

# Ezekiel 37:1-14

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder what comes to mind when I say the word revival. Revival. Maybe for some of you of a slightly older vintage, you think of kind of Billy Graham crusade, stadiums packed out with people, strong message, loud singing, hundreds, thousands of conversions.

Maybe others of you of similar, if not older vintage, think of the Lewis revivals, well known in our land, village to village, families converted to the faith, who had long sat in churches perhaps, but by the word came to know the Lord personally, the way it spread through that island, the way it still lingers, its impact there.

We talk about revival. Those two things are very different, aren't they? They look very different and maybe felt very different for the people who were part of them. What makes it revival?

Well, I found it really helpful to think of what we talk about as revival, like this when God uses his ordinary means of grace in extraordinary ways.

We could think of it, if God had a kitchen, it's his ordinary kitchen, okay, his ordinary knives, but he sharpens them. It's his ordinary oven, but he turns the temperature right up.

[ 1 : 33 ] He uses his ordinary tools to do extraordinary things. And perhaps we think, we haven't seen that in a while.

Where's revival? Where do we see that? Does it happen? Well, Ezekiel was given a vision of revival, a very graphic vision, quite literally, of revival, people coming back to life, resurrection. And that is because Ezekiel was speaking to these people. He had to speak this to these people because the people were dead. They had ignored the prophets who had come before, including Isaiah, who we're listening to in our regular series in the evening.

They had shut their ears. They weren't listening anymore and had been sent into exile. So at the time, Ezekiel is around. The people are in Babylon. And Ezekiel and Daniel, also in our Bibles, are prophets during that time.

Daniel is a prophet up in the palace. He gets to speak to the king, the courtiers. Ezekiel is slumming it down by the Kibar Canal in a time of shantytown created by God's people in their exile in Babylon.

[ 2 : 57 ] And his ministry has been hard. If you'd read up to this point in the book of Ezekiel, you'd see him doing and saying all kinds of really tough things and the word not getting through. Ezekiel has been given wonderful visions of God being with his people and for his people.

And so calling the people to turn their hearts back to him and set their hope on him and his promises and trust in him to do what he's promised to do for them.

But they haven't. But finally, Ezekiel is given a vision of things changing, revival. We had the privilege this morning, some of us, of witnessing three new members come into the church, Elise, Anna, and Alistair, who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As elders, one of the great privileges of that role is hearing people's stories, listening to how the Lord worked in people's lives to bring them to him.

And we've had others recently, haven't we? Brendan, William, and Caitlin as well. Others before.

And there's others of you sitting here tonight in whom the Lord has worked even in the last weeks or months who've been drawn to Christ, who've had that new heart and that change happen in you.

[ 4 : 23 ] And each and every one is a miracle. New birth, a new heart, new life, the word cutting through. God is doing something, isn't he?

Don't we kind of feel this softening towards him? God is doing something. Our church is changing. He's doing something special. And yet, we're not doing anything special, are we?

We're not doing anything special. This is an ordinary church where ordinary things happen and ordinary people meet together, isn't it? Nothing special happens.

But God takes ordinary things and sometimes he uses them for extraordinary purposes. And tonight, this passage helps us just maybe peel back the surface and see how and why that happens.

Just look with me from verse 1 and we'll see how we are called to humble ourselves before the Lord's sovereignty. Humble ourselves before his sovereignty.

[ 5 : 34 ] The hand of the Lord was on me, says Ezekiel, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. Now, it's a strange picture, isn't it?

But it helps if you look at verse 9, we see that these are slain people and verse 10, that when they are raised, they are a vast army. So, what we're meant to picture is a kind of battlefield strewn with corpses, the dead, who've been left to rot.

but they are not kind of awaiting CPR, are they? They're not waiting to be resuscitated. Verse 2, he led me back and forth and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.

Whatever war this was was fought long ago. Ezekiel doesn't see, does he kind of neatly laid out anatomical skeletons. This is just scattered, piled up heaps of very dry bones.

These are not just dead people, they are dead dead, long dead. And, the question, verse 3, comes, the Lord asked me, son of man, can these bones live?

[ 6 : 51 ] Can these bones live? Now, faced with that, what would we say? Would we even think about it? It's a no-brainer, isn't it? I think I've told you before about the Bealdside Cairn around the corner from the manse.

