Ezekiel (Old Testament Figures)

Dry bones, a new heart, and why Pentecost happened

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, June 5, 2022
PASSAGES	Ezekiel 36:22-28; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Ezekiel 37:21-25; Acts 2:29-33; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-4; Ezekiel 36:16-21; Ezekiel 34:23-24
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Israel was as helpless as a valley of dry bones. Through Ezekiel God promised to gather them, cleanse them, replace their hearts of stone and put his own Spirit within them – "not for your sake… but for the sake of my holy name." At Pentecost that promise broke open, not because anyone tipped the scales by praying, but because Jesus, the true Son of David, was exalted and poured out the Spirit.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ezekiel ministered as a priest among exiles in Babylon, wondering what had become of the promises to David.
- God acts "not for your sake… but for the sake of my holy name." That is an ouch and a comfort: his reputation is an invitation for the nations to know him.
- Ezekiel's promise goes further than a return to the land: clean water, a new heart, and God's own Spirit causing his people to walk in his ways.
- The dry bones are Israel – not just dead but "super dead," helpless, and wholly dependent on a life-giving God.
- Not even Sinai on fire or manna every morning made Israel faithful. We need an exodus from something inside us.

- The true story of the Bible is God hallowing his own name through weak and broken people; the fake story is a book of good examples for good boys and girls.
- Pentecost happened because Jesus is on the throne. And we need the Spirit not only for the spectacular but for everything, to be God's own people.

▶ 1:12:47

On Pentecost Sunday Matt began with appeals: tell Deb if you share the vision for N2 Worship as passing a baton to a new generation; start new small groups around the city – even two or three friends and an empty couch to pray about; and volunteer to run slides, because "this isn't a show where the show must go on."

A priest by a river in Babylon

▶ 1:15:36

"Good luck providence": the Old Testament series happened to reach Ezekiel on Pentecost, and Matt wanted to speak about the Spirit of God given to cleanse his people. Ezekiel was a priest sitting with the exiles by a river in Babylon, surely wondering about the promise that David's son would sit on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13), and about the days when the Queen of Sheba came to admire God's name in Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:1–9). As with Daniel last week, the emphasis is not on the heroes but on what God will do because his people cannot.

▶ 1:17:35

> "Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds... So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations... But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.' But I had concern for my holy name."
>
> EZEKIEL 36:16–21 ↗

▶ 1:18:48

Defilement, innocent blood, open idolatry, and judgment: God lifted his hand of protection, and Assyria and Babylon did the rest. The natural consequence was that God's reputation was in question – these people cannot even stay in their own land; how is he God of all nations? Israel's "global name-

building project for God resulted in failure. And you might think I give Israel a hard time all the time, but I don't think we would do any better."

1. For the sake of his name

▶ 1:20:05

> "Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name... And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes."
>
> EZEKIEL 36:22–23 ↗

▶ 1:21:29

"Not for your sake" is both an ouch and a comfort. Isn't caring about his reputation conceited? Think about what he wants: a relationship of love and loyalty. But you cannot see him, and he will not send "a Xerox copy of a photo" to put bread in front of. So people come to know him by his name – what he has done, what he is capable of, what he prefers. He already knows and loves the nations; they do not know him. "His reputation is an invitation." Not a magic pronunciation, but his renown.

2. A new heart and a new spirit

▶ 1:22:42

Israel had broadcast a confusing reputation, cycling through revival and idolatry, sometimes doing both at once. So what will God do?

▶ 1:23:17

> "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes... and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."
>
> EZEKIEL 36:24–28 ↗

▶ 1:24:34

Part of this came true visibly: after the return, the Asherah poles and Baals really seem to vanish. But like the promise to David – fulfilled in Solomon, yet clearly pointing to "something greater and later" – this one leaves you feeling there is more. Forgiveness of sin? Hearts of stone exchanged for flesh? God's own Spirit given? Did Zerubbabel do that, or Ezra and Nehemiah? God longs for a people who belong to him, "but somehow you feel like, man, they need serious help to do that." How, and when?

3. Can these bones live?

▶ 1:26:48

> "The hand of the LORD was upon me… and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones… and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD… Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.'"
>
> EZEKIEL 37:1–6 ↗

▶ 1:28:10

Why dry? "They're not just dead, they're super dead." ("Not mostly dead," Matt added, nodding to the movie-night announcement.) The bones rattle together, sinews and flesh and skin cover them – "that must have looked really scary" – but there is no breath until Ezekiel prophesies to the breath, and they stand up, an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:7–10).

▶ 1:30:25

> "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them… Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people… And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live… Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."
>
> EZEKIEL 37:11–14 ↗

▶ 1:32:12

Could you blame them? Trapped and powerless in a foreign land all over again, "not in Egypt this time, but in Babylon." They are completely dependent on a life-giving God, and thankfully he means to give

them life for his name's sake. But is it just a return from time-out? The first exodus was extravagant, and even with a mountain on fire they rebelled. "We need an exodus from this land, but really we need an exodus from our wickedness… an internal exodus of some kind." And what kind of Moses could lead that?

