

Explore: Hope of new life

June 28, 2014

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for July 13 focuses on Ezekiel 37:1-3, 11-14, 23-28.*

It may not seem this way at the moment. You find yourself standing atop a hill looking back at what you've made of your life. It looks a great deal like the valley of bones Ezekiel was observing. All you can see are the skeletal remains of what once was, of what could have been.

It can be a very discouraging moment. Maybe it's a broken family or a lost career. Maybe it's your physical health or the health of someone you love more than yourself. Maybe it's even the skeletal remains of the church in which you've invested your tithes, offerings and energy for decades. Now, all that remains are the bones.

For many of us, becoming a Christian was the next natural step we took in our family faith tradition. It's when we're standing atop a hill looking down on the valley of the skeletal remains of what might have been that the gospel has the first real chance to change our lives.

Shall these bones live?

We shouldn't be surprised if the first introduction the gospel brings into our lives comes in the form of a question. "'Son of man, can these bones live?'" (Ezekiel 37:3) How we answer that question is everything.

Can what has no life have life? Can what once had life have life again? Can the skeletal remains of our dead dreams, our dead lives, have life, new life, life they never had. Those are the gospel questions posed to us every single day in one way or another.

Is there more to life than just punching the corporate clock, getting the next promotion or raise only to have more money so we can collect more bones? Is there more to life than what we can see looking back on dreams that once were but are no more?

Where is hope?

It is so easy in those moments to draw the same conclusion as the people of Israel: “‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off’” (Ezekiel 37:11). What we often don’t realize when our hope is lost, that is the very moment God has a chance of becoming our new hope.

In that moment, God spoke to Ezekiel the words of gospel hope. “‘I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord’” (Ezekiel 37:14).

After I recently took my car through the car wash, sure enough, it rained the next day. All that money just went down the drain, literally. What had been a shiny new coat on the outside of the car now was a dusty remnant of what had been.

For some reason, while regretting the waste of the car wash, I looked up on the windshield and saw the oil change tag. It reminded me my oil change was way overdue. While I was focusing on how good my car looked on the outside, my engine was choking to death on the sludge that was once clean oil.

Transformation from the inside out

Maybe that’s one reason the Lord used dried up bones to speak to Ezekiel. True change and transformation happens from the inside out. God didn’t promise Ezekiel the bones would come together, clothed in the finest garments and living in the finest homes. God promised he would, first, put

his Spirit in them, give them life from the inside.

That's when the real change would take place. What had once been nothing more than a valley of dry bones would become what God promised. "I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:23). With God's Spirit becoming the sinew, the muscle, the blood that enlivened the old dead bones, the people of Israel would have a totally new identity as the very people of God.

The promise of the gospel is the same. "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). In Christ, we don't simply change the way we look on the outside. Our very lives are changed from within; we're given new hearts, new reasons for living, a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

The moment we stand atop a hill looking down on the skeletal remains of what might have been may be the greatest day of our lives. It may be the first time in our lives we hear God ask if those bones can live again and then promise that, through faith in Christ, they'll have a life like they never could have imagined.