

Pentecost

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Ezekiel 37:1-14

The Holy Spirit Conscripts a Vast Army

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Fellow-Redeemed,

In a room beneath the football stadium at the University of Tennessee, there are boxes and boxes of dry bones. Complete skeletons of all sizes and parts of skeletons are there. The bones belong to the Forensic Pathology Dept. Here is the question? Can these bones live?

That was the very question the Holy Spirit asked the prophet Ezekiel during Israel's captivity in Babylon. The Spirit showed the prophet a valley floor full of very dry bones. There was only one thing that could bring those bones back to life- the Word of the LORD. The Spirit told Ezekiel to speak that Word of the LORD to those dry bones and the prophet obeyed.

What was the result? **The Holy Spirit Conscripts A Vast Army.** He would conscript an army from spiritual corpses. He would conscript an army by the power of God's Word.

Ezekiel's vision was not a vision of the physical resurrection of all the dead on Judgment Day. Revelation calls that event "the second resurrection." Ezekiel's vision was about conversion. This is the spiritual resurrection from the death of unbelief to the life of faith. Revelation calls this "the first resurrection." The first resurrection takes place at the baptismal font, or through hearing the Word of Christ.

God's Old Testament church had become a corpse. Six centuries before Jesus' birth, the Holy Spirit breathed new life into hearts. By doing so, the Spirit conscripted a vast army of believers who would return home after their captivity. The Holy Spirit did the same thing on the Old Testament Festival of Pentecost 50 days after Jesus' resurrection to continue this creation of saints from the Jews, then later among the Gentiles. The Spirit continues his conscription today as the Word of the Lord calls sinners to repentance and faith.

The prophet gave the right answer when the Spirit asked him, "Can these bones live?" He said, "O sovereign LORD, you alone know." When we take the Word of the Lord out only the Lord knows if that person will believe it or not. What we know is the only way they can live is by the power of the Word.

The new life that fills the dead hearts of spiritual corpses is Christ's life. Paul reminds us that as we were baptized into Christ's death we also are raised up in his new life. It is not our physical resurrection although that is real also. It is our resurrection from spiritual death, i.e. unbelief.

As a nation, Judah was dead. They would again manifest God's glory by their faith. The restored faithful would return to Jerusalem. The Spirit told Ezekiel to prophesy for the LORD, "I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel."

Because of my sinful nature, I am lifeless, listless and hopeless. We are by nature like those dry bones littering the valley floor. We have no natural desire to live in Christ. We have no natural ability to do so. What has the Holy Spirit done for us? With the good news of full forgiveness in Christ Jesus give us life. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 2, "Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions...It is by grace you have been saved."

Pentecost Sunday reminds us of the way the Holy Spirit conscripted a vast army among Israel. Peter and the other disciples conscripted a vast army for the quick and vast increase in the church's size. Like Ezekiel Peter conscripts this army by the power of God's Word.

Pentecost is not so much about the miracle of speaking in known languages to the large crowds in Jerusalem as it is about the message. The disciples conveyed "the wonders of God" especially the death and resurrection of the Savior of the world.

Through Peter and the other disciples the Holy Spirit applied the hammer of the law to crush self-righteous hearts, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Take those words to your hearts. Our sin and guilt crucified Christ. Cry out with Peter's hearers, cut to the heart by the law, "What shall we do?" Peter applied the sweet and healing gospel that purifies hearts as David wrote in Psalm 51, "Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow." Peter invited them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins."

The Holy Spirit brought into the church about 3,000 souls that day. Like Ezekiel before him and God's faithful spokesmen since him Peter prophesied, "Hear the Word of the Lord, 'I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.'" The Holy Spirit continues and will continue to conscript a vast army of believers as we faithfully proclaim law and gospel.

As we tie together Ascension and Pentecost which are 10 days apart the Spirit strengthens our hearts and our resolve even in the midst of the spiritual battles in these last days. Our Ascended Lord lives and reigns and has all his enemies under his feet. He continues to send the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and sacrament to "Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

There is no human word that can bring to life those boxes of dry bones down in Knoxville. Someday God will restore them at the resurrection of the dead. In the meantime a greater resurrection and restoration daily takes place. By the Word of the Lord, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church. To those who are cut to the heart by their sins God's Word is life giving, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." Amen. <SDG>