

## *Scripture Fulfilled in your Hearing*

Sunday, 24 March 2019

Dale Green, guest preacher

The Valley of Dry Bones—what a picture, dry bones, the breath of God, a vast army! Keep that picture in mind.

Back in Groton, CT at my home church, St. Andrew Presbyterian, I sing in the choir each week. So, as I look across the congregation there, from the choir's perspective, my eyes pass over my entire church family. And that view includes, like it does here, the "core" of the church; many people who are said to have been "grafted into the olive tree". These are believers who have... "chosen, have taken a risk, have said yes in a world of nos. They have..."leaned forward, heard the whisper, and trusted it to be the voice of God."<sup>1</sup> And they come to church most every Sunday.

This core... warming the Sunday pews, are the "heart and soul" of any church community. They are, you might say, the major-muscle-movers in God's house. They are the committee meeting attenders, the Sunday schoolers, the huggers, the hand shakers, and the after church, fellowship-hall, coffee drinkers. When the church has a special congregational meeting, they are there. If you measure their potential energy for God's service, they are off the charts. They are the core, the strength!

My career has taken me to many places in the world and I have attended and been a member of many churches. Statistics will tell you that I am one of over 173 million Americans who call themselves Christian.<sup>2</sup> As one in both that big statistic and one of the smaller "core" of my church statistic, I can tell you that personally, in every church setting, unless there is something moving me onward, unless I'm doing something for God's kingdom, I quickly find myself back in that valley we just read about. Just a sack of dry bones.

And I guess when you look across any congregation, there will be Christian believers who really never grow beyond the Sunday service. They are the idling masses, the frozen chosen you might say, people who have found God but are seemingly waiting to figure out what to do with Him, what to do with the Spirit in their lives, and how to answer the Jesus of Revelation 3:20 who continues, even now in this moment to say "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock...**"<sup>3</sup> They are dry bones, waiting on the breath of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Craddock. Preaching. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985). 158.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center Fact Tank (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Rev 3:20 KJV

But, back in my world, sometimes it's not just me that gets dry, sometimes it's the church itself that can make me dry. Here are a couple of personal church examples from my past that have left me dry:

In my "Salvation Sanctification" church the primary objective was to bring me to the altar. Important, yes, but once saved, I was placed in the proverbial "done pile", left to figure out my Christian walk on my own.

In my "Socially Vibrant" church we had great music and great potlucks but Scripture was **never** preached and salvation **never** sought on fear that the congregation would feel challenged, walk out the door, and miss even that *meager spiritual food* that was offered. The centrality of the truth of this book to our lives was not the truth of the church.

In my "Once a Sinner, Always a Sinner" church we approached the throne of grace every Sunday, recognizing the messed up lives we led and departed with the knowledge that from the moment we left the sanctuary, until next Sunday, it was all downhill.

All dry bones.

If you spend time listening to media sermons or attending special spiritual events, it seems as if churches and pastors are all talking about seeking a Revelation, a Revolution, or a new Revival. We are seeking what Malcolm Gladwell calls a Tipping Point<sup>4</sup> where God's word spreads like a virus.

But my experience tells me that God's kingdom on earth rarely works like that. God uses individual people to spread His good news. He uses the church family, and the fellowship of being "the church" together to be the example of heaven on earth.

Some of my past churches had clear issues with the "message" they spoke, and with the image of Christ on Earth they portrayed. But even in a great church there can be a big gulf that separates the words the pastor speaks and the lives we live when we exit the sanctuary.

There can be a wide canyon between the "great commission" **to go forth and make disciples of all nations**<sup>5</sup> and how we live every day in the workplace.

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<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Gladwell. *The Tipping Point*. (New York: Little Brown, 2002). Describes a point when conditions are such that something suddenly takes off in popularity or becomes successful, often for reasons difficult to explain.

<sup>5</sup> Mat 28: 19-20 NIV

There can be a deep ravine between the "great commandment" to **love the Lord and love your neighbor**<sup>6</sup> and how we treat the attendant with an attitude at the DMV.