It's this enormous stack of rocks. There's a wee plaque next to it that says, apparently, this was created by hunters and gatherers 4,000 years ago as a kind of burial mound.

Now, I don't know if the bodies are still there, but if they were, and we went tonight and we got the bones up from that cairn and we rushed them down to the ARI and we kicked the door open of the A&E; and we laid these bodies out and we said, can these bones live?

What would they say? Probably phoned the police, wouldn't they? Of course they can't. No, of course not. But what does Ezekiel say?

Verse 3, I said, sovereign Lord, you alone know. He doesn't rush to judgment, does he?

[ 7 : 59 ] He doesn't give a kind of overconfident, boisterous, yes! And he doesn't, does he give a proud and arrogant, no, but he submits himself to the Lord's judgment.

Lord, you know. I don't know. You know, Lord. Now, why could he say that about a heap of bones? Well, what's the vision all about? Just glance forward at verse 11.

He said to me, son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say our bones are dried up and our hope is gone. We are cut off.

Presumably, Ezekiel knows this. Lord's not just asking him about bones, but about his neighbors, the people who live in the house next door, his family, generations of Israelites, people that he knew.

And the Lord is asking, can these people, can the Israelites, can my people, can they live again? Can they live again?

[ 9 : 09 ] Can this nation, can this family, can this person, can they live again? I wonder if you've ever asked that of yourself. Maybe someone that you know, maybe the people who live next door to you, maybe people who live in your home, maybe people you see on the news, our nation.

I was talking with somebody on Friday about St. Andrew's. It's a great town. If you walk around, there's various monuments and plaques. One place you can go and visit is a big kind of PH, kind of made out in the ground.

that is the location where a man named Patrick Hamilton at the age of 24 was burned at the stake for preaching the gospel during the Reformation.

Around the corner there's another one, a GW, George Wishart, burned at the stake for the very same reason, preaching the gospel. And that's just in front of the castle where another gospel preacher was kept, John Knox, imprisoned for, guess what, preaching the gospel.

He was then made a slave and then exiled, spent some time in England before coming back to Scotland. Now if you had asked those guys, look at this nation, Scotland at that time, a place where gospel preachers were burned at the stake, can these bones live?

[ 10 : 45 ] Can this people have a new birth? Can there be revival, new life, reformation here?

Everything in them, perhaps, on the surface, maybe, humanly speaking, would have cried out, no,

the gospel cannot take root here and lives cannot be changed.

But they didn't say that, did they? They didn't run away. Instead, perhaps, they said something like this, sovereign Lord, sovereign Lord, you alone know.

They left it in God's hands, didn't they, what the outcome would be of their gospel ministry, and they did not live to see, did they, the fruit of their labor, that Scotland would one day be known as the land of the book.

Reformation. And perhaps, as we look at our nation today, we feel the same way, humanly speaking, can these bones live?

I'm not proposing any kind of Christian nationalism, anything like that, but we just look around, don't we, at our country, and we long, don't we, we long for the people of Scotland to hear and to respond to the gospel and have life.

[12:03] Can that happen? Is the church in terminal decline? Is it just going to all fade away and be forgotten? Humanly speaking, on the surface, perhaps, perhaps we think, yeah, maybe.

What should we say? Well, it's not in our control, is it? But it is in someone's sovereign Lord. You alone know the answer to that question.

You alone know whether there can be renewal and revival and new life in this land. Or on the individual level, maybe there's people in your life, you think, can, could this person become a Christian?

Could they respond to the gospel? Now, I don't want to put these guys in the spotlight, but perhaps, perhaps the three friends that we saw up here this morning, perhaps if we had known them not so long ago, perhaps we would have wondered, can this person be a Christian?

Can this, would this person, would Elise respond to the gospel, we wonder? we might have wondered? You can tell us. But today, we saw, didn't we?

[13:19] Today, we saw differently than maybe we would have thought. Can this person live? Well, we don't know, do we? Do you know? I don't know. Sovereign Lord, you know.

You know. Perhaps there are people in your life tonight, you just wonder, could this person ever, ever, ever be a Christian? Sovereign Lord, you know.

You know. At this vision of bones on the valley floor, that is our natural state before God. That is where we all once were, everyone in this room, dry bones.

How did that change? The Sovereign Lord knows. He's in control. He's the king. It's often said, isn't it, that evangelism isn't difficult. It's impossible.