4. One king, one shepherd

▶ 1:34:09

God has Ezekiel bind two sticks together: Israel and Judah will be one kingdom again. In chapter 34, God says he himself will shepherd his scattered sheep – and then that his servant David will be their shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23–24). "How's that going to work? We'll see that soon."

▶ 1:35:03

"I will make them one nation… and one king shall be king over them all… They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols… But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:21–23). He does not say he will save them from Babylon. He will save them from their backslidings. The people who saw the river turn to blood, crossed the sea, trembled at the mountain and ate manna every morning still could not be faithful. If you think one great miracle would make you loyal, "take a lesson from these people."

The true story and the fake one

▶ 1:36:36

In the true story of the Bible, God always kept a witness, but through terrible brokenness: Cain murdering his brother; Abraham and Sarah old and barren; Jacob's "just creepy" sons selling Joseph, who rose not by playing his cards right but by God's orchestrating; judges, worsening kings, idolatry winning again and again. "A bunch of liars, murderers and cheaters – and all throughout that time God was hallowing his own name."

▶ 1:39:25

The fake version is a good book of hero stories and tips for upgrading spiritually. Matt thinks many in his profession embraced it because it was respectable, marrying "the cult of kindness": let's all be like Jesus, the kindest of us. "I think that's how we trained even our own children, generation after generation, to be pagan" – because if it is all about being good, I have the latest version of good and do not need the church. But the Bible is "a lamp to my feet" (Psalm 119:105): you carry a lamp in treacherous places, and it shows you the roots and broken glass. That is not negative; it is true.

Why Pentecost happened

▶ 1:41:28

So Ezekiel leaves an unresolved longing: a real spiritual exodus, somehow tied to a future son of David, with God's Spirit causing his people to obey. Joel gave another hint: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28–29). Then, at Pentecost, the sound like a mighty rushing wind, tongues as of fire, and all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4).

▶ 1:43:06

The fake version: the apostles prayed long and hard enough and "tipped the scales" for the mega-upgrade. The true version is hinted just before Joel's promise: "Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people" (Joel 2:18) – God acting for his own reasons, not because the people finally made it. And Ezekiel again: "My servant David shall be king over them… and David my servant shall be their prince forever" (Ezekiel 37:24–25). But David died – and Peter points that out:

▶ 1:44:40

> "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ… This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."
>
> ACTS 2:29–33 ↗

▶ 1:46:24

That last verse is not churchy language for a pillow. It is the rationale for Pentecost. The true Son of David, risen, ascends and sits at the Father's right hand; the Father gives him the Spirit; he pours it out. "All of that was stuff that happened in heaven… stuff we had no control over. Pentecost didn't happen because the church prayed long enough and hard enough, but because Jesus is on the throne." He tore the veil with his death, and he is the one John the Baptist said would baptise with the Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11).

Spirit for everything

▶ 1:48:51

God always wanted a people of his own, and humans failed "spectacularly – and it wasn't for lack of trying." He gave power, miracles, prophets, and over-the-top reminders: love the Lord your God with all your heart; talk about it at home and on the road, when you lie down and when you rise; bind it on your hand and forehead; write it on your doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:4–9). And they still failed. So do not drink from the cup that says, "I could do it if I just had better routines and supplements and a whole prayer thing."

▶ 1:51:06

Even our frailty God used to glorify his name: in our weakness he is shown strong; in our idolatry, unbelievably patient. What we celebrate at Pentecost is him pouring out his Spirit for his own name, so that he gets what he wants – a people who are his precious possession.

▶ 1:51:44

> *"We had to have the Spirit not just for the big stuff – for everything. We can't live the Christian life without his Spirit. It's not just to heal, it's not just for a prophetic word. It's for us to be his precious possession."*

The Spirit is not reserved for Pentecost or for special breakthroughs; he was with you when you became a Christian, yesterday, and today. Matt prayed that the Spirit would flow within us like streams, that God would open our eyes to what is already there, keep us his precious people, be our God and our shepherd, and pour out his Spirit anew on all of us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 2 Samuel 7:12–13
- 1 Kings 10:1–9
- Ezekiel 36:16–21
- Ezekiel 36:22–23
- Ezekiel 36:24–28
- Ezekiel 37:1–6
- Ezekiel 37:7–10
- Ezekiel 37:11–14
- Ezekiel 34:23–24
- Ezekiel 37:21–23
- Psalm 119:105
- Joel 2:28–29
- Acts 2:1–4
- Joel 2:18
- Ezekiel 37:24–25
- Acts 2:29–33
- Matthew 3:11
- Deuteronomy 6:4–9

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. God says he acts “not for your sake… but for the sake of my holy name.” Why did Matt call that both an ouch and a comfort?
2. How can God’s reputation be an invitation rather than vanity? What does your life say about his name to the people around you?
3. Where do you feel like a valley of dry bones, and what would it mean to say, “O Lord God, you know”?
4. How have you seen the “fake story” of the Bible – good examples for good people – shape your own faith or the church around you?
5. Matt said we need the Spirit for everything, not just the spectacular. Where in your ordinary week will you ask for his help?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofI_zhUDRXc&t=4298s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.