There can be a huge gulf between what Jesus demands of us, to... "**seek ye first the kingdom of God**"<sup>7</sup> and how we respond by instead adding Him to our day as an afterthought.... like a little more salt on the meal of life.

So how do we close that gulf between Godly expectation and actual reality in Christian lives. How do we resurrect our dry bones?

Maybe there's an example we could use, maybe there's a person in history to point the way... do you think?

Many Jews believe that when the Messiah comes to Earth, the dead will rise from their graves and *walk to the holy Temple Mount* in Jerusalem's Old City and from there be taken into eternity.

In fact, the most sought-after Jewish burial site is the Mount of Olives cemetery, only a few hundred yards from the entrance to the city. The urgency to be ready for the Messiah is profound. It is said that "Everyone in that cemetery is buried with their feet facing the Temple Mount so they come straight up and march to Jerusalem and don't even have to turn around."<sup>8</sup>

From our understanding, these are Dry bones, waiting, and still waiting, for God's breath, because actually, the Messiah... has already come.

In our New Testament reading today from Luke 14, Jesus proclaims His role in history by staking a personal claim on what was written in Isaiah 61 nearly 800 years earlier.

*Luke 4:14-21*

*4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.*

*He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.*

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

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<sup>6</sup> Mat 22: 37-39 NIV

<sup>7</sup> Mat 6:33 KJV

<sup>8</sup> Rick Westhead, *The Star, Jerusalem's Mount of Olives Cemetery Running Out of Room*, Dec. 16, 2012. Accessed 1/22/19.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.*

*Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled - in - your - hearing."*

That was some 2000 years ago! The world's Messiah has already come. God's spirit has already been *breathed* into those who accept Him.

I think you will agree that when the circumstances of our lives change, we change our lives to fit those circumstances. A couple personal examples:

- When I fell down the stairs in High School and broke my leg, pretty much everything in my day was different, I had to change.
- When son #1 was born to our family, our lives changed completely... we adjusted, we had to change.
- When Jesus called me to ministry, everything about our future was altered and nothing has followed what I thought the plan was. I am still changing.

I can tell you that knowing Jesus will change the circumstances of your life and *by knowing Jesus*, you will change your life.

So, maybe you are sitting there thinking that God was really something in your life before, but now, not so much.

Or maybe you are thinking that dry bones is an apt description of your spiritual life – you are waiting for God to act and make something happen.

Or maybe you are thinking that none of this makes much sense.

I'm here to tell you that Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Today, just like every day since Jesus spoke those words.

I'm here to tell you that when God comes into your heart, *your circumstances change* – and you change your life.

I'm here to tell you that the breath of God that makes dry bones live is *yours for the asking*.

Jesus said: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. Mat 7:24

He said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. John 14:15

And Jesus said: “You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and **first commandment**. And a second is like it: You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself. Mat 22:37-40

And our Lord said: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12

The body of Christ, those words of Jesus, are alive in the world through the power of the people in this church.

God's church is made powerful in saving a single soul but also in strengthening the core of the congregation through study of His word. There is Disciple Bible Study Tuesday morning and Wednesday evening each week and Church School for preschoolers-8<sup>th</sup> grade on Sunday mornings.

God's church is made powerful through prayer and through our service and fellowship together. The Scribe newsletter is full of ways this church is working together. There's a crowd of folks in North Carolina doing God's work in Hurricane recovery right now, the Sew Good Souls sewing and Quilting ministry brings people together to spread love across the globe and Michael Walton, the youth ministry leader is back in Ghana right now, challenging youth with his Speak out to Reach out campaign. He's planning to empower 35 schools in less than 2 weeks. Bless him.

And God's church is made powerful by our pastors challenging us each week to live better, more Christ-centered lives and by your answer back, by doing just that.

Jesus fulfills scripture in our hearing and he has changed the circumstances of our lives.

It is up to us to change our lives to meet those circumstances.

He has made it possible for our dry bones to come alive in Him, making us, like the bones of Israel in the valley, a vast army, awakened.

Thanks be to God.

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