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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor
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Lesson. Ezekiel 37.

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

We should be exceedingly thankful to God, as enabled, for the blessed book of prophecy written by Ezekiel because it comes where we are. It proclaims an amazing message of hope, consolation and expectation to God's children who are in a low and dark and distressed condition in relation to their own case and the cases of those they continually bear before God. This will be quite patent and obvious in the language of the verse read.

I wish as we commence, to give a very brief account of the background to the prophecy so we may behold the faithfulness and goodness and love of God to His people who were in one of the deepest sorrows and periods of difficulty ever known in the history of His favoured people. Nebuchadnezzar when he carried the people of Judah to Babylon for a long period of captivity, carried with them Ezekiel. He was one of the children carried into a captive state in that idolatrous land of great misery and suffering. It is impossible to contemplate the agony, - and I must confine my observations to the saints of God. - the agony and misery they passed through; to know the destruction of the temple, the House of God; to see it in ruins, reduced to stones and dust, burnt with fire; the wall badly damaged and the city largely destroyed and in a ruined state. This was the matter of priority, and afterwards their own homes and possessions gone, and a terrible state of dislocation, disorder and disunity: the separation of families and peoples as they were herded into misery in Babylon.

Who can really contemplate this? I suppose you put a question-mark by the side. There is an immediate answer: - sin. It clearly meant that some who had not transgressed the commandments suffered with those who had. But the agony and misery of the people in captivity! and to add to it

the years passed and multiplied until Babylon became to them a grave: they were buried, forgotten. Do you see what I mean? It was not one year, or three years, or ten years : presently they seemed to be completely buried, and as you know from the language of the chapter, the Lord says what they said in their lamentation. They said; "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." It would appear it seemed as though all hope they had abandoned.

Let me translate this to spiritual experience. Are there not cases and matters, - and this certainly runs through the work of the Spirit in the soul. I am thinking of conviction of sin, a law work, the condemnation a poor sinner comes to feel. "Our hope is lost; there is nothing. Take the major things of life; things your prayers concentrate on relating to some of your dear ones, and this also applies to a gracious exercise. There may be a time when the whole is as in a grave, buried, and it seems lost. Satan says; "You must resign now all hope; give it all up. It is useless, futile to pray more. The thing has gone." I suggest to you, and those who know a measure of deep teaching in the soul will appreciate this, - God performs. Performs what? His own decrees and promises. What is the nature of the performance of the decrees, promises, purposes and will? What completely discovers to you God's method? Surely one word; resurrection power, or energy. The thing, matter, case, person is brought up as if out of a grave. I am firmly convinced in my soul, whatever it is God will perform we must come measurably into heavy trial and to a deep place where it seems to be in a grave. One day the Lord will perform by resurrection energy. This applies to regeneration, conversion, calling of His people, His method in grace and providence. God performs by the efficacy, the all-powerful influence of the glorious resurrection. Take the ministry: it is just the same. I remember when I came down from London, after a little while the whole matter of the ministry to me was in the grave. One Sunday morning resurrection energy went through my very person as a flash of lightning, and God had raised it out of the grave. When He did, (it shows how quickly God can perform His own purpose) immediately I vowed if He would make the way and enable me I would go. But my expectation was that possibly a way would not be made for some while. In a single month the Lord commenced to open the way. This is it,

you see. It is like being buried in a grave. I always watch this with souls in an exercise, to see whether they know the two sides, and then the resurrection power of the Lord. I have an impression in my mind that this has touched some of your cases. You to night have matters dear and close to you in the tomb. You will know the resurrection power of the Lord.

So this will enable me to revert to the amazing prophecy of Ezekiel. They were in Babylon; they were all buried, with no hope of coming out. They must resign the expectation of being delivered from Babylon. What did the Lord do? Godly Ezekiel being among the captives was by the river of Chebar with his contemporaries and something wonderful happened. Let me say to you, when you see nothing on earth, no relief, no sign of deliverance, listen to this; the heavens were open. There was nothing on the earth, but the heavens were open and he saw visions of God. What happened was the Lord opened the heavens to him and gave him a relevant vision. He clearly revealed the divine purpose of God to this people. So if you come to name Ezekiel's usefulness, it was to cheer and encourage and invigorate the poor, desolate, suffering people by what God had shown him. Although they were in all their distress and mourning, shut in and buried, to show them what God would do. Could you follow on in your personal exercise? My Text forms a part of it: it is a simile. "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"-bones being the skeletal part of man. They were not bones joined together; they were scattered, and he saw them. Now you can follow the sequence. "And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry," they had been there a long time. Think of a skeleton: some of you may have seen one. Imagine it being disjointed and scattered; and they were very dry. This touches us sometimes. "Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead." (29) You feel like a dry bone. Satan says you have nothing real; you have only a name that is external, and you are sorely tried lest you are a dry bone, lifeless. We must look at this thoroughly, and you often do. The Lord will cause you to pass round about the bones in the valley, and they are very dry.

Now came the question. "And he said unto me, Son of man." What was he thinking of? All the scattered, disjointed bones in the valley; his own contemporaries; the Lord's nation scattered in Babylon, with no prospect of a body politic; no prospect of being restored to their own land. (This is not the deep spiritual meaning.) So He puts the question. "Son of man, can these bones live?" He puts the question to you, to me. "Can these bones live?" and you are feelingly, and your children and the Church of God in a desolate state. "Can these bones live?" And those in unregeneracy, "Can these bones live?" I wish to suggest that in the very question there is a ray of hope. The Lord introduced into the question an element of resurrection energy. "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel could not answer positively, nor can I. I wish I could to night to the Lord concerning a thing with me for well over three decades. "Can these bones live?" The whole beauty of it is he referred and committed it to the Lord in hope. "And I answered, O Lord God, O mighty One, Almighty; filled with divine, infinite, glorious, majestic power. O Lord God, King, Supreme Ruler, Sovereign. O Lord God, thou knowest. It is hidden in the secrets of the Covenant." He referred it to the Lord.

There are one^{or} two sweet thoughts have occurred to me. What was the next word? "Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live." Let us take a few of the constituents. First you have very dry, disjointed bones; the framework, but it was a framework. Then you have several wonderful things. First there is breath. Whose breath? God's breath. Do you see? God's breath. There are two parts in the creation of man. He formed his tabernacle of the dust of the earth, then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, - his soul. You have got these bones, now you have got breath. O my friends, the wonder and hope there is here! "O breath, breathe upon these slain, that they may live." God breathes upon His own people, His dead elect, and they are alive. He breathes on your soul and you receive the Spirit, and you are animated and invigorated and revitalised spiritually. He breathes, and things that appear dry and dead, live. There is breath. God's breath breathes. I think if you have the efficacy in your spirit you will take this blessed concept home.

He breathes, and there is life. We hope we have life: we need His quickening breath constantly to refresh, revive and cheer, and to be the Spirit of prayer and holiness.

So breath. "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." It is wonderful to be alive; to live by Him, through Him, and to Him, and in union with Him; to be alive unto God. If you are alive, if you have life, you will not be satisfied only as you are lively in the things of God; not just alive. It is easy for one to get to be as a smoking flax; life at a low ebb, You want to be lively in the things of God. It is impossible for any to go on in the ministry of the Word without breath to inspire and strengthen. "and ye shall live." You see the valley full of dry bones, and the breath of God breathes, and they are alive.

What will God do? Will He leave them in the valley? will He leave them disjointed? No. Let me lift up the constituents. He says; "And I will lay sinews upon you." You know what a sinew is: it connects the muscles to the bones. It means that all the bones are bound together by sinews. If you study the human frame in an elementary way you will know immediately. Do you see the beauty of it? So there are two things I want to postulate. Not a single bone will be missing, and not a single bone will miss its place in the Body. The sinews: love binding in the Covenant of Grace; electing, redeeming love binding the bones together. This is the foundation of the Body itself. Think of the body; of a mass of bones and flesh and the bones not bound together! but everyone is in its place.

So in the Church of God, in the Lord's Kingdom not a bone misses its place and not one is missing. To me this was a very sweet thought. Those of you who are much in prayer, not a bone will be missing. Not a bone of Him shall be broken, and not a bone shall miss its place in the mystical Body of Christ. If you carry out experiments you realise the sinews have enormous strength. It is incredible the strength of the binding, the holding in place, holding together. Blessed be God for sinews! They show the faithfulness of God. Satan cannot, sin cannot rend it. It is the body of the Lord's choosing. I know this refers to the Jewish nation, but this is the spiritual translation. Breath is life: the bones are always joined together by the sinews, and nothing can sever them. See how perfect the

Lord's work is in the body. How wonderful is the binding! Think of the dear ones gone to glory and those the Lord has joined to you in Christ. None can ever break or sever the sinews. Satan will do his utmost, and sin: none can ever sever the sinews.

"and I will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin." There will be a covering; a wonderful cover. The skin is a wonderful organ; the flesh is, especially the flesh that is spoken of; "his flesh shall be fresher than a child's." (Job 33.25) that is, the flesh of the resurrection. This surely depicts the way the Lord will clothe His Church with love, humility, righteousness, holiness, peace. He clothes them with skin and flesh. So this is complete.

"I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." This is the work of God. The question, and the whole subject matter has reference to several things. First, the Lord's dead elect; those on earth now, or at any time in history in their sins, in unregeneracy, those the Lord loves, and you know in your very soul you will be completely deceived if the Lord does not make manifest that they are His. So there are these bones. It is amazing how in the deep exercise that covers many agonies concerning a poor soul, you sink so low, and then a word from the Lord, from the Holy Scriptures, or from the hymnbook the Lord drops into your heart. If He says to you; "Can these bones live?" you will say; "Lord, I believe they will." It is not for me to quote before you what I received years ago when I was on the verge of despair, (but I will) I thought it was no good looking in the Bible: the thing was beyond. A voice seemed to say; "Look once more." I had no wisdom to know where to look. I wanted the Lord to do it. The blessed volume fell open at St Luke 15. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." I went in the faith of that.

My friends, can these bones live? Indeed they will. The Lord will

never give you a word for faith to feed on and disappoint you. We may little realise the characters of grace who will be sitting in these pews when we are gone. You may be in this place yourself: I have heard an eminent minister say, and I have felt it myself; he felt he had no more religion than a beast. This is being like a dry bone. You would never imagine a minister who has preached on the walls of Zion and been used and honoured, coming to feel that. ~~When~~ Mr J.C. Philpot said when he was taken for death and Mr Covell asked him; "How do you feel?" "Dark and dead." He didn't stay like it. "Can these bones live?" You will know the animating power when it comes.

"Can these bones live?" The Lord knows how to animate them; to breathe, until your soul lives. And concerning Zion, as we know the Churches of God in the earth, that are so desolate; "Can these bones live?" What shall I say to you? I know. "Can these bones live?" When I went to Southill more than one said; "You will preach the funeral service." This was a deep exercise to me, and I watched. The day came and I reached Southill. There was no death: it was resurrection. The Lord was there all day long, and I said; The Lord will revive you. There was no death. "Can these bones live?" Amen.