

SERMON FOR MARCH 26, 2023

TEXT: EZEKEIL 37:12-14

THEME: YOU SHALL KNOW THE LORD

Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

In the name of Jesus:

Three church members were on a walk and the topic of their conversation turned to how they would be remembered by others and what they would want people to say about them at their funeral.

The first church member said, "I guess I'd want folks to say that I was a good husband and father, I worked hard and I loved Jesus.

The second one said, "I would want people to say that I was a good worker in the church, that I loved the Lord and my family, and that heaven is a wonderful place."

The third member was silent. When the other two prodded him to answer the question about what he would want others to say about him at his funeral, he smiled and said, "I would like them to say, Look, he's moving!"

Well, needless to say, that would get people's attention. And in our text for today, the Lord seeks to get our attention as He speaks through the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet during the time of the Babylonian Exile. The people of God went into exile as a punishment for their disobedience and rejection of God and His Word. Time and time again God spoke through the prophets beckoning the people of God to stop their idolatry, their love of the world and the things around them, and to turn to the Lord in faith and fidelity. The people of God rejected the Lord by following worthless idols, so the Lord sent them into exile, far away from their homes and their county.

Yet even in this time of punishment, the Lord would not forsake His people. Ezekiel was sent to call the people to repentance, to turn to the Lord in faith and be the people of God that they were created to be.

The Lord gave Ezekiel the very words that He wanted to proclaim to His people. Earlier in Ezekiel, the prophet speaks of God's judgment upon the nation because they had rejected God and His Word. Now, the Lord seeks to get their attention by doing something that is so miraculous, so spectacular, that when this thing takes place, the people of God, in fact all of mankind would know who is the one true God! People will pay attention to a prophet who can raise the dead to life by the spoken Word.

So the Lord tells His prophet to go into a valley that is filled with dry, dead bones. The prophet dutifully follows and obeys the Lord, and then the Lord asks a question: “Can these dry bones live?” And the prophet answers, “Lord, you know if they can or not.” So the Lord tells Ezekiel to begin to preach to the bones, to speak the Word of the Lord to these dry, dead bones, and much to Ezekiel’s amazement, the dry bones come to life! First the bones come together to form a skeleton, then muscle and flesh surround the skeleton, yet there is still no life in the bones. The Lord then tells Ezekiel to once again speak the Word of the Lord given to him, he does, and as he does the Holy Spirit moves into what was once lifeless and breathes into the dead body fresh, new life! But it isn’t just one body, it is many bodies, a whole army of people, raised to life to serve the Lord as the people of God!

Some 500-600 years later another Prophet would be sent by the Lord to speak the Word of the Lord and bring life to God’s people. God’s only Son, Jesus, was brought forth from the virgin’s womb and lived His life to do the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus would come to give life to sinners by forgiving their sins and He would come to bring resurrection life to others. He would raise Jairus’ daughter to life, a widow from Nain’s son, and just a week before He would be crucified, Jesus would raise Lazarus from the grave. And

how does Jesus do all of this? By His Word, by calling them by name and raising them to life again, because Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

Once Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave, well, let's just say that got people's attention! The Jewish leaders saw people coming to follow Jesus in droves, and they thought that the whole world was going to follow Jesus! And so they made haste to plan to have Jesus crucified on a cross on the next Friday, right before the Passover, to be done with Jesus, for certainly once Jesus was dead, everything would be said and done, and they wouldn't need to hear anything from Jesus or about Him ever again.

But surprise surprise, Jesus is raised from the grave three days after His death. Jesus really is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus' resurrection not only got the attention of His disciples, it got the attention of others as well. There is no one like Jesus. He is the One who is not only the Author and Giver of Life, He is the One who raises the dead to life again.

Exekiel tells the story of the valley of the dry bones to get not only the attention of the people living in his day and age, it is a story that is retold to us to get our attention as well. Why? Because in a world of all sorts of things that seek to get our attention and draw us away from our Lord, the Lord gets our attention and tells us that no one else and no other idol or god and do

what Jesus did. And if Jesus did rise from the grave, and He did, then the Lord should have our undivided attention when He speaks to us.

And what does the Lord have to say to us? He tells each of us to repent. To examine ourselves in light of God's commandments, to see that we are sinners and that we have not kept God's Law in thought, word, or deed. Our sins are like filthy garments that cling to our body and soul. And yet, the Lord doesn't condemn us, He instead saves us. For while we were yet sinners, Christ came down from heaven, to keep the Commandments for us, and then to die and rise again as our Substitute, paying the price for our disobedience to the Lord.

The same Lord who calls us to repent has washed our sins away in the waters of our Baptism. Why? To give you new life, a resurrected life in Jesus. For the Bible says: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. And **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." Just as God raised Jesus from death to resurrected life, so too He raises you to the new resurrected life today. For if anyone is baptized into Christ he has become a new creation, the old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new. The Lord gives you new life here, today, now by the power

of His Word, and He also promises to raise you from death to give you new life with Jesus on the Last Day, for Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Jesus, even though he dies, he will live and everyone who believes in Jesus will live and never die.

God brought new life and hope to His people after the exile. Those dead dry bones came to life by the power of the Word. And the Lord brings to life to each of us by the power of Christ, all so that we and everyone will KNOW THAT JESUS IS THE LORD.

Amen