vision, a type of every kind of death. As we said this morning - "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead?" I think we observed that every kind of resurrection, and there must be death where there is resurrection; and every kind of reviving in spirit; and all the interpretations of soul right through the experience of a child of God, together with the ultimate resurrection at last deriving from the resurrecting power of the Lord Jesus, also shows the importance of union to Christ. To receive the virtue, by union with Him, of His divine Person and all the work He accomplished in His sacred humanity, by which humanity He was able to unite His people unto Himself in a sacred relationship - not ashamed to call them brethren. O, the union between Christ and His people is so complete that they are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. A union so complete that all that He is and has is theirs. But He uses the ministry. "Can these dry bones live?" And I answered, "O, Lord God, Thou knowest. Again He said unto me, prophesy upon these bones and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." "Faith cometh by hearing and how can they hear without a preacher; and how can they preach except they be sent?"

The things of salvation are so important, so glorious, embracing the whole compass of the glory of God in the covenant of Grace; and providing for all HIS dear people such a boundless inheritance, so sacred, holy an inheritance; an inheritance undefiled and that fadeth not away!

But this prophesying or preaching was made essential. There was a shaking; there was a noise and a shaking among the bones. It would be a mercy to see this work of the Lord appear among us. These bones represent a dead elect; the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost upon the soul - and that through the means of the ministry. The Holy Ghost putting virtue into the word and gospel of His

grace, to reach the hearts in conviction of sin, so that there is a shaking among the bones and a coming together, bone to his bone. So he prophesied as he was commanded, "and when I beheld, Lo! the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above, but there was no breath in them." Some resemblance of a person - the work of grace being carried on. It is a great thing to observe this; some evidence of a new creature, but there was no breath in them. Therefore, He says, "Prophesy unto, the wind, prophesy son of man" - and this gives us to see that there is to be preaching with respect to every degree of the work of grace in sinners' hearts - through preaching the gospel. The Lord knows those that are His - and He will not let His word return unto Him void. It will accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing to which He sends it. But there is to be a preaching upon every development of the work of grace in the soul and it is a particular feature of this chapter that there is a making use of this prophesying.

The Lord did not accomplish these effects by a direct interference of naked omnipotence, but "prophesy, son of man!" There was no breath in them. Then said He unto me, prophesy unto the wind, prophesy son of man and say to the wind; thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." O that the Holy Ghost would so unite us and dwell in our hearts that we may truly see these effects of His heavenly power in our midst. But then again, as we said this morning, this resurrecting power is exercised in every reviving - and there is something very expressive in this complaint here. "Then said He unto me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, behold they say, our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts."

It makes a companion for Heman. "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead, shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave and Thy faithfulness in destruction?" Why, it brings forth the blessed attributes of God against every complaint. It is a source of strong consolation. If you take them out you have nothing but despair left. If there was merely a complaint of being dead and of being buried; and being in a state of destruction and in a land of forgetfulness and darkness and nothing else - O, but there is something else! and that something else, my friends, is that which is in the gospel and that very thing that bears the spirits up, which enables one to look from the border of the pit to His recovering grace; and that is the wonders of redeeming love and grace the love, the covenant love of Jehovah's divine faithfulness, faithfulness to the covenant and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus which covers every folly, every fault. A righteousness to full perfection. O then, such a poor sinner who feels to be dead and buried, who feels to be forgotten and walking in darkness, has hope! Therefore, said David, "Why art thou cast down O my soul? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him."

Well, that brings us to the text. Therefore, because they say our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts. You see this experience so often in the word of God and it is well when we are brought to it; and to see this door of hope when we are in our feelings sinking in deep mire, our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts. 'Therefore, prophesy, and say unto them, behold O my people.'

Why, the first, the very first word will do you good; some of you who are full of distress and conflict, you feel that your hope is cut off. O what a change it would make if by the Holy Spirit and even through the preaching of the gospel, the Lord by His Spirit should bear witness in your heart that you

are one of His people! Why though you may look at yourself and consider it an impossibility; there is a question asked in the chapter - "Can these bones live?" There is a question asked in Jeremiah - "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a goodly heritage among the nations?" But the Lord answers His own questions. What would you say to Him if He should ask you - "How shall I put you among the children?" Why, you would have to do the same thing with that question as the Prophet did here, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." I really don't know how these dry bones can live, and I really cannot see how I can be put among the children, but Thou knowest. There is some relief in that 'O.' when there is some impossible question comes into your mind concerning yourself and your standing for eternity, concerning what is discovered to you of your carnality and then as to how you can be put among the children! O it is a wise and humble response to refer the question back to God and He will answer it. "Thou shalt call me, My Father and shall not turn away from me." But then you might say, I cannot call Him my Father, but He says, you shall; and how is this accomplished? "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." It is the Spirit's witness. But what does the Spirit bear witness with that we are the children of God? He does not bear witness with our nature, nor with our carnal mind, but He bears witness to His own work in the soul and what is that? "Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak", those are the things He bears witness to. Your cries, your tears, your anxieties, your prayers, your seekings for instruction.