It's impossible to bring someone back to life, spiritually. But what did Jesus say when the disciples said, well, this rich man, if he can't get into the kingdom, he can't have eternal life.

[14:19] Who can? What did he say? With man, it is impossible, but not with God. Not with God. Can these bones live?

Sovereign Lord, you alone know. We must, we must, mustn't we, humble ourselves before God's sovereignty if we want to see lives, people, change.

Secondly, we speak to the bones. Look at this verse 4. Then he said to me, prophesy to these bones and say to them, dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath into you and you will come to life. He says it again in verse 6. I will put breath in you and you will come to life.

Then you will know that I am the Lord. God's message is a message of life, isn't it? A message of life. Let's not forget that. But again, I wonder what you would say if you were tasked with this.

[15:24] Speak to these bones. Now it sounds a bit silly, doesn't it? Go down to the morgue and talk to people about Jesus.

Let's do a graveyard tour of Aberdeen. Let's speak to the bones. But remember what he's talking about, not bones, but people, living people.

I wonder what our answer is. Go and speak to these people. I hope it would be different. God is sovereign, but he instructs Ezekiel, doesn't he, to go and speak.

He gives him a word. Now perhaps, perhaps in our kind of tradition, we kind of sit back easy, don't we?

And we say, God is sovereign, so we just have to kind of watch and wait people to come in. If people have heard it, they've met us, we hope and pray the penny will just drop and people will just get it one day and they'll just come in.

[16:32] God is sovereign and he's in control of that, yes, but the sovereign God has appointed means by which he works. He has said, this is how I do it.

These are my tools. This is how I work. And so he says to Ezekiel, doesn't he, I am sovereign and you know that, so go and speak to the bones.

Verse seven, so I prophesied as I was commanded. Friends, if God is sovereign and he is sovereign in salvation and he says, go and speak to spiritually dead people, what do we say? Surely we say, yes, Lord. Yes, we'll go and speak. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound and the bones came together, bone to bone.

I looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. How do spiritually dead people live? Spiritually dead people do not come alive normally unless someone goes and speaks to them.

[17:44] Again, wonderful stories. We heard in the elders meeting about how these dear friends had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ without an exception.

Without exception, there were people in their lives who spoke the gospel to them, who actually opened the word of God with them, did uncover Mark, did Christianity explore.

If I can just pick on Anna, I don't know if she's, sorry. You and Jude will both be mortified, okay. But, Anna came because Jude quietly spoke to her about his faith, just in life, just openly and confidently and humbly.

and then Jude invited Anna to church and Jude invited Anna to church and the first Sunday she heard was Ecclesiastes chapter 4.

Now, if you don't remember what happened in Ecclesiastes chapter 4, go back and look. The way that Ecclesiastes 4 ended was with the teacher saying, better never to have been born than to see the oppression that happens under the sun.

[19:04] Not the kind of sermon one might think would cause somebody to take interest in Jesus Christ. But there it was and we heard how Anna's life and our preaching series just came together like this on that night in a way that nobody could have coordinated or organized at all but in his sovereign providence the word was spoken and as God's word is spoken lives are changed.

I'm not sure if Anna would appreciate you asking about that after. But there it is. It's wonderful, isn't it? It's exhilarating. And yes, that's for the prophet, the preacher.

Okay. But revival is not when the preacher's heart comes alive, is it? How do things change? It's when all our hearts together united come alive and have a passion for God's word and to speak it to the spiritually dead.

Isn't that how it works? Being a preacher is a wonderful thing. It is exhilarating. If any of you are wondering what to do, it's the best job in the world.

It's fantastic. God's word works. And we must, mustn't we, have absolute confidence in God's appointed means, his way of working, his way of working.

[20:41] If we just try and come up with our own way, we will be discouraged. But when God says, go and speak to dry bones, what do we say?

Surely we say with everything in us, yes. And if we're not sure, hopefully that is because we're just not equipped or we just wouldn't know how to begin and not because we lack confidence in God's word to really work.

Now, perhaps you feel discouraged in that because you have shared the gospel maybe over many years and you haven't seen the results that you've wanted. But look how that bit ends in verse 8. there's tendons and flesh, there's bones, there's skin, but there was no breath in them. So, half of what God said has happened, would happen, has happened, but something else is needed, isn't it? Jesus is so clear in his ministry that we can share the gospel with people and there are just different results. Sometimes we see a bit of progress but not to eternal life.

[21:48] Sometimes it just bounces off a hard heart. Sometimes it cracks the surface and doesn't get all the way through. Something else is needed than simply to share the word. Now, what's that?

Number three, we've had humble ourselves before God's sovereignty, speak to the bones. Thirdly, pray to and for the spirits. Then he said to me, verse 9, prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to it, this is what the sovereign Lord says, come breath, breathe into these slain that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me and breath entered them and they came to life. Now, speaking to dry bones wasn't enough. Speak to the wind.

Don't know what you've got in mind, someone standing on a kind of blowy hilltop and saying stuff. It's not that, okay? It's actually what we did just before we opened our Bibles. As we sang, Holy Spirit, living breath of God, come into my heart, come and change me, speak to me, mold me. That's what it is, what Donald was preaching this morning. It's prayer. That's what it is. Speak to him. Speak to him. Ask him to come. It's praying for God's Spirit to come.

[ 23 : 10 ] And that's not kind of a Christian interpretation. The word breath there is ruach, ruach, spirit, wind. What's in view is, remember in Genesis, God formed the man, Adam, and then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being.

That's what's happened. Ezekiel has spoken the gospel, a kind of human-shaped thing has emerged, and now he prays for the breath of God to come and breathe into him that he might live. All these people, it's just prayer. It's just prayer. And again, what do we say to that? What do we say?

Do we pray for the spiritually dead? Many of you pray for people in your lives. I know that. People in your families. The Holy Spirit might come and renew their hearts.

Maybe some of us need to begin that. Maybe if you don't feel equipped to speak a word in season to somebody, the first place to begin is to pray. Maybe you don't feel like you have opportunity to speak to somebody outside of Christ.

[ 24 : 22 ] Pray that you would have. Pray that the Spirit would open the door. And if you have been doing that over many years, maybe decades of your life, do not lose heart.

Do not give up. Because what does the sovereign Lord say? This is a means by which he works. I tell you, it might not seem like it's fruitful, but apart from that, without that, you can share as many gospel verses as you want, but without prayer, they will not cut.

Do not give up praying. Without your prayers, the gospel will not cut. So do not lose heart. I prophesied, as he commanded me, the sovereign Lord, and breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet a vast army.

How does God do it? How does God change things? Where does revival, reformation, newness of life come from? It's not complicated. It's not complicated.

What did the sovereign Lord tell Ezekiel to be engaged in? Word, ministry, and prayer. It's what the apostles were doing, wasn't it?

[ 25 : 42 ] What was their priorities? Prayer and the preaching of the word. That's what they did.

And we can bolt on as many things as we want to that, but that is how the sovereign Lord says he works in people's lives to make change.

Now, the actual cutting edge of this, I think, the kind of, if you were to draw a straight line between Ezekiel 37 and our situation today, if we could just go here for a little minute, is actually to the church, God's people, right?

Not to the nation of Scotland or to your home. It's to God's gathered people, his church. Now, we might wonder, mightn't we, about the church in Scotland?

Can that live? Can it live? Maybe you're hoping for revival in the national church, and we all want to see it live, don't we? We want to see churches alive, testifying to Jesus.

But we cannot pin our hopes on revival apart from God's appointed means, can we? We can't just hope that God will one day turn up and do something different that we haven't anticipated by what?

[ 27 : 00 ] The preaching of the word and the ministry of prayer. Churches will not be resuscitated apart from those apostolic priorities. So we cannot just hang around and wait for God to revive or give life to something that is dying without also praying that those things would take place.

The clear, steady witness to Christ from his word and prayer. And I'm not just speaking about kind of churches out there somewhere, I'm speaking about in here too.

What is it that makes us a living church? Why is this church family growing and vibrant and healthy and the Lord is adding to our number those who are being saved?

Why is that happening? Only because, only because of this, a clear testimony to Jesus, the word of God and prayer.

If those things are lost, we are lost. If that tails off, we tail off. Be in no doubt about it.

[ 28 : 17 ] We never get past that. So it doesn't matter how healthy we are, how vibrant, how lively, how many people come to Christ. Do you not lose confidence?

Do you not stop prophesying to the bones and prophesying to the wind? Let's be united in that, please. Okay, not me and me and Donald or the elders.

