

The LORD Is There

Session 13. Can These Bones Live?

God asked a mortal man whether the hopeless dead can live, and answered with an army on its feet.

What We Found

God set Ezekiel down in a valley of bones that were very many and very dry, made him take honest inventory of the death, and then asked, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' Ezekiel's answer, 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest', is neither despair nor presumption; it hands the question back to the only one who can answer it. Then God made Ezekiel preach to a congregation of skeletons, and the word did what the word does: bone to bone, sinews, flesh, skin, and then, in a second movement, breath from the four winds, until the slain stood up, an exceedingly great host. Form without Spirit is still a corpse; the Spirit is what makes the difference between a reassembled people and a living one.

God interpreted his own vision: the bones are the whole house of Israel, saying 'our hope is lost.' He does not dispute their diagnosis; he disputes their conclusion. Hopelessness can be accurate about the situation and still wrong about God. The promise of 37:14 delivers exactly what last week's promise of a new heart was for: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live.' And we traced how this hope ripened: a vision given first about a nation's restoration grew, within Scripture itself, into the full hope of the resurrection of the body, flowering in Christ.

Then the two sticks: Judah and Joseph, a kingdom broken in half for centuries, joined into one, not by negotiation but 'in my hand', under one shepherd-king called 'my servant David', promised four hundred years after David died. Resurrection and reunion are one work of the same God. And the chapter crested at the highest promise of the book so far: a covenant of peace that is an everlasting covenant, God's sanctuary in the midst of his people for evermore, his dwelling place with them. We followed that sentence all the way to the Bible's final pages, where it is still standing. The question this study has carried since night one, where will God finally choose to dwell, is nearly answered. Two sessions left.

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. c. 202

Writing against teachers who claimed the flesh was too lowly to be saved, Irenaeus argues that the God who formed man from dust at the beginning can certainly reform him from dust at the end. He appeals to Ezekiel's valley of bones as God's own picture of this: the flesh is not beneath God's power or outside his care, and the resurrection of the body is not an embarrassment to be spiritualized but the point. The same hands that shaped Adam will raise us.

Against Heresies, Book 5. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone who quietly suspects Christian hope is really about escaping the body rather than raising it.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, d. 386

Preparing candidates for baptism, Cyril teaches that the resurrection of the dead is an article of the Creed, not a pious extra, and he gathers Scripture's witnesses to it for people who found it hard to believe. His teaching, in substance: what looks to us like an absolute ending is, to God, raw material. The dead are not beyond his reach, because nothing that exists is beyond the one who made it from nothing.

Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 18. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the grieving, and for anyone who says the Creed's last lines without ever having stopped on them.

St. Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274

Aquinas teaches, in substance, that the resurrection of the body exceeds every created power and belongs to God alone, and that our resurrection is not a free-floating hope but is caused by and patterned on the resurrection of Christ. Grace does not discard the body God made; it raises it. So Christian hope is not optimism about circumstances but confidence in a person who has already done, in his own flesh, what he promises to do in ours.

Summa contra Gentiles, Book IV. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For the young adult whose hope has been beaten down into vague positivity: this hope has a date, a tomb, and a body.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Name one 'dead thing': a relationship, a hope, a person's faith, a habit you have given up fighting. Once a day this week, pray Ezekiel 37 over it by name: read verses 4 to 6 slowly, put the dead thing where the bones are, and end with 'O Lord GOD, thou knowest.' Do not script the outcome; just keep showing up in the valley.
2. Each morning before you check your phone, pray three words: 'Come, Holy Spirit.' One breath in, one breath out. The chapter's whole promise fits in that prayer.
3. The two sticks: choose one divided relationship within your reach, a family rift, a cold friendship, a grudge, and take one small concrete step toward reunion this week: a message, an apology, an invitation. You are not required to fix it. You are required to put your stick in God's hand.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 37:27

"My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Ezekiel 37:27

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 703.** Word and Breath together at the origin of every creature's life
- **CCC 715.** The Spirit promised: renewed hearts, a reunited people, God dwelling with them
- **CCC 992.** Resurrection revealed progressively to God's people
- **CCC 820.** Unity is Christ's gift to his Church and our task

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 38-39 before we meet again.