**Pastor Lloyd’s Sermon Notes for 27 February 2022**

**WHAT DO YOU SEE? – EZEKIEL 37:11-14 – HOPE IN THE WASTELAND**

**In June 1997, Reader's Digest** told a story about a family in which the daughter contracted a form of leukemia that would ultimately kill her unless she received a bone marrow transplant. Because she had an unusual blood type, it was very difficult to find a donor. So, her parents did something that was almost unbelievable. They began praying to have another child with the same rare blood type. The couple conceived again, and they gave birth to a second daughter who had the same rare blood type. 14 months later, the little baby provided enough bone marrow, from her hip, to give a transplant that saved her older sister's life. There is life in the bones!

**Some years ago, my father-in-law Angus I were playing winter tennis**. Opposite me was an older man in his 70s named Ken. One moment he was fine, the next he was still on the ground not moving. Within 30 seconds his lips turned a grey colour and his whole body started going cold…Ken had suffered a major heart attack…we ran over and started CPR. 111 was dialed and we entered what is called ‘the critical minutes’. Only two things mattered - keep the heart pumping by very vigorous CPR and keep clear airway clear. For 12 minutes we worked without a moments break. When the St Johns Ambulance arrived, they put a defibrillator on Ken while I continued CPR and he flatlined for some moments, turn up the shock…and then blip…his heart kicked in…and he started breathing. Ken came as near as you would ever want to go to eternity that day. Some years later I attended Ken’s 80th birthday party and we spoke again of the day he received the breath of life. Today I want to speak about bones and what the Bible calls the ‘breath’ of God.

Ezekiel is not many preachers’ favourite book; it is filled with all kinds of **prophetic pictures** like wheels within wheels. It also contains the **history** of Israel’s stubborn rebellion and her discipline. It tells answers to some great questions like – do children pay for their parent’s sins? The answer is – No. Each generation will sow and reap their own destiny, you will not be blacklisted by God for your parent’s failures. You have enough of your own!!

**But there are also some amazing promises in Ezekiel** – **Chapter 36** After this time of discipline and captivity God would bring them home again.

*“For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, you will no longer worship idols, and I will give you a new heart, and I will put a* ***new spirit*** *in you. I will take out your stony stubborn heart and give you a tender responsive heart”. Ezekiel 36: 24-26. V28 – I will be your God, you will be my people. V29 – I will give you crops and grain, no more famines, land will yield again, instead of a wasteland there will be harvest.*

V33- Your **cities will be repopulated, and your ruins rebuilt**, people will know once again that I am the Lord. Now why I have taken time to explain chapter 36 is because **chapter 37 is a picture of Chapter 36.** What we called the valley of dry bones is in fact an illustration of the previous chapter…it’s almost like God says let me show you a picture of what I am going to do! The picture we have read is quite a bizarre and surreal image…like something out of a horror movie…. a picture of death, decay, lifeless ruin, and hopelessness.

**Ezekiel sees a picture of a bleached wasteland,** but scattered everywhere were bones of all shapes sizes and they are mixed up **and God asks Ezekiel ‘Can these bones live again’? Is there any life left here? Are they too far gone that there is no hope? …**and Ezekiel answers – ***only you know God***. Without God, the situation is hopeless. Right at the start there is something for us, which many of us have thought from time to time when we look at our lives or the Church of God – is there any hope? Can the wreckage and carnage recover? Sometimes we face experiences and events which potentially can destroy us, cripple our faith, sideline us and result in us disintegrating into a wasteland. There have been two times in my life when I have been almost a total wreck, one time in particular when this picture could well describe my life. I know that God can bring new life to dried up shipwrecks, I’ve been there. Just when there was no hope and no future for me, God raised me up…breathed into me. Just when everything looked like it was over… God said it’s not. I’ve been wounded by people and I’ve crashed by own life…. But God rebuilt me, repowered me, and revived me…. this is my story and it can be your story too.

God asks Ezekiel to **prophesy to the bones**, to **speak the Word of the Lord to them**, and he even tells him what to say to them…. say to the bones. Come alive and live!

*“May flesh and muscle come on you, may skin cover you, and may breath come into you” v6*

**And when Ezekiel started speaking to the bones something happened…power was released into the situation. And many of us today need to hear the Lord speak to our bones, to our situation, to our wasteland, to our dryness, to our disintegration…** and say – get connecting, get moving, get shaking, get rattling, get up, get moving!And as he said this there was a rattling sound….and first of all the skeletons were formed…the right bones found the right bones to attach to. Then the flesh and muscles and sinews attached to the bones. And then the skin…and last of all the breath of God from the four winds of the earth. And they came alive, a mighty army, **stood on their feet**. The net result of this story is moving, united bodies, who stand….instead of a disconnected, lifeless corpse – wasting away in the wilderness.

