

CHAPTER V

Come O Breath!

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones . . . and he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again He said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, Oh ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." (Ezekiel 37: 1, 3, 4.)

The Lord set Ezekiel down in the midst of the valley of dry bones. Many Christian workers believe that the Lord has also done this same thing for them! He has given them a dry-bone ministry in the valley of death. They have been called to be the Lord's messengers to dry bones. How many dear pastors are preaching to congregations Sunday after Sunday with no apparent sign of life, whether among the professing Christians or sinners under the wrath of God.

When challenged by Jehovah to believe that this great valley of dry bones could come to life, the prophet of God answered, "Oh, Lord God, Thou knowest". I do not know exactly what Ezekiel meant by this reply, but I can only give you my experience. How many times we have preached our hearts out, fasted and prayed, without any sign of spiritual movement whatsoever in our congregation or in our MISSION FIELD OF DRY BONES. Heartbroken and discouraged, we have fallen to our knees, and with tears streaming down our faces, we have cried, "Oh God, Thou knowest we have preached our heart out. Oh God, Thou knowest we have travailed in spritual childbirth. Oh God, Thou knowest that we have sounded the

alarm faithfully, Yet, we see no sign of life. Oh Lord, Thou knowest we can do no more.”

Possibly the prophet referred the question back to God for an answer. ”Oh Lord God, Thou alone knowest. If these are ever made to live, Thou wilt have to tell us how.” In this chapter God proceeds to give the answer as to how dry bones in all places may be made to live.

In the first place, one commissioned to raise dry bones must have a special preparation. This preparation is two-fold: he must see a vision of God and must feel the touch of God upon his life. In the first chapter we are told that Ezekiel saw visions of God. (1: 1). In the vision under consideration, Ezekiel feels the touch of God: ”The hand of the Lord being upon me” (Rotherham). The hand of the Lord symbolizes His power, and to be under His hand is to be endued with His power. *The Spirit of God is in every Christian for life, but every Christian is not under God’s hand for power.* The prophet responds to the touch of God and follows where He leads: ”The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones”. He was willing to be led by the Lord’s hand, even into a valley of dry bones. The temptation for every Christian worker is to seek a fruitful vineyard and shun a valley of death. How blessed it is to labor under the Spirit’s control.

The Prophet also responds when God’s hand sets him down in the midst of the bones. He was made to feel the mighty impact of death. ”And he caused me to pass near them round about on every side” (Rotherham). Ezekiel was not allowed to look at them from a distance. Dwelling with bones is more trying than just going to them on a visit. To have bones for neighbors and companions may not be very pleasant. We love rather to live with a company of living people. But unless we are ready to respond to the hand of God which would lead

us to the bones and make us dwell among them, we are not prepared for the work of raising them to life. The work cannot be done from a distance. The Holy Ghost would never have used General and Mrs. William Booth, the early Salvationists, had they not been willing to settle down in the midst of those whom they were called to help.

The Lord said to Ezekiel, "Go round about these bones and take in the scene". By taking in the scene he received a mighty burden for his congregation. My brother and my sister, until you feel the burden upon your heart concerning the spiritual desolation of the people whom you serve, you are not ready for the resurrection ministry.

Again, you can never be a trumpeter of the Gospel of the resurrection until your eyes are opened to see and confess that you are a minister of the Word in the valley of death. How many pastors, because of spiritual pride and for the sake of reputation, completely ignore the true spiritual condition of their own church. If they were honest with God and with themselves, they would have to confess with the prophet that they also have a dry-bone congregation. Then the Lord would give them a burden which would break their hearts and cause them to fast and pray and cry unto God.

Three things severely tested the prophet's faith: the bones were very many; the bones were very dry, and the prophet was told to do a very impractical thing; he was told to preach to the dry bones.

The bones were very many: the valley was white with them. To reach them all by personal effort was impossible. And yet, the multitude of bones did not cause the faith of the prophet to fail. And we, as we survey the world situation today with millions yet unreached, are tempted to be appalled, but the eye of faith may see God still equal to the situation. No difficulty can surpass His resources.

The bones were vere dry. There was no sign of life. Their

dryness was positive proof of death. If Ezekiel had kept looking at the very great number of very dry bones, he might have said, "There is no use trying to raise them to life." But instead, he was like Abraham "who staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." (Romans 4: 20—21). While we must be willing to face the fact of the dryness of the bones, we must not look to them for encouragement to our faith. Our eyes must be always upon the God of the miraculous.

The prophet was told to do a very impractical thing; he was told to preach to the dry bones! If Ezekiel had not had faith, he certainly would not have preached to dry bones; they made a wretched congregation. If preaching is not a supernatural exercise, it is a useless procedure. Our prophesying must be an act of faith. Preaching has always been the great agency of God for the ingathering of souls. It is by the "foolishness of preaching" that men are to be saved. (1 Cor. 1: 18). Every Gospel preacher must be willing to appear a fool in the eyes of worldly men.

The prophet was not told to tickle the bones. Oh how many today are trying this experiment. Tickling bones to make them laugh on their way to hell is a tragedy. When the Forerunner, John, was baffled and perplexed, he sent his disciples to ask the Saviour, "Art Thou He that should come?" You remember the Redeemer's reply: "Go and show John again those things which ye do see and hear: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." (Matt. 11: 3—5). There is no suggestion in this list which says "And the careless are amused, and the perishing are provided with innocent recreation."