"Therefore, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, behold O my people, I will open your graves" - every grave in experience. He opens the grave when by the Spirit He quickens the sinner into life; He opens that grave. But how many graves we dig subsequent to that new birth; at least I find it so. O the backslidings of His people recorded in the word of God! How deep David dug a grave for all his communions, it seemed as though he buried everything by his sins; and have you never buried things by your carnality and wordly mind and wordly conformity? By your backslidings and your wanderings, by your independence of God? Why at times it seems as though you have buried your reliefs, buried your prayers, buried our comforts, our hopes, buried the ministry, seem to have buried the very word of God!

'O my people, I will open your graves.' How blessed it is when the Lord restores that which He took not away, but what we sin away. "He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake." But He will exercise His people when they thus bring themselves into death and destruction - and a good deal of waiting for the Lord is waiting for Him in these depths. "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me and heard my cries. He brought me up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, set my feet upon a rock and established my goings." Set me a going again in the paths of righteousness.

'I will open your graves.' But not only open the grave - He does not leave His people there, but 'bring you up out of your graves.' When He does this we shall know a little of what we tried to speak about: last Wednesday - "Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" And we shall prove this my friends, at least I do, that every time of recovery, restoration and reviving, needs the same God, needs the same grace and will be the effect of the same blessed resurrection of the Lord Jesus; so that the whole of vital religion derives from union with Christ. O to draw virtue from Him! He who is infinite in wisdom, being made that wisdom to a poor ignorant sinner; He who has omnipotent strength; that strength to be made perfect in their weakness.

'O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves." Cause you; you take notice of this word through the Scripture; there is something beautiful in it. There is experience in it. There is nothing, if I might so say, in religion that is a direct act of omnipotence, but it is through faith, through experience. Therefore, "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and causest to approach unto Thee." You look into your experience - at that word, "Cause to approach" and see what caused you to approach. See what the Holy Ghost brought to bear upon your heart and conscience, and how in divine providence there was a leading and also a hedging up; and there was this in it - "I will cause you to pass under the rod and bring you into the bond of the covenant." It is a great thing to look into our experience and see a cause for things, and that cause to be the work, the influence of the Holy Ghost; and the original cause to be in the covenant of grace, which will be the cause of every causing in our souls.

"And cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel.' Several times in this chapter and in the preceding chapter there is the promise to bring them out from the people and to bring them into their own land. Well, doubtless literally that is being fulfilled in Palestine, in Israel but spiritually, what is their own land? Well, I know of no other land here than the gospel itself. To be brought into the gospel. It is the land of His people, it is where He dwells. A fruitful land it is; and the provision that there is in that land is a living provision. A heavenly provision, heavenly doctrines; it is the city of the living God, and the living Spirit in the midst of the people at times is felt. O, have you ever felt some mysterious and yet sacred influence upon your spirit? The every atmosphere has been charged with the vital life of Christ, who said, as He was about to leave this tabernacle, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

'And cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.' Gather you from among the people - it is in the preceding chapter. It is a mercy if the Lord has done this for us. 'Thy own land'- the land of Israel. "The lines", said the Psalmist "are fallen unto me in pleasant places, I have a goodly heritage." Do you really feel, with a sacred influence upon your spirit, the contrast between everything that is of God in Zion, His things universally recorded in His Word; and the world that lieth in wickedness? It is a mercy to really feel that distinction in our souls; that as we wend our way to the House of Prayer at times, to feel and to sing -"I love her gates, I love the road."

Well, you know the feeling; feeling the Holy Spirit drawing you to the means of grace, seeking a portion for your soul. 'And bring you into the land of Israel.' The land of the living among a living people, the city of the living God; and to be joined unto Christ in those heavenly doctrines, to be raised up together with Him and to sit together with Him in heavenly places; even here before they reach heaven. I know that is a very great experience? my friends, but have not you in some measure, been brought to the land of Israel, into the land of the living gospel, and have been so transformed by the renewing of your mind as to be raised up together with Christ and to sit with Him in heavenly places! Very sacred, may be a rare, a very rare experience, It will be the nearest you will get to heaven while here, it will be as near as you will know. Those disciples on the mount of transfiguration, they said to the Lord "It is good for us to be here, let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, one for Elias; but a bright cloud overshadowed them and they feared as they entered into the cloud." O that was a sacred dread! A dread that I hope never to lose. It was a bright cloud, a sacred awe of the majesty of Jehovah; but when the cloud had passed they saw Jesus only. Why had Moses and Elias disappeared? Well the Lord Jesus had fulfilled the law, gone to the

end of it; there was no need of Moses and He has fulfilled every prophesy, Therefore, Jesus is the one thing needful; and He fills Emmanuel's land, fills the Church and everything that is in it. O I wish I could speak of it! Not only 'open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, but bring you into the land of Israel's where there are trees of His right-hand planting.'