**The three ‘Not So’s!**

**The people were saying *our hope is gone, we are ruined****.* Not so says God.

**They are saying *our parents have sinned*** and we are paying for their sin. Not so says the Lord for I will bring you home again.

**The people were saying our** **future is bleak, our lives are impotent**. Not so says the Lord.

Today I want to suggest to us that like the nation of Israel, their **familiarity** with God caused them to dry up….**caused them to live religion** rather than faith.They took God for granted, slid into religious habits and practice without life. As I prayed about what to say today… this is what I got. **I got the process for recovery and restoration in our lives that God wants to take us.**

**1. Reconstruct** – **God wants to bring the bones together** - shaking and rattling sound. The bones are the **structure** **of your skeleton**. In your body you have 206 of them and over half of them are in our hands and our feet! And we need to have structure in our life. And into our lives God wants to bring shape and structure. He does this when he reconstructs some key structural components into our lives **– they are *our*** ***identity and core beliefs, and values***. Some of you know this, others of you don’t. If you are a new Christian establish structure to your faith. And the right bones need to go in the right places!!! Some of the bones **protect** your heart and vital organs. Your vital organs like your heart are under threat if you don’t understand **whose** **you are and what you believe** **and what you value.** Other bones are for **action** (hands and feet) – for you to move and do stuff. All are important. The most important is to get your vertebrae straight…. who you are and whose you are! It gives shape to everything else.

**2. Repower - God wants to add muscle and sinew or ligaments to us**

*Who you are is more important to get sorted before* ***what you do.***

This is how the bones will move and enables action to take place. This is your ability to ***serve, love and be loved***. The muscles are to be used and exercised, for without use, they shrivel and die. This is you discovering your SHAPE. Your spiritual gifts, your passions, your personality, and then through your life experiences allowing God take you and use you. So, there is something wrong when believers want to just come and take – receive but not give or serve. There is a disfunctionality, because you are more than bones! You are flesh, muscle and sinew…and they need each other, the bones need the muscle to make them go…the muscle needs the bones to give them structure. So, find out your SHAPE and start using your giftedness, passions & personality.

**3. Recover - God wants to put skin on us – now this is where it gets messy.**

The skin is the largest organ in the body, it is alive and you can grow skin, it is replaced regularly on your body. And this is the covering of your body. Skin is what holds us together, the structure and the muscles are contained by the skin…. otherwise, we fall out all over the place. Here is what the skin is– it is the outward container that we show people, **the skin is what we choose to** **disclose of our self to others.** Now I want you to understand why this is important. Levels of intimacy with people determine how much skin you show and when and where. What I show you is one level, what I show my wife is another. And we choose the appropriate disclosure of who and what we are depending on who we are with.

Have you heard the expression….’not comfortable in their own skin’? Or someone is just ‘skin deep’….’got under their skin’? You see skin is your covering, in the right place with the right person we choose to disclose ourselves…. there is another word for skin, it’s called transparency.

God asks us to become appropriately transparent about who we are and what we are facing from the inside out. Some of us are closed books when it comes to sharing our lives with others and God wants to free us to be more transparent. Some of us have been hurt by people before and we go ‘never again’…. That was too painful and close off our lives, to a level of personal protection that God never intended for us. Skin is where we convey emotion, empathy and experience connection with people. By the way, inappropriate connection is not just physical it can also be emotional disclosure. What God asks is that we learn how and where to disclose our lives to each other. That’s why many times in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, it speaks of praying for each other, even confessing your faults to each other, speaking honestly with each other, its skin doing what skin should do…. covering, protecting and holding…connecting in appropriate ways.

**4. Revive You. Now comes the breath. God wants to revive us.**

You know when a baby is born what is the first thing that happens? – It breathes, if it does not breathe is dies….and those moments after birth before the baby breathes are critical, it’s called pinking because if the baby does not breathe it will go blue and die within minutes.

You can have a skeleton – all the structure right but no life.

You can have sinew muscles and flesh – know your gifting, you SHAPE, but no life.

You can even have a skin covering, but no life inside. And when you have that you have religion and not a real living faith…. you’re effectively dead.

Let the weak say, I am strong - and they **stood together** a **mighty army.**

So, there it is, the promise of a rebuilt, repowered, recovered and revived people.

Isn’t this exactly what we need also in our lives today?

A message of hope – but a message that asks us to press into God and ask Him for this.