

Valleys of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37)

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 16th November 2014

Intro

- A couple of weeks ago Dave Tucker spoke about revival. I want to carry on that theme today.

Read Ezek 37:1-14

We, like Israel, desperately need God to move

- v1 'In the midst of the Valley'- Israel's situation- Kingdom split into 2 parts after death of Solomon. Northern kingdom sacked by Assyrians who scattered them to different lands. Southern kingdom of Judah (where Ezekiel is from) taken into captivity in Babylon in a series of defeats. The first deportation included Ezekiel and happened in 597BC. Later in 586BC the temple in Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by the Babylonians and all hopes of the southern kingdom of Judah would dissolve. This is the situation Ezekiel finds himself in- he is living in the land of Babylonia (for the rest of his life) with a group of other Israelites who have also been deported. To get home they would have to walk about 900 miles (it was about 500 miles but you could not travel in a straight line). This was a true 'low point' in Israel's history- a real 'valley'.
- A roller-coaster line of your life- ups and downs. Could do that of the life of Joseph- promised great things and then sold into slavery. Just as was on way up got accused of adultery and thrown into prison. Just as things on way up got forgotten about. Eventually though God's word fulfilled and he became second in command in Egypt and saved a generation from starvation and fulfilled his destiny. What about your life right now? Is it an up or a down? Those who truly admit their need of God to move will be able to weather the tough times knowing that the overall trend will be up, even if it takes a long while. We need to persevere, like Joseph, and lean on God to move in our lives and in our nation- he will not let us down.
- v4,v11 'our bones are dried up' We all love times of blessing and fruitfulness, but what about when the going gets tough? 'Bones' speak of death, the opposite of fruitfulness. 'dried up' speaks of the heat of the sun bleaching them and the length of time they had been dead for. In Ezek 17:24 God says He is able to make the 'dry tree flourish' -i.e. turn green again. V11 'our hope is gone'- Israel had no hope of the situation changing unless God stepped in.
- The situation in Wales is equally dire. We often see in the UK former Church buildings being sold off for other uses. Whilst smaller denominations seem to be growing, some of the mainstay denominations are closing more churches than they are opening. The number of churches in each denomination opening and closing from 2008-2013 in the UK (from the Evangelical Alliance website):

	Angl- ican	Bap- tists	Indep.	Meth- odist	New churches	Pente- costal	Presb- yterian	Smaller Denoms
Opening	0	+1	+104	+4	+256	+640	+9	+1,937
Closing	-324	-76	-112	-813	-4	-2	-183	-38
net diff.	-324	-75	-8	-809	+252	+638	-174	+1,899

- And yet, we have known the hand of God here in Wales come powerfully in the past when there was a dire need and people prayed for revival. In 1904 a great revival

happened and over 100 thousand became Christians in the space of one year, but a similar thing also happened in 1859, especially under the preaching of a man named David Morgan. Eifion Evans puts it this way:

"By the summer of 1859 there were 300 converts at Llangeitho, 400 at Tregaron, 500 at Aberystwyth. As well as the Calvinistic Methodists, other denominations reaped a plentiful spiritual harvest in the period 1858-60, with a total estimated to be about 110,000. Many affirmed it to be the fruit of several years' faithful sowing of God's word, acknowledging God had brought them conviction through a sermon preached years prior to the revival....A prayer meeting at the Calvinistic Methodist South Wales Association in Llangeitho in the summer numbered 18,000, and a contemporary newspaper commented on the 'pervading and overwhelming solemnity' that marked the occasion."

- For the origins of this revival, we need to go back to 1857 in the USA. Although there had been a moving of the Holy Spirit in Canada before this time, the event that appears to have been the catalyst for the spread of this revival was a prayer meeting commenced by a Jeremiah Lanphier, a layman with the Dutch Reformed Church in New York. Noticing that the businessmen in that city were looking downcast at the economic state of the country at that time, he decided to hold a midday prayer meeting on the 3rd floor of the church in Fulton Street for one hour, each Wednesday. At first he was the only person present, but after ½ hour a further five men joined him. The second week twenty businessmen turned up and then forty the following week. They then agreed to meet every day, and on the first day, 100 men turned up, many of whom were not Christians. After 3 months every room of that church was filled with men praying, with others on the outside kneeling together praying because they couldn't get in the church. A further church nearby was opened for prayer, but that also became filled. A theatre was then hired for this purpose, and on the first day, half an hour before the announced time, it was packed to capacity, again with men on the outside praying because they couldn't get in. 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. It was not uncommon to see a hundred people come down the aisle of a church at invitation time confessing their sins openly, and receiving Christ into their life. Soon a common mid-day sign on business premises read "We will re-open at the close of the prayer meeting." As time went on the movement spread to the whole of the USA and Canada, and there were actually places where not a single person was left unconverted. Along the East Coast of America there was a zone of heavenly influence that affected even ships coming in from abroad, who knew nothing of the revival, but when they came within a few miles of land God got hold of people on board the ships and in some cases the whole of the crew got converted. Thirty captains of vessels like this were converted. During the period 1857/8 no less than one million people were converted in the USA. If such a revival were to hit America today the equivalent number of conversions would be somewhere in the region of eight to nine million people.

News of the revival soon hit these shores, and the first place to be affected was Ulster, and a mighty revival hit that place in 1859 with somewhere around 100,000 people converted which as a percentage of the people in that country was quite staggering. About the same time and quite independently Wales also was affected and a revival brought again around 100,000 people to Christ. The revival arrived in Scotland in the north of the country and as time went on it spread down south, until it arrived in England. Around 300,000 people were converted in Scotland. The revival in Ulster, Wales and Scotland, however, was somewhat different in character to that of most of England. In the former the revival was more spontaneous, and most of the conversions occurred during the year of 1859. In England, however, the initial move was not quite as dramatic as in the former two parts of the country, but within two years something different happened which resulted in large numbers of people coming to Christ. God raised up a large number of evangelists who travelled the length and breadth of the land preaching the gospel, and many thousands of people were brought into the kingdom by this means. By 1864 no less than 600,000 people were converted in England, bringing the total in the UK to over one million people. Even parts of Southern Ireland were affected by the revival, including Dublin, Cork, and Kerry. The latter place was most blessed and the move there was known as "The Kerry Revival." Even ships travelling from Dublin to Holyhead were influenced by the move, with revival services being held on board, and many people being converted. (Source <http://www.liverpoolrevival.org.uk/1859.htm>)

God moves when we acknowledge our need of Him and exercise faith

Acknowledge our need of Him:

- v3 'Son of man'- God called Ezekiel this a lot- emphasising his humanity compared to God as divine. For us we would say 'I'm only flesh and blood' in the same way to emphasise our mortal humanity. Jesus often took this title, emphasising His humanity, however Daniel predicted the 'Son of Man' would be the one worshipped by all nations- Jesus is both 'Son of God' i.e. divine, and 'Son of Man'.
- Many of us don't like to ask others for help or to admit need or weakness or reliance. We will try and get ourselves out of a fix and rely on our own abilities. However, if we do that and do not rely on God how much are we going to see of God moving in our day? Jesus says 'Apart from me you can do nothing'. We need to repent of self-sufficiency and acknowledge our complete need of God to do something truly awesome in our day. Prov 3:5 'trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'.

Exercise faith:

- v3 'Can these bones live?' This is like when Jesus tests Philip by asking 'Where can we get food for all these people?'. God will at times ask us a similar question when He wants to do a great work- He is looking for a response of faith in us. Sometimes we will be able to hear God's voice in the voices of those around us as they ask for help in difficult circumstances and we feel God challenging us to speak out an answer in faith.
- What situations around you are there where God is challenging you 'Could this situation be different?'
- As many as 30% of Muslim converts to Christianity in one part of the world where Christians are persecuted is due to people having dreams about their need of the Saviour it has recently been reported. i.e. they come to faith due to a supernatural encounter- God makes a way where there is no way.
- Welsh revival- people convicted whilst in the pubs, leave their pint and find a church. Duncan Campbell, used by God in in the Hebridean revival 1949 said this about what happened the night revival came:

...That meeting continued until four o'clock in the morning. I couldn't tell you how many were saved that night, but of this I am sure, that at least five young men who were saved that night are ministers today in the Church of Scotland. At four o'clock we decided to make for the manse. Of course, you understand we made no appeals; apart from asking those who wanted to get right with God to come to a further meeting, where we would quote Scripture to them, but basically we just left men and women to make their way to God themselves. When God takes a situation in hand, I tell you, He does a better work than we could ever do! So we left them there, and just as I was leaving the church, a young man came to me and said, 'Mr. Campbell, I would like you to go to the police station, for there must be at least four hundred people gathered around there just now.' A crowd of men and women, from a neighbouring village, five or six miles away, had been so convicted by God, that they found themselves moving to the police station, because the constable there was a God fearing, and well saved man, and next to the police station was the cottage in which the two old women lived (these were two women who had been praying for, and believing for revival for some time). People knew that this was a home that feared God. I believe that that had something to do with the magnet, the power that drew men. Now, if anyone would ask them today, 'Why? How did it happen? Who arranged it?' they couldn't tell you. This is the moving of God's Spirit, I believe, in answer to the prevailing prayer of men and women who believed that God was a covenant-keeping God who must be true to His covenant engagement. I went along to the police station. As I was walking along that country road, (we had to walk about a mile), I heard someone praying by the roadside. I could hear a man crying to God for mercy. I went over, and there were four young men on their knees. Yes, they had been at the dance (where many suddenly rushed out to get right with God), but now they were there, crying to God for mercy. One of them was under the influence of drink, a young man who wasn't twenty years of age. But that night God saved him, and today he is the parish minister and a man of God. He was converted in the revival with eleven other men who were to serve in his presbytery, a wonderful congregation. When I got to the police station, I saw something that will live with me as long as I live. I didn't preach; there was no need of preaching. We didn't even sing. The people were in great spiritual distress. Under the still, starlit sky, with a bright moon shining down on us, and angels, I believe, looking over the battlements of glory, were men and women on the road, others by the side of a cottage, and some behind a peat stack, all crying to God for mercy. Oh, the confessions that were made! There was one old man crying out, 'Oh, God, hell is too good for me, hell is too good for me!' That is Holy Ghost conviction! Yet from the group of young men who sought the Lord that night; there are nine in the ministry today.

- Do we have simple faith that God can do it again here, in our day?

Faith is not passive- it takes action

- James- faith is accompanied by deeds- we reveal what we believe by what we do.
- Faith gets us stepping out of the boat as Peter did.
- v4 'Prophecy to these bones' (Ezekiel had to prophesy to the people of Israel). Speaking God's word to people brings hope and releases faith in them for God to be able to move. Prophecy brings edification, building up. As we prophesy God moves- conviction, faith, healing- 'God is really among you'- 1Cor 14:25.
- Revival comes when people of faith bring the challenge to the people of God, that

God wants things to be different, far and above what we are presently seeing and then people start to believe for it and ask God to do it, and then He responds in a sovereign move of power.

- My background prophecies to coming to Wales- Wheatfield, stadium, Wimber conference stadium, apostolic movement of people, etc. God is going to bring revival- let's believe and ask Him for it.
- The results of this- v7 & 8- **A structural change**- body parts coming back together, bone to bone etc. When God speaks we are able to make sure our structures in life get ready for what He is about to do. People start to purchase buildings and get them ready in faith. People move house to new areas where God is about to move. People take new jobs and step into areas of ministry in line with what God is about to do.
- If we truly want God to bring revival in our time, we need to be prepared for God to revive us. Are our lives presently structured around ourselves or God? A response to God which says 'revive me' may consist of a change in behaviour where we start going to a meeting we had previously avoided due to coldness of heart towards God.
- A coming together of the body of Christ in unity. When God moves we start to deal with petty differences- we start to show true forgiveness, we deal with back-biting, gossip, offence etc. Easy in theory, not so easy in practise- when was the last time someone offended you in Church? How have you made it right? Satan tries to break up a move of God through disunity, let's not give him a foothold.
- A unity of purpose- coming together, different parts of the body of Christ, different roles all operating together alongside one another in harmony and unity. Step out in boldness and faith and do what God has gifted you to do to bless others. We don't do this to make a platform for ourselves, but to serve God and His Church.
- God said to me 'first there is the coming together and then the Spirit comes'. Unity of purpose paves the way for the Holy Spirit to be poured out, not just on individuals, but on a whole community of people.
- v9 'Prophecy to the breath' v9- (Ask God's Spirit to come).
- It's no good having structure if there's no life. A graveyard is very structured, but it's full of death.
- In this passage Ezekiel has seen people coming together, but there is no breath in them- they are a group of corpses! They are zombies! If we have all the structures of Church but don't encounter the presence of God we are to be pitied. Moses said 'if your presence does not go with us what else will distinguish me and us from all other people?' (Ex 33:16). If God is not with us we just become a social club. Like Moses, we need God's Spirit!
- The Heb. Word 'ruach' means 3 things: 'spirit', 'breath', 'wind', therefore they are interchangeable and the right word is worked out by the context.
- There is a parallel in this passage here with the creation of mankind from Genesis- God made the animals, but for the man to become a living being there is a different process- God breathes the breath of life into man's nostrils and then he becomes a living being. We are made in the image of God- authority to rule the earth, a conscience, morality, built for relationship with God, but also built to hold the breath of God- to be filled with His Holy Spirit.
- What are the 'four winds' in verse 9? The four winds are the four corners (compass points) of the world- i.e. every direction. Israel was scattered 'to the four winds' by her enemies, now God is saying at every direction and place Holy Spirit come and fill the people of God. Our being filled with God's Spirit is not location dependant- it can happen anywhere.
- When was the last time you were filled with God's Spirit? Maybe you've never been

- filled- God wants to fill you today.
- The good news is we don't have to plead with God to fill us- He loves to fill us with the Holy Spirit- He is our dad and gives His children good gifts (Luke 11:13) i.e the Holy Spirit. We live in the age of the Spirit prophesied by Joel and explained by Peter (Acts 2) when all believers have the promise that the Holy Spirit is for them.
- How do we get filled? Desire (thirst) (John 7:37) 'let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink'. Ask in faith- Ezekiel had to make a step of faith 'prophecy to the wind (Spirit)'-we need to do the same -ask the Holy Spirit to come and fill us.
- We can all be filled with the Holy Spirit, but when there is revival whole communities are changed and become aware of the presence of God. How can we see this happening? Two ways. Firstly overflow- as we are filled the atmosphere changes- faith is released and God breaks out like a river bursting it's banks. Secondly, God can simply come in power to a whole community in answer to prayer, even just the prayer of a few believers- this is what happened in the Hebridean revival.
- Believe God for a major move and pray for it!

The result of God moving

- v10 'A vast army'. People longing for revival are often frustrated at how pathetic and powerless the Church appears to be, but when revival comes this situation changes amazingly! Evan Roberts saw both of these extremes in his lifetime.
- The people of Israel in Ezekiel's vision went from dead bones to a vast army in a very short period of time. The same can happen to the Church in the UK. Often the UK Church is portrayed as weak and wimpy, but God can suddenly change this picture.
- An army has to have unity to gain victory- they all know their marching orders and are committed to the common cause.
- An army has to possess superior strength to win it's battles. It is through God's breath in us that we become this powerful army- it is the power of God's Spirit which will enable us to see the breakthrough and overcome the enemy.
- Gideon was clothed in this power and able to become the warrior God intended- In Judges 6:34 it literally says 'But the Spirit of the LORD clothed Himself with Gideon and he sounded the trumpet'- God stepped inside Gideon like putting on a pair of shoes! The result was a boldness Gideon formerly did not know.
- Samson was the same- he became a mighty warrior when the Spirit of God came upon him.
- The Greek word Jesus used for 'power' in relation to the Spirit filling us was 'dunamis'. This word is the basis of the English words 'dynamite', 'dynamo' and 'dynamic'.
- 'Stay in the city until you are clothed with **power** from on high'- Lk 24:49
- But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)
- This happened at Pentecost in Acts 2 when they were filled with the Spirit.
- The result was the early Church really did become a mighty army which took the Gospel all around the world and whole regions were impacted by the gospel powerfully.
- The name *The Salvation Army* developed from an incident during 19 and 20 May. William Booth was dictating a letter to his secretary George Scott Railton and said, "We are a volunteer army." Bramwell Booth heard his father and said, "Volunteer! I'm no volunteer, I'm a regular!" Railton was instructed to cross out the word "volunteer" and substitute the word "salvation". The Salvation Army was modelled after the military, with its own flag (or colours) and its own hymns, often with words set to popular and folkloric tunes sung in the pubs. Booth and the other soldiers in "God's Army" would wear the Army's own uniform, for meetings and ministry work. He became the "General" and his other ministers were given appropriate ranks as "officers". Other members became "soldiers". When William Booth became known as the General, Catherine was known as the "Mother of The Salvation Army". William preached to the poor, and Catherine spoke to the wealthy, gaining financial support for their work.... William Booth described the organization's approach:

"The three 'S's' best expressed the way in which the Army administered to the 'down and outs': first, soup; second, soap; and finally, salvation." (source: Wikipedia)

- We might think the Salvation Army are just about doing good works, but their roots were very much in preaching the Gospel and the power of God would be seen in their meetings. A Salvation Army minister told us that in one place there were shelves at the back of the church where they used to stack people who had been overcome by the power of God. It is also reported that sometimes people would be lifted off their feet by the power of the Holy Spirit in meetings.
- William Booth said 'Whatever you do, get the fire!'. Do we know this fire in our lives today? This wind/breath, Spirit of God empowering us to be a mighty Salvation army sent out into this world to turn it upside down for Christ? Let's see God moving in revival power in His End Time Army in our day!

Conclusion

- We, like Israel, desperately need God to move
- God moves in response to our faith
- Faith is not passive- it takes action
- The result of God moving

Song: *O God of Burning Cleansing Flame*