Ezekiel 37:13-14 Then you will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and when I raise you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will come back to life.

These really are extraordinary times aren’t they? I am going to venture that none of us alive today has ever seen or been a part of such a worldwide type of quarantine as we find before us today. Of course, with modern day travel, the fact of the matter is that viruses and disease are more easily spread. And when you end up with one that has shown itself so contagious and deadly as this one, well, then in truth, extraordinary measure were called for. And frankly, I don’t care what your political opinion or your conspiracy theory is, (none of that matters) what I care about is that lives are being saved. It is true, we may be suffering hardships, but nonetheless, lives are being saved. For that I am thankful.

One of the other aspects of this pandemic is that it has indeed given us great pause for thought. I don’t know if everyone is doing that, but we have a unique opportunity to examine our lives and the things of our lives. Being holed up I hope has given you a new perspective, a time to measure what our lives really are. Thoughts like:

Exactly what is essential and what isn’t when it comes down to life? Has this difficulty helped you to realize that in our country we are surrounded by “luxuries,” items we have in our lives that are not essential for life and living, but that we surround ourselves with because they somehow satisfy our sense of “something.” Things like sports, TV, casinos, tattoos, fast foods, jewelry, cosmetics, power shades in our homes, remote car starters….this list could go on and on.

You may have discovered with your kids home all this while that you don’t like the direction your children are headed. You find their wise cracks and disrespect very much a challenge and you wonder just how they got that way. You have now discovered that we haven’t been paying them enough attention and we haven’t been the ones “in charge” of what they are becoming. What a wakeup call.

Perhaps you are also learning just how dependent we really are on each other. We don’t like that we cannot socialize and be out there. But contemplate these things. Is staying at home a strain? That’s because??? Have you found that your friends or maybe even your work is more important than family? Did you know that before? And if all of this is true, what does that say of what you have been in your household? Have you discovered just how helpless you are over so much, like your food supply and even your toilet paper supply? We just aren’t that self-sufficient anymore are we? We are really very dependent on each other.

Those are just some things I have observed and thought about as this time of seclusion has transpired. I also thought that this is a great time, an excellent time for you to be able to truly take the measure of your spiritual life. Do you feel compelled to worship, to give thanks and praise to God for his love and goodness in Christ or do you find you easily and readily dismiss “Church” and what it is and means? And don’t give me that “I prayed a lot.” I am glad, but prayer is not a means of grace that keeps our faith strong and sure. Prayer is our speaking to God our concerns and thanks, which is good, but the real source of faith is you and I listening to God! Spending time in His Word, hearing His wisdom based on his Word, and making sure to keep the wonder of Jesus before us. Worship and Church is the way God gave us be fed with His wisdom and mercy. Are you feeding upon God’s Word regularly during this time of trial or have you easily forgotten the Lord? Good things to think about and contemplate, hard, but good!

That then brings us to our text for today. It has always been such a fascinating text and the lessons that it provides are so important for us to grasp. Our text is that vision of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones and what happened there. Our theme will be: **LESSONS FROM THE LORD ON LIFE!**

The first thing you should know is that this text is during that period of Judah’s history where Judah has been taken captive by the Babylonians. What I am sure weighed upon the minds of the Jewish people was the fact that when the Assyrian’s took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive and carried them off, well, that was the end of them! As a people and nation they disappeared. So here are the Judahites in a similar situation and you can well imagine their fear and trepidations. For that matter, God himself shares with us their thoughts. Verse 11 records that. **“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying, ‘Our bones are dried up. Our hope is lost. We have been completely cut off.’”**

Understand what is said here. First of all, remember that the term Israel was not just that Northern Kingdom, but often, as here, when the term is used it is speaking of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints, those who were to be the saved and believers in the Lord. Then grasp that the bones, very dry bones, is a symbol of complete death, in this case, the people were afraid they were dead as a nation and in truth, they were afraid they were spiritually lost to the promises of God. In way the people were right. For the past 100 years, ever since the Northern Kingdom got carried away God has been warning them and calling for their repentance because THEY had abandoned God, turned their back on his truth and stopped hearing the Word of his truth. Yep, they were dry bones, very dry bones, spiritually dead people before the Lord their God.

That’s why this vision is given! It was a visual record of the facts of the spiritual condition of the Jewish people. They had the wonder and truth of God and despised it! They were a people who thought they could set the rules, give the directions, tell God how it would be spiritually and they were wrong. After 100 years of warning, the Babylonians came and carried them away to exile.

The wonder of this is that God told them it was going to happen and God told them He would bring them back. He would restore them as his people Israel! They just didn’t hear and believe the promises of God. So here is God, with patience and compassion giving them a lesson on just what is. The vision of the valley of dry bones was God’s message that spiritually they had no life in them! That’s what abandoning the faith is! It is the lack of life, true life, spiritual life in God! And the whole point of Ezekiel’s having to wander around in that valley was to also get across to these people that not only did they have no life, there was absolutely no chance at all that these bones, the dry bones could do anything about the lack of life. Dead, dead to God in sin and unbelief was indeed the problem!

But God has brought his messenger, Ezekiel the prophet into this valley. God asks the prophet to preach. Note that God does not preach himself, he asks the messenger to do this. The prophet speaks God’s word. The prophet acts as God’s tongue and by the very power of God this preaching has an impact. The bones come together. Then tendons and flesh and skin appear. Then at further preaching, through the command and power of God, breath enters the once dry bones and all those dead are now alive. Alive and awesome. An army alive for God!

Quick lessons here. This prophet and the preaching he does is the picture of the Church and how God has determined to work among us even today. But the preacher must preach God’s truth, God’s Word as God gives it, not as the man wants to see it! God still works through his church and through His word to bring life, true life, spiritual life to His people! Second, note that the bones become an army. Armies act and do what the commander says. Armies follow their king. They don’t argue about the commands or question the authority of the King, they hear and do! That is still a picture of the Church today. Our job is to hear and do. Jesus is our King. We have His Word before us, if you would his marching orders for our lives. Are you are part of this army, spiritually alive to the Lord or are you still in a valley filled with dry bones? Are you a soldier who hears and follows or do you argue with and disobey the King? Then you are soon to be a part of another valley of dry bones. Simple lessons but important.

By the way, is it possible that as God used heathen Babylon to do his bidding and bring what He knew was best upon the children of Israel for their spiritual salvation, that he could do the same here with this virus? Is God sending a message? I don’t know the answer, but I sure think the question is worth asking. Have we become a kind of valley of dry bones, taking God and his marvel for granted and has God just given us a wakeup call? Is it time again to get back to the Word of God and the wonder of his message of love and care for our lives? Again, just asking.

Now I want you to know that this vision, this prophecy of Ezekiel is what is called an intermediate prophecy. In other words, it would be partially fulfilled at one point and then it would become completely fulfilled at another time, usually the complete fulfillment of such prophecies is found in Christ Jesus and his work on our behalf. The partial fulfillment is going to be that in 80 years, God does allow the Jews back to the Holy Land. He does allow them to reestablish their nation and their worship life. God still allows these people to be the carriers of his gracious promises that through them the Savior of the world would come! They will be restored!

Again, simple lesson. The life given in the valley, the restoration coming to the exiles was of and from God. It is God who caused it. It is God’s power that brought it about and worked this miracle of life on the bones. That is a spiritual picture we so desperately need to hear. Salvation is not about us. It is about what God has done and will do. It is about the power and wonder of God. That army of God is not in that valley because the bones decided to accept God. That army is not standing because the dry bones were obedient to God and then God blessed them. They came alive because of God! They came alive because God called them, God granted the power, God granted and provided the moving, the tendons, flesh and skin. God gave the breath of life! Why do we so often want to keep taking God’s credit when it comes to His salvation? Yes, you are his army. Yes, obey Him. But stop taking credit for his grace, mercy, love and power in our lives! Fall to your knees, dear soldier of Christ and thank God that He has called you to be His in Christ our Savior!

And now I will tell you why I highlighted the verses I did. Do you remember them? Listen again, only this time listen with the knowledge that this is intermediate prophecy, the complete fulfillment is found in Christ our Lord and Savior. **“Then you will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and when I raise you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my Spirit in you, and you will come back to life.”**

You can’t hear those words now without grasping the wonder of what would be in Jesus. Think now of the importance of what happened when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, the widow of Nain’s son and then, as we heard in our Gospel lesson, Lazarus! Even more important think of the resurrection of Jesus himself and that we are told that many people were raised when Jesus was. Don’t you see the fulfillment of these words? And with that marvel of resurrection then came the wonder of Pentecost. Here was God’s Holy Spirit poured out on people and from that point forward God’s Holy Spirit, testifying to the resurrection of Jesus is still bringing life, true life, eternal and spiritual life to the souls of the world.

No wonder the world works so hard to deny and ignore the resurrection of Jesus. Seriously, there are so many churches today that just don’t preach the actual physical resurrection of Jesus. Go ask your Pastor. Ask: “Do you believe in the actual and physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead?” I am telling you, should you hear anything less than the absolute “Yes, with all my heart!” run, run and find a church that does preach this factual and wonderful truth of God. It is the heart and core of the Church. Because if Jesus is not raised, then there is no resurrection and there is no life and there is no hope and in truth we are still and will be nothing more than a valley of bones, very, very dry bones!

But Christ Jesus has been raised! We have the gift of eternal life and salvation in and through Jesus. He suffered eternal death and damnation for us. He endured the cross and its agony to atone for us. And then Jesus, by the very power of God was raised to life. Jesus lives and rules forever. Jesus grants eternal life and salvation because He has provided our redemption, paid the debt of sin we each owed (gazillions of debt) and grants us life in His name. How did our Epistle reading put it? Ro 8:11 **“And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit, who is dwelling in you.”** In Jesus we have life, true life, eternal life and with that the wonder and awe of being children of God! With that knowledge what is there to fear, no matter what is going on.

Honestly, there is so much more I want to tell you. But we will let this be our encouragement for now. Though we are by nature the dry bones of that valley, God has called us to life in Jesus. His Spirit has given us life, yes, we who were dead in trespass and sin are now alive to God! He calls us His own and casts His love upon us.

Dear children, alive with Jesus. Hear his Word, especially that preached word of God’s servants. Let that Word dwell in you richly. It will and does bring life in Jesus. That is the marvel of God in Jesus. And with such a caring, gracious and powerful God on our side, the God who gives true life, there is nothing to fear. Again our Epistle reading put it this way, **“For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed in us.”** There is a Godly perspective! Lord, thank you for life in Jesus! For this life is my comfort, my hope and my sure salvation in Jesus. Amen.