'And ye shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.' "This is the way to know Him, by what He works in the heart. O what a blessed knowledge, experimental knowledge this is! If He has done this for us by quickening us into life when we were dead in trespasses and in sins; and maybe in reviving your drooping faith when passing through deep tribulation, when He hides His face, when you are under an experience of soul destitution and desertion, O then when He causes you to come up out of your graves and blesses you afresh, causes streams to break out in your desert, makes your wilderness to blossom as the rose, but not only so – "and shall put my Spirit in you and ye shall live." Why my friends, we said at the outset, this text is a most blessed response to that lamentation in the Psalm, "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead?" And we have the same things in the preceding chapter; concerning David's confession in the 51st Psalm "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." and so you have the same promise in that chapter as in this - "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean, from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart-also will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you." O, how complete it is! And we see that the Lord possesses it all in His infinite fullness and He does it all, as the last words of the text suggest 'Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.' It is a mercy to have such a confirmation of the work of grace in our hearts.

'And shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live.' Well, my friends, if we have not the Holy Spirit within us, we are dead. He is the Spirit of life; He is the Spirit of faith, the spirit of hope; the Spirit of the fear of God. He is the Spirit of prayer, the spirit of worship. It is He that anoints for the ministry; it is He that anoints the people to hear; it is He that creates a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is He that inspired the Word of God, and He alone can interpret that Word and apply it to the soul with power. What a great thing then, to be possessed of the Holy Ghost.

David deprecated being without the Spirit! It is a terrible thing, he prayed against it - "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." These things, if we consider them will give urgency to our prayers. O, think of it, my friends, to be cast out from the presence of the Lord and to have the Holy Ghost taken away from us. What would there be left but death, destruction and despair.

'Put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land.' In the conclusion of the chapter there is some enlargement upon that point. "Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will place them and multiply them." Now this takes in the providential pathway in which the Lord leads His people, about and instructs them. A word that may help us here is in the 10th chapter of John "When He putteth forth. His sheep, He goeth before them." There is a putting forth of sheep as we know in this country. Often there are sheep put out to keep; some in one place and some in another, and so with respect to the people of God; and "the lot is cast into the lap and the whole disposing" the whole placings, "are of the Lord." So there are some in His providences directed to one town and to one place, some to

another. His people are the salt of the earth; and salt is far more useful when it is sprinkled and not all in one lump. Therefore, He places His people, goes before them when He putteth them forth. Some of you may look back and see how He led you, and why you were brought to a certain place and under a certain ministry.

'And I shall place you in your own land, then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it.' There are many things that we trust the Lord has said to us in the way of direction, when we have sought Him as to our movements. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him." He may have given us a word of direction, O, but when He has accomplished the purpose in those particulars, then shall ye know that the Lord have spoken it. This comes in with that faithfulness that we were speaking about this morning. His divine faithfulness and immutability is exercised in every condition of our life. What a great thing if we have any reason to believe that when that lot was cast into the lap of the covenant of grace; we were in that lot, and the whole disposing of it, both in our wanderings through the wilderness and in the work of grace in our hearts, is of the Lord!

'Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it and performed it.' He performs all things for me, says David. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians - "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly." How I have prayed for that! Who needs sanctification but those that feel their sin and guilt and filth. "Sanctify you wholly," - thoroughly. "I pray God that your whole soul and body and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." But this is the point, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." He must do it all and yet there is a sense in the work of grace that it is through faith. Therefore, there is a battle to be fought, a race to be run.

'Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.' He works all our works in us and now this is a comfort - a. comfort to those who live to prove their helplessness; those who are brought into that state of being dead and buried and corrupt and forgotten and in darkness. We see that in God in Christ there are those things that will meet the direst extremity and He will at last bring His dear people out of their graves and bring them to Canaan above. O, what must it be to be there! But my friends, there will be a tasting of that inheritance here below, when you get a little you say inwardly',

*If such the sweetness of the streams,
What must the fountain be!*

(Gadsby's 472)

Amen