"Can These Bones Live?" -- Ezekiel 37:1-14

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"O son of Adam, watchman and shepherd of My people, as I have revealed my Word to you, you are to tell those congregating in the holy place what your eyes have beheld and the sounds which your ears have heard. Tell them of both the severity and the kindness of the LORD. Speak to them that they may know that I am the LORD God and there is no other. Take them out into the land of death and show them what they already know with both head and heart. Then remind them of My promise that is not so easily believed with mind and soul -- that I will open the graves of My people and bring them into the Land of Life."

Therefore, listen, dear Israel of God -- you who are gathered here this day. With your mind's eye behold the world before you, this ground upon which you walk, for 'tis, even for the children of God, a land of death. Strew across the vast breadth of distances, from side to side, from horizon in the distance to the dust under your feet, are the bones of the dead. Scattered across the millenia, from century to century, from day to day, behold the bones in the valley of the shadow of death. Bleached from the sun's rays and attacked by the teeth of time, the bones of the people of God were very dry and the valley was filled as in an open mass grave.

And the people on the face of the earth weep, for death causes such a reaction for the non-Christian as well as the child of God. It is not pleasant for any of the sons of Adam to think on death and behold the bone-filled valleys of this world. And the Christian in this world weeps for he meditates on God's original creation and man's fall, *for the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the Breath of Life, and man became a living being (Genesis 2).*

The pulse rate jumps and the heart becomes scared for *through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men (Romans 5).* Terror mingles with tears at the impending impact of the Word of the Lord and the reality of it is faced by each one of us as He confronts with His Law, *till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3).*

And the Lord weeps at the futility of death, doing so as He stands at the graveside of His friend Lazaras. Death was not His intention when the Word spoke causing the heavens and the earth to come into being; when *His hands formed the dry land (Psalm 95)*. The awful, horrible, frightening valley filled with dry bones was not God's purpose when He created man and when *male and female He created them (Genesis 1). All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men (John 1).*

One day, as we quietly and soberly stand viewing the dry bones scattered on the floor of the heat-baked, open valley below, a question is asked by the Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, *"Son of Adam, can these bones live?"* Can they live!? These bones? Oh, but they are so scattered about, they are so dry, and they have been dead so long. But that doesn't really matter either, because even for those whose hearts have only recently stopped beating and whose breath has left them but an hour ago, we are able to do nothing to bring them back to life. We can but cover

them with a sheet, or put them in a body bag. Then, in the graveyards of this world, we scatter them upon the floor of this earth and You, dear God, ask us, "*Can these bones live?"*

Certainly, husband and wife participate in the creative act of bringing life into being, but there is no way for us to answer the Divine inquiry of bringing life from death. Good grief, such a thing would require an absolute miracle! Therefore, to Your question, *Can these bones live?*, we can but reply, *"O Lord God, You know."*

"O son of Adam, watchman and shepherd of My people Israel, *Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones; "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord."'"*

Dear Israel of God, did you hear that? What an absolutely amazing and unexpected truth! Oh, the amazing part is not that God is able to raise the dead, for He is God! He does that kind of thing, you know. Indeed, what is unexpected and surprising is that He gives such authority to a descendant of the first Adam to do this thing on His behalf. The means of God's grace is the Word of God. The means to the means of His grace is a son of the ground!

The means of God's grace is water and the Word -- water pooled in the calloused palm of a mortal hand and poured over the head of a newborn child of God -- the impeccable Word of the Lord God spoken by a peccable man. The means of God's grace is absolution of the Gospel -- the soul-cleansing promise of God in Christ Who suffered in our stead and *Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4)* -- the standing Word given to and announced by fallen men in a decaying world. The means of God's grace is the bread and wine with the Word become flesh and dwelling among us -- administered by men whose bones will soon be added to those in the valley.

