

## There Is Always Hope

Dear friends,

A great calamity was coming. At least, that's what certain prophets were saying, though the people certainly could feel it. They were suffering already, but when word came that things were going to get worse, much worse, most of them didn't want to believe it. It couldn't happen. Some even fell back on saying, God wouldn't let that happen.

But it did. Things got much worse. And so the people went from great confidence and pride to utter despair. They felt hopeless.

And so the Lord stepped in. He sent his prophet once again to fill the people with hope—hope not based on what they might do, but hope based on the Word of God.

The people I'm speaking about are the people of Israel in Ezekiel's day, in captivity in Babylon, left helpless and hopeless. But these words apply to us, with all the challenges we may face. The Lord wants us to know, There is Always Hope—in our Savior God.

Ezekiel was among the Jewish people taken captive to Babylon, a hundred miles away from their homeland. Now, it was only a portion of the people who were taken captive; and they assumed that, so long as their relatives in Israel were still there, still offering sacrifices to the Lord at the temple, things would work out fine. Ezekiel's first job as prophet among the exiles was to tell them that things were not going to work out that way. Israel had forsaken the Lord, and they were to be judged. Ezekiel was a prophet of doom—literally. He said, **“The end has come!...Doom has come upon you.”**

But this message didn't sink in until word came back from Israel that Jerusalem had been overrun. Specifically, the people heard that the Temple had been destroyed. The Temple was where the priests offered sacrifices each day; and as God accepted those sacrifices, they were assured that he was watching over them. No Temple meant no sacrifices. How could God be looking out for them now?

**“Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off,”** the people said. Their hope was gone, because they had placed their hope in the wrong thing. The bones were dried up—like a pile of bones that are not fresh but old, deteriorating, ready to crumble.

We might feel this way as we look around our world. We read each day of more and more people infected and dying, and it can be overwhelming. But even apart from the current news: when we hear about the sins that are more and more accepted, even by people claiming to be Christians; people turning away from the Lord—it may seem hopeless.

And our lives can seem that way, too. It can happen because of loneliness—a mother who's kids have moved away and her husband is gone, and Facebook only offers so much company. Or a parent who is way too busy with kids who are now home all the time. Bills pile up and work is so uncertain.

And if we don't stop to read or listen to the Bible regularly, if we don't drink from the water of life God provides in his Word, then we will feel dried up. For without God, all we have left is our sinful lives.

And that sin leads us either to take pride, thinking we can keep everything under control, or we fall into the depths of despair.

But then our Lord steps in, when we are dried up. Notice in our Bible lessons today, it is God who does all the work. God does not come to us only when we are strong; he comes when we can't do it. God does not only help those who help themselves; he helps those who realize they are helpless.

He pictured this so vividly in our Lesson from Ezekiel. **“The hand of the Lord was on me, 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. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.”**

You see what the Lord was doing. Taking Ezekiel to a valley, having him walk back and forth and see piles and piles of human bones. Dry bones. This was from a slaughter.

**“He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’”** The answer is an obvious, No. These were just bones; dried out bones, at that. There was no life in this valley. But Ezekiel trusted that with God all things are possible. So he answered, **“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”**

**“Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’”** What could possibly change this valley of bones? No human could change this awful scene. Our strength, our might couldn't do a thing. But the Word of God—that has God's power.

**“So I prophesied as I was commanded. 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, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.”

What a picture. A valley of bones turned into a living, breathing army! Could those bones live? No; except that with God, there is always hope. By the power of God, the answer was, Yes!

**“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.’ Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.’”** God would not only give his people life; he would take them back to their promised Land. In fact, 70 years after being taken into captivity, the people were restored to the land of Israel. And 70 years after the Temple was destroyed, it would be rebuilt. How incredible God's power and love are!

The Bible says that we are dried up bones, we are dead in our sins. And like Israel, we react to our sinful condition with pride, trying to take care of ourselves, and when that doesn't work we can fall into despair and fear.

But God brought us to spiritual life by the power of his Word. He leads us away from the despair of our life's circumstances to the grace and promise we have in Jesus.

You don't think God's Word is that powerful? Remember how he created this world—by speaking words like “Let there be light.” God's Word is that powerful.

Look at how Jesus dealt with the death of Lazarus. He went to Bethany, he met Lazarus' sister Martha. And what did he do first? He spoke to her. **“Your brother will rise again.” “I am the resurrection and the life.”** And Martha's faith was refreshed by those words.

And then Jesus went to the tomb; Lazarus had been dead for four days. And Jesus again spoke his all-powerful word: **“Lazarus, come out!”** And that's all it took. His Word is so powerful, it can raise a man from the grave.

Jesus tells you that he is the resurrection and the life, and you will rise to live with him.

Shortly after his trip to Bethany, Jesus was arrested, condemned, and crucified. His bones stuck out as he hung there, all dried up. And he, the Lord of life, became the dry bones that we deserve to be.

But he rose from the dead, himself! In a couple weeks we will celebrate Easter—apparently not in person, but even on-line God's Word is just as powerful. Each time we hear the message of Jesus, each time we stop and read the Bible, our dry bones are made alive again.

When God asked Ezekiel, Can these bones live? The answer seemed pretty obvious—of course not. But God raised that whole valley of bones. And God has raised you from spiritual death to life. Further, God promises to raise your physical bones to live with him eternally.

God brought new life to ancient Israel. And God brings new life to us today. There is Always Hope. Amen.