

Dear Fellow Christians, who have experienced the mercy of God,

It was a dire situation. The Phoenix Suns were down two games to the Lakers with only three games to play. The sports writers were convinced that the Suns were done.

At a news conference with the coach, the late Paul Westphal, he told the media, "The Suns will win the next three games and the series." The sports writers were astounded. Most of them mocked Westphal and wrote, "What he promised is impossible."

What happened? The Suns did the impossible and advanced to the next round of the playoffs. The moral of the story. Never underestimate a determined coach and a determined team.

In our text for today we find Ezekiel walking in a valley of dry bones. The bones represent people who have turned their back on God. So is there any hope for such people?

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE MERCY OF THE LORD

I. You see, by nature, you and I are those dry bones.

At the time of Ezekiel the future of the Jewish nation looked bleak. They were in exile in Babylon. This was the punishment they received for ignoring God's Word and ignoring the prophets God sent them. Finally, the patience of the Lord ran out. The army of Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, destroyed the city and the temple. The people who survived the attack were carried off into exile in Babylon.

In exile the people of Judah said, "**Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone. We are cut off.**" They didn't think they would ever see Jerusalem again. In the ancient world it just didn't happen that a people in exile would return to their homeland. In the depth of their despair they could not see a solution.

Ezekiel's vision is a picture of all of humanity, not just the Jews. By nature, we are nothing but dry bones. We are born into this world without a relationship with God. We are born dead in sin, dead in unbelief. This is our natural spiritual condition. We follow the devil rather than the Lord God. We ignore God's calls to repentance and faith.

By nature, we are cut off from God by our own doing. We have physical life, but no spiritual life. Because of our lack of connection to God, we should be facing death, eternal death in hell. No medical expert has yet proved that he can bring back to life a dead person, a person who is only bones. Even worse, when a soul is dead to God, no human being can ever bring that soul back to life.

Yet, here was Ezekiel, transported in his vision to a valley filled with nothing but dry bones. When the Lