

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“LIVING HOPE”
Ezekiel 37:1-4

“The hand of the LORD... set me in a valley filled with bones.... They were scattered everywhere... and were completely dried out. Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, “We have become old, dry bones – all hope is gone”’” (Ezekiel 37:1-2, 11).

The prophet Ezekiel does not see a valley full of dying people. If he did, there would be strong hope that God might heal them.

He does not see a valley full of recently dead people, still warm to the touch. If he did, there would be some hope that God might resuscitate them.

He does not even see a valley full of intact skeletons. If he did, there would be a flicker of hope that God might bring them back to life.

No. Ezekiel is knee deep in old, dry bones that are scattered helter-skelter, like autumn leaves caught in the wind. It is the picture of absolute hopelessness, utter despair.

“All hope is gone,” lamented Israel. It was ground to dust by the destruction of Jerusalem and (worse) the Holy Temple, the slaughter of tens of thousands of people, and the forced exile of the brightest and best Hebrew people in Babylon.

They had invested their hope in the king, the army, the economy, their property, their cultural heritage, and their religious rituals; but not anymore. None of those things were worthy of hope. None could fulfill their expectations.

Yet Israel was wrong to conclude from this that there was no hope. And so the Lord spoke through his prophet: **“My people, I am going to open you graves and bring you up from them... Then you... will know that I am the LORD... I will put my Spirit in you and you will live”** (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

This has been a difficult season for our church family. We are enduring many trials and tests, from illness to disability to poverty to family collapse to spiritual rebellion by children to the aging of parents to addiction, and even murder. Our government, military, money, property, and traditions are helpless to shield us. Not even our religious rituals can protect us. We might be tempted to give up hope.

That would be wrong. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ can save us!

To be sure, God allows his people to suffer hardship. (Anyone who says that Christian faith guarantees physical health, material wealth and easy circumstances is either deluded or lying!)

What is more, God generally does not undo the temporal consequences of our folly and sin. He most certainly can, and sometimes he does – but not usually.

Even so, God has a proven track record of turning despair into hope. Many of us testify from experience that God is willing and able in every situation to work **“for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”** (Romans 8:28, 29).

There was a season when, though I was barely twenty years old, I felt like **“old, dry bones.”** All I could see stretching into the future was futility and emptiness. Everything (including my faith) had let me down, or so I thought. **“All [my] hope [was] gone.”**

Night after night I climbed up to the roof of my nine-storey building, sat on the edge, and debated whether or not to jump to my death. One night, I came to the end of my rope. I literally cried out, “O God! I am at the end of my rope. Save me, or I am dead!”

God’s Spirit embraced me and spoke into my soul. He told me that he loves me, and that I would not die by my own hand.

My suicidal thoughts instantly vanished. The depression gradually lifted over some months, and I never required medication.

As for the despair – that went away and has never returned, not even in times of great hardship. The Lord has given me the unshakeable conviction that there is hope (true hope, substantial hope, lasting hope) in him: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Do you feel like **“old, dry bones”**? If so, take heart! God might allow you to remain in difficult circumstances;

but if you put your hope in him, God will not leave you buried in despair. Just the opposite, God will **“open [your] grave and bring you up.”** He **“will put his Spirit in you and you will live!”**

When he does, do not keep the good news to yourself: {Mk 5:19} **“Tell [people] how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”**

Glorify God with your testimony, as I have done. Let them know that he is the God of hope!