

Ezekiel 37 v 1-10

The Valley of Dry Bones

¹The 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. ²He 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. ³He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

⁴Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD. '"

⁷So 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. ⁸I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, 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.'" ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹Then 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.' ¹²Therefore prophesy 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. ¹³Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴I 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. '"

The Past

I am sure that all of you are familiar with this passage it was after we had changed our name that I began to think about what this passage might mean for us as a church.

After all these bones were as dead as any bones could possibly be.

They were, probably, bleached white with the sun.

It was very hot in this valley!!

I imagine that it would be somewhere like Death Valley (aptly named) in California..

If you recall we had our summer a few weeks ago (when the Olympic Torch came through Brynmawr).

Remember that - it was about 25°C.

Was that hot enough for you?

How about 30°C (86°F)

Or even 40° (104°F)

Or what about 50°C (122°F)

The highest temperature recorded in Death Valley was 56.7°C (134.06°F)

That is not the highest ever recorded though - that was in Libya at 57.8°C (136.04°F) (although this is disputed).

So it was VERY hot - clear sky, no cloud, no shade.

After God had breathed into these bodies and they came to life it says, in verse 10, that there was "a vast army".

There are 206 bones that comprise the human skeleton, so if this "vast army" comprised 100,000 men (of all shapes and sizes) then we are talking about 20,600,000 bones - a huge number.

It must have been quite a sight, and sound - all those bones coming together.

Then all these skeletons being clothed with tendons, flesh and skin.

The Present

If you were to go from Abergavenny, in a helicopter, fly in a westerly direction (towards the southern tip of Ireland) and look to your left, what would you see (assuming that the weather was good, with no cloud, just a clear bright day)?

You would see the valleys of South Wales.

There are, starting with the Llwyd Valley and going as far as the Gwendraeth Valley, by my reckoning at least, 21 valleys in South Wales.

As at 2009 there were 756,300 people (612,100 aged 16 and over) in these valleys.

That is an awful lot of bones.

I would suggest that, spiritually at least, they are as dead as that vast army that Ezekiel first saw in that hot, dry valley.

Now I know that at least a proportion of those 750,000 or so people are Christians but never the less that is an awful lot of unsaved people (and bones).

But revival has come to Wales in the past.

The best known of these was the 1904 Revival led by Evan Roberts when it is estimated that some 100,000 came to know Christ for the first time.

This seems a lot but, to put it into context, the total adult population of Wales at that time was 1,416,945 of which there were 693,493 (that is 48.94%) adults who declared membership of some denomination or other.

There have been other revivals in Wales, notably the one in 1859 which also saw 100,000 came to know Christ for the first time.

There were also local revivals between 1866 and 1892.

Before the 1904-1905 revival the last revival that Wales saw was in 1859, but prior to that change was already afoot. From 1850 onwards the Christianity of Wales was markedly less Calvinistic in form. A generation of powerful biblical preachers ended, as leaders such as Christmas Evans (1838), John Elias (1841) and Henry Rees (1869) died.

Between 1859 and 1904, there were local revivals: in Cwmafan (1866), Rhondda (1879), Carmarthen and Blaenau Ffestiniog (1887), Dowlais (1890) and Pontnewydd (1892).

That all seems to be a long time ago but from Gods perspective it is no time at all.

We read in Psalm 90 and verse 4 (where Moses is talking about God) that

"A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night."

Also we read in Isaiah 46 and verses 9 and 10

"Remember the former things, those of long ago;
I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.
I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'"

God sees all time equally vividly.

All of past history is viewed by God with great clarity and vividness, as if it had just happened, and it will always remain just that clear in His consciousness throughout millions of years of eternity future.

So God remembers 1859 or 1904 just as clearly as 16th June 2012.

The Future

A People Restored

What of the future - if you read between the lines of what the world would say about the future there is not a lot to hope for?

There is an ongoing economic crisis in Europe and beyond.

Prices are increasing where ever you look.

The employment situation is going downhill, businesses going under with people being made redundant.

Institutions like the NHS are creaking at the seams

(Although I have to say that from a personnel point of view I think the NHS is great in view of how Paula has been treated over the last 2 years - I am just so grateful that we came back to the UK when we did, if we had still been in South Africa now we would, in all probability, still be blissfully unaware that there was anything wrong.)

By world standards the NHS is wonderful, even compared to some First World countries like the USA.

Even the weather seems to be changing - generally, it has to be said, for the worse.

Is what I am saying cheering you up or is it just making you feel depressed?

In verse 11 of Ezekiel 37 it says "They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off"

So this is where we came in.