The Lord God, by means of His Life-giving and Life-sustaining Word of the Good News of Christ crucified and risen, *raises the poor out of the dust and lifts the needy out of the ash heep (Psalm 113).* Indeed, He truly *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2).*

However, when God works with such means of grace and through such means to the means, He can be rejected. So the Lord weeps over the futility of death and the rejection of Life. He drew near the city of peace. When He did, *He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes (Luke 19).* Thus, we learn from the Word that not all who are members of the physical Israel are of the true Israel of God *nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham ... that is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise (Romans 9).*

So the son of Adam, watchman and shepherd of the people of God, prophesied as he was commanded; and as he did so, *there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as* he *looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.* The first step was done, just as the time when God formed the first man from the dust of the earth. There are two parts to us - body and soul. Both

need the Life of God, both have been redeemed by the Blood of Christ, and both have received the Holy Spirit.

The Lord God said, *"Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."'"* So he prophesied as commanded, *and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.* There are two parts to us - body and soul. Both are gifts from God and both have been given Life and Breath in Jesus our Savior -- Life and Breath that defeats sin, death, and Satan.

So, we must drawn strength and comfort when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must reply and confess,

> "'But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.' This is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body has water poured over it, though it cannot receive anything but the water, and meanwhile the Word is spoken so that the soul may grasp it. Since the water and the Word together constitute one Baptism, body and soul shall be saved and live forever: the soul through the Word in which it believes, the body because it is united with the soul and apprehends Baptism in the only way it can" *(Large Catechism).*

Then He said to the watchman,

> *"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.' "*

This speaks of the Resurrection on the Last Day of which we believe and teach in the meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed and which doctrine the Israel of God confesses ...

> ... "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with the one true faith; in which He daily and richly forgives all the sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

Indeed, the *hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice (John 5)* and every man, woman, youth, child, and infant who has ever lived and died on this earth in the history of the world will be raised up on the Last Day. These same bodies will be raised and reunited with the souls that have either been with Christ in Paradise or in the place of the dead. Those who belong to

Christ will be raised to the Resurrection of Life. All others will be raised to the *Resurrection of condemnation (John 5).*

More than 500 years before the Bethlehem Birth of our Redeemer, the promise of the Resurrection of Life was given once again to the prophet Ezekiel and the children of God. The promise of the Lord is as sure and certain as His Word. During the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, it was this doctrine of the Resurrection that sustained the hope of the people of God.

Still the Lord did not leave His people without witness. He preserved the nation from whom the Messiah would come. He brought them back to the land of Judea, an action which says, "Just as I was able to return you to Jerusalem, so I am able, and indeed will, raise My people. *Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live.*"

Each spring time, with its new life summoned from the dead of winter, the people are reminded of the Resurrection on the Last Day. Each morning, when the Lord awakens you and brings you safely to another day in His creation, He is reminding you of that Day He will call you forth from your grave. His speaking of the Word of Life to Jairus' daughter, the widow's son, and Lazaras, reminds us of the ability and authority that Jesus is able to raise up His people on the Last Day, calling them forth from their tombs. The question is asked, *Can these bones live?* and on Easter morning the Lord of lords and King of kings answers it and the angel announces it, *He is risen as He said (Matthew 28).*

The Lord led Jacob's descendents back to the land of Judea, and just prior to a certain Pentecost during *the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee ...* and in the times of *the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3)*, the Risen Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem. The Body of Christ did so, waiting until the giving of the Holy Spirit in a special way. The disciples waited and suddenly *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues* (languages), *as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2).* The message of Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ was taken to all nations *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1)* and has arrived here this day.

Thus the Word of the Lord went forth and accomplished, accomplishes, and will accomplish its purpose. The promise of that Day remains and God declares through His witness: *I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.* The land is not the geographic area that we may visit today and which will be part of the first heaven and the first earth which passes away on some tomorrow. Rather, it is the new heaven and the new earth in which the true Israel of God will dwell, and thus, *all Israel will be saved (Romans 11).*

The Apostle John *heard a loud voice from heaven saying,*

> *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21).*

Can these bones live? Dear children of God, hear what He declares and promises ...

> *... "You shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.* Amen.