There was no change of method adopted by the Lord during His course of ministry; no learning by experience of a better

plan. As we study the four Gospels carefully, we find no suggestion that at any time during His ministry He turned aside from His preaching to entertain in order to attract the people. He was in awful earnestness, and His ministry was like Himself. In vain will the Epistles of the New Testament be searched to find any trace of "tickling dry bones".

Ezekiel spoke directly to the dry bones. He prophesied as he was commanded. (v. 6). He called them by their right names: "O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord". Our ministry is not to flatter, but to thunder forth the message of God.

He preached about the great essentials. If you read his sermon, you will see he talked about life. Ezekiel did not waste his time talking about a number of things that could not possibly concern dry bones. He saw death; he preached life. He saw ruin; he preached remedy. Ye Ezekiels in the valley of death, when you preach, cleave to the grand essentials of the Gospel message!

He preached the truth. He preached well. What was the result? Exactly the same as will be the result of all our work unless the Spirit of God applies the Word. There was a noise, then there was a shaking, then there was a coming together, followed by an improvement in appearance. First, "there was a noise." Many valleys of dry bones could do with some noise. Noise is to be preferred to the stillness of death. However, noise is not always the evidence that God is working. There may be noise and no power.

The Lord was not in the earthquake that rent the rocks.

Along with the noise, there was a coming together. The bones all came bone to bone. He would be an unusual servant who did not feel a sense of excitement in seeing a vast multitude gathered around him to hear the Word. We thank God for these crowds who come together, because often-times this is the first step toward their salvation. But let us remember, large congregations do not necessarily prove the presence of

God. We may have crowds of people coming together and yet have no permanent spiritual results.

Also, there was an improvement in the outward appearance of the valley. After Ezekiel's sermon, the valley did not look as desolate as it did before. Instead of dislocated bones, there were, first skeletons, and then, we read, "and on the bones there came flesh, and over the flesh there came skin." Do you see what Ezekiel's sermon had done? It had made them look a great deal more respectable. Yes, preaching can do all that, apart from the power of the Holy Ghost. There may be a very great deal of moral improvement, and yet there is need to add the sentence, "But, there was no breath in them". They were better looking, but they were just as dead. Their nakedness had been covered, but they were still corpses. *They were just as when their scattered bones lay bleaching in the sun.* The preacher creates a stir, and makes a noise and brings the bones together, but all the eloquence of Ezekiel never could have put any life in them.

Notice the preacher's last resort. It must have been a grand and glorious sight. He had been preaching, and thus far he had been gazing at the bones. He had seen a marvelous change. Now do you see the man of God? He does not look at his "valley" any longer. He has nothing more to do with it. He has finished his preaching. He turns to praying. I see him lift up his eyes to heaven, surrounded as he was with corpses, and he cries "Come, O Breath of God, come and breathe upon these slain". He has reached his limitation. He has done all he could. He preached, as he was commanded; now he leaves the results with the Spirit of God. *The true preacher's sermon will be but a text for long continued prayer.* He will be crying to God continually to bless the Word.

With what wonderful faith he prayed! It was simply "Come, O Breath of God". He has no doubt but that it will come. Why? Because he had a "Thus saith the Lord". The Lord had

told him to call upon the wind, and therefore he knew it would come. Do you see the glorious faith he had in the power of the Spirit: "Come Breath, and breathe upon these slain, and they shall live." We are almost ready to exclaim, "What! Ezekiel, do you think it will be as easy for the Spirit of God to raise up all the corpses as it is to breathe?" "Yes", he would have answered, "I may preach, and I may cry, and I may wear myself out. I can accomplish nothing. But all the Holy Ghost has to do is just to breathe." Oh, the glorious ease expressed in the sentence, "Breathe upon these slain"!

One kiss of the breath of God did more than all Ezekiel's preaching could accomplish. We may have our mighty sermons and our mighty preachers but at the end we must go from preaching to prayer, crying "O Breath, come and breathe upon these slain". Mere preaching may make a noise; it may create a sensation; it may even gather the hundreds and the thousands together. It may produce reformation: drybones may be clothed with flesh and sinew, but *spiritual life can alone be imparted by the Holy Ghost.* The work of the Spirit in regeneration is a Divine miracle, which is the result of His forth-putting of supernatural power. It is the spiritual quickening of a corpse; it is the bringing of a dead soul to life. This miracle of grace is spoken of in Scripture as, "The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." (Eph. 1:19—20).

Nothing short of Divine power can meet the emergency. Mr. Spurgeon cried to his own people in London in the Metropolitan Tabernacle: "Oh, brethren, think nothing of us who preach to you. If ever you do, our power will be gone. If you begin to suppose that such and such a minister, having been blessed of God to so many thousands, will necessarily be the means of the conversion of your friend, you are imputing to a son of man what belongs only to the Son of God; and you will

assuredly do that pastor or that minister serious mischief by tolerating in your heart so idolatrous a thought. We are nothing. You are nothing. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts' is a message that should make us lie in the dust before God."

*Lifeless in the valley,
Come, O Breath, and breathe!
New-create and rally;
Come, O Breath and breathe!*

*Blowing where Thou listeth,
Thou the Word assisteth
Thou, death's power resisteth
Come, O Breath, and breathe!*

Son of man, can these bones live? Yes, my brother, with God all things are possible.