BUT and it is a big BUT there is God

Just to go back to what I was saying about the revival in 1859 it can trace its roots to 1857 in New York, USA. The event that appears to be the catalyst for the spread of the 1859 revival was a prayer meeting commenced by a layman with the Dutch Reformed Church named Jeremiah Lanphier. He noticed that the businessmen in the city were looking downcast at the economic state of the country at that time, and he decided to hold a midday prayer meeting on the 3rd floor of the church in Fulton Street for one hour, each Wednesday.

At the first meeting he was the only person present but within six months there were 150 prayer meetings like this going on somewhere in New York City, with 50,000 gathered for prayer. This also became a means of outreach and appeals were made for people to receive Christ, and no less than 25,000 businessmen were converted.

Eventually this reached Wales with, as I said earlier, some 100,000 people being converted.

The point of my repeating this is that it started with someone seeing that people (businessmen) being downcast at the economic situation, which was a real situation. Up to that time in America there had been a time of rapid economic growth (or "boom") centred on the expansion of the railways. However, due to a number of different factors, in 1857 things began to change which resulted in the downturn in the economy.

Now then doesn't that have a familiar sound to it?

People being depressed by the state of the economy!!

And what was the answer - people praying
 people coming to accept Christ

Did this change the economy?

No it didn't but what it did change was the way people reacted to their circumstances.

As Christians we are called to live in the world, be part of the world. And as such we are impacted by what happens in the world.

But because we have the hope that is in knowing Jesus, having a relationship with Him, if we have troubles, cares and woes we know that we can give them to Him and He will give us peace.

In Psalm 68 and verse 19 it says:

"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,
who daily bears our burdens".

And in Matthew 11 and verses 29 and 30 Jesus says

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

For Paula and myself I can really say that the last 2 years has been a huge test but throughout it all we have been sustained by faith that has given us a peace which a lot of non Christians find difficult to understand.

But how, you may ask, does this affect the people of the South Wales Valleys. These valleys with all these "dry bones".

Bones joined to form a skeleton.

The first thing that happened was that the bones joined together.

If you consider that we were all just dry bones once, but we were joined together by being part of this fellowship and now form the "body" which is this local church.

1 Corinthians 12 and verses 1 to 31 is a memorable description of how the diverse members of Christ's church all fit together. Using the analogy of the human body and its many different parts, each with its unique function, we learn that each of us has a special role to play in the kingdom of God.

So if we all form one body then we can consider each of us to be part of the skeleton, that is to say that we are bones.

In the same way the "bones" in the valleys need to be joined together. They need to, either join with their local body (that is their local church), or form new bodies that will form part of Gods army.

Ligaments (sinews) added so that the bones may be united and the skeleton complete.

The skeleton was then joined together with ligaments (or sinews) – what is it that joins us together or unites us?

A love for our many unsaved brothers & sisters should join us together that we wouldn't want to see them suffer and, let's be honest, go to hell when they die.

A passion to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached, with people being saved and added, and the borders of His glorious kingdom pushed forward is what (or certainly should) join us together.

The flesh clothes the skeleton.

The skin envelopes the flesh covered skeleton.

So what is it that clothes and envelopes this skeleton?

In Galatians 3:26-27 it says

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

So here again it is Jesus Christ who envelopes and covers us.

And then God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will then breathe life into them.

How can this be accomplished – *vision*, *prayer* and *perseverance*

Ezekiel had vision and he prayed.

Jeremiah Lanphier had vision. And he prayed. And he persevered. He was the only one at the beginning of that prayer meeting in 1857 but he persevered. After 6 months there 150 prayer meetings going on with 50,000 people attending. At the end of this time some 25,000 had given their lives to Christ. That prayer meeting started the move of God that, in 1859, came to Wales with 100,000 people giving their lives to Christ.

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God" Those were the words of that great missionary William Carey in 1792 when he was preaching from Isaiah 54 v 2

"Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes"

During his lifetime he established the Baptist Missionary Society, there were many missions in India and the surrounding areas and through his efforts the Bible was translated in many Indian languages and dialects. He did a lot more besides but suffice it to say that he did a tremendous amount of work for Gods kingdom.

This local church did not change its name to Valleys Family Church for nothing - we realised that we have a vision to reach further than just Brynmawr - we are called to reach the Valleys of South Wales.

In Hebrews 13:8 it says that

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

God did it in the Valley of Dry Bones

He did it in the 19th Century

He will do it tomorrow.

With *vision*, *prayer* and *perseverance* we can do it.