

CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

(Ezekiel 37:1-14)

Intro: Can these bones live?

I. Ezekiel Saw Bones.

A. Valley Full Of Bones.

1. Not:
 - a. Chicken bones.
 - b. Dog bones.
2. But:
 - a. Human bones.
 - b. Whole house of Israel.
-Ezekiel 37:11.
3. How did the whole house of Israel become a valley full of bones?
 - a. Historical answer.
 - Babylonians had attacked:
 - #Israel.
 - #Jerusalem.
 - *Under King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - +588 B.C.
 - *Not for the first time.
 - +Israel had been under Babylonian domination.
 - =For almost 20 years.
 - Paying tribute.
 - #Rebelling.
 - Paying tribute.
 - #Rebelling.
 - Year and half.
 - #Siege.
 - #Starvation.
 - #Disease.
 - Finally.
 - #Walls were breached.
 - #Temple was leveled.
 - #City was ransacked.
 - #Many citizens.
 - *Tortured.
 - *Killed.

- #Many more were exiled.
- *Including Ezekiel.
- +Who was a priest.
- =First in Jerusalem.
- =Then to the exiles in Babylon.

b. Theological answer.

- God.
- Israel was not simply:
 - #Dead.
 - #Dying.
- Israel had been completely cut off.
 - #Ezekiel 37:11.
- Cut off:
 - #From where?
 - #From whom?
 - *From God.
- For years.
 - #God had been sending prophets.
 - *Encouraging the people of Israel.
 - +To forget their:
 - =Political treaties.
 - =Military alliances.
 - +To trust in God for their:
 - =Safety.
 - =Security.
- #People of Israel.
 - *Paid lip service to God.
 - *Continued their:
 - +Political.
 - +Military.
 - =Wheeling and dealing.
 - *Until God had enough.
 - +Day of reckoning.
 - +Whole house of Israel became a valley full of bones.
 - =Dry bones.
 - =Very dry bones.

B. Can These Bones Live?

1. Who wants to know?

- a. God wants to know.
- b. God had taken Ezekiel.
 - In the spirit.
 - Into the valley.
 - To the bones.

2. Was this a trick question?
 - a. How can bones live?
 - b. Bones mean:
 - Life is gone.
 - Life is not coming back.
 - Time of Jesus.
 - #Bodies were often laid on a shelf in a tomb.
 - #After the flesh had decayed.
 - *Bones were placed in a bone box.
 - +Ossuary.
 - #Another body could be laid on the shelf.
 - *For the flesh to decay.
 - +I think I told you.
 - =When I was in Jerusalem.
 - +At the Israel Museum.
 - =I saw the ossuary of Caiaphas.
 - High priest at the time of Jesus.
 - Time of Ezekiel.
 - #Flesh is already gone from the bones.
 - #Perhaps there was no one left to bury the dead.
 - *Flesh had rotted from the bones.
 - *Animals had eaten the flesh.
 - #Maybe the wind had uncovered shallow graves.
 - *There was no one to rebury the dead.
 - #I recently re-watched the movie *Patton*.
 - *I had originally seen it in college.
 - +As part of a double feature.
 - =*Patton*.
 - =*M.A.S.H.*
 - *In one of the early scenes of the movie.
 - +Patton comes across a battlefield.
 - =In North Africa.
 - +Bodies of the dead.
 - =Lying everywhere.
 - =Locals looting/scavenging the bodies.
 - Clothes.
 - Boots.
 - Money?
 - +Patton's first order.
 - =Secure the battlefield.
 - =Bury the dead.
 - #In Ezekiel's valley of dry bones.
 - *There was not even someone to do that.

3. How can Ezekiel answer the question?
 - a. Obvious answer:
 - “No.”
 - “No way.”
 - b. There were just bones.
 - Not even:
 - #Tendons.
 - #Ligaments.
 - *To hold the bones together.
 - c. One of our members has a malady called Charcot’s Foot.
 - I had never heard of it before.
 - #Symptoms include:
 - *Loss of feeling in the feet.
 - *Broken bones.
 - *Bones detached from the tendons.
 - Ezekiel’s valley full of bones.
 - #Way past that.
 - *Just bones.
 - d. But Ezekiel was talking to God.
 - Does Ezekiel dare say “no” to God?
 - Instead he hedges his bets:
 - #“Lord only knows.”
4. Can these bones live?
 - a. Not from anything:
 - Bones can do.
 - Ezekiel can do.
 - b. Only God can bring life to the bones.

II. Can Our Bones Live?

A. What Dry Bones Do We See?

1. Our loved ones who have died.
 - a. Some have been buried.
 - Flesh has begun to decay.
 - b. Some have been cremated.
 - Even the bones have turned to ashes.
 - c. Lazarus had been dead for four days.
 - Jesus raised him back to life.
 - #John 11.
 - But I haven’t seen that happen.
 - #Have you?
 - d. It seems almost like a cruel question.
 - Can these bones live?

2. I look at all these empty pews.
 - a. In some ways they look like bones.
 - Dry bones.
 - b. Can these bones live?
3. Sometimes it is our hopes and dreams that become bones.
 - a. I knew at a fairly young age that I wanted to be a pastor.
 - When I went to high school.
 - #I chose to study:
 - *Latin.
 - *German.
 - #Because they would be useful when I got to seminary.
 - When I went to college.
 - #I chose to study:
 - *Hebrew.
 - *Greek.
 - *Early church history.
 - *Reformation history.
 - #Because they would be useful when I got to seminary.
 - b. I grew up in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
 - I enrolled at Concordia Seminary.
 - #In St. Louis.
 - My first day on campus.
 - #I went to my campus mail box.
 - *First piece of mail.
 - +Faculty's response.
 - =To the so-called Fact-Finding Committee.
 - +Cover letter.
 - =From Dr. John Tietjen.
 - President of Concordia Seminary
 - =In which he characterized the fact-finding results.
 - Witch hunt (garbage in/garbage out).
 - #I thought:
 - *What in the world is going on here?
 - *What am I in the middle of?
 - #What I was in the middle of was:
 - *Controversy about:
 - +How we read.
 - +How we interpret.
 - =Holy Scripture.
 - But I started going to class.
 - #Some of the greatest Biblical scholars.
 - *Not just in the Lutheran Church.
 - *But in the world.
 - #Fostered in me a love for Scripture that I hold to this day.

-Following summer.

#Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

*Meeting in convention.

+In New Orleans.

*Declared the teaching of the faculty majority.

+False doctrine.

+Not to be tolerated in the Church of God.

#I thought:

*If what these wonderful men have taught me.

+Not to be tolerated in the Church of God.

*Maybe I don't belong in the Church of God, either.

#I thought very seriously about:

*Not going back to seminary.

*Finding a different career.

+My faculty advisor.

=One of those world-renowned scholars.

+Persuaded me to go back.

#Valley of my dream.

*To become a pastor in the LC-MS.

*Beginning to fill with bones.

-Following January.

#When Dr. Tietjen was suspended.

*From his office as president of the seminary.

#We students:

*Declared a moratorium on classes.

*Asked the Board of Control to tell us:

+Which of our teachers, if any.

=We should consider to be false teachers.

+Which of their teachings, if any.

=We should consider to be false doctrine.

#We never received an answer.

-Month later.

#Board of Control gave the faculty an ultimatum.

*Be back in the classroom by noon the next day.

*Be fired.

#Faculty said:

*"We're not the ones who shut down the seminary."

+ "Students did."

*"You have not addressed their concerns."

+ "Under the circumstances,"

= "We cannot in good faith return to the classroom."

= "With this cloud of suspicion hanging over our heads."

#Faculty was fired.

#We formed a seminary in exile.
 *Concordia Seminary in Exile.
 +Seminex.
 *Bare bones operation.
 +If ever there was one.
 #There were more bones in my valley.
 -After finishing seminary.
 #I went to graduate school.
 *Luther Seminary.
 +St. Paul, Minnesota.
 #One Sunday I was sitting in church.
 *Either:
 +Reformation Sunday.
 =At the end of October.
 +All Saints Sunday.
 =Beginning of November.
 *One of the hymns:
 +*The Church's One Foundation*.
 =That had been our theme song at Seminex.
 =I knew (still know) all five verses by heart.
 +Everyone else was singing.
 =I was not.
 =I was crying.
 -It dawned on me:
 #I was crying because.
 *My dream was dead.
 +I would never become a pastor.
 =In the Missouri Synod.
 *My valley was full of bones.
 +Dry bones.
 +Very dry bones.

B. Can These Bones Live?

1. Like Ezekiel.

- a. We might be tempted to say:
 - “No way.”
 - “Bones are bones.”
 - “Death is death.”
- b. We might hedge our bets and say:
 - “Lord only knows.”
- c. Ezekiel discovered:
 - When the spirit of God blows.
 - #Exiles can be returned to their homeland.
 - #Bones can live.

2. Mary and Martha.
 - a. Blamed Jesus for her brother's death.
 - “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”
 - John 11:21, 32.
 - b. Jesus said to her:
 - “These bones can live.”
 - “Your brother will rise again.”
 - #John 11:23.
 - c. Martha said:
 - “Oh, sure.”
 - “On the last day.”
 - #John 11:24.
 - d. Jesus said:
 - Not:
 - #“I will be the resurrection and the life.”
 - But:
 - #“I am the resurrection and the life.”
 - *These bones can live.
 - +After three days.
 - +After four.
 - +Even after a year.
3. After I finished graduate school.
 - a. It was a whole year before I received a Call into professional ministry.
 - Luther Seminary.
 - #Part of the American Lutheran Church.
 - *Still in Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with the LC-MS.
 - *Didn't want to jeopardize that.
 - =By opening the floodgates to Seminex grads.
 - b. I was so:
 - Disgusted.
 - Discouraged.
 - #I thought more than once.
 - *About pursuing a different career.
 - #Pastor friend of mine.
 - *One of my mentors during graduate school.
 - *Missouri Synod pastor said:
 - +“Norm, if you don't end up in the pastoral ministry,”
 - +“I'm going to kick your ass.”

Concl: Can these bones live?
 Can these bones live?
 -When the Spirit of God blows.
 #“Lord, only you know,” becomes:
 #“Lord, you know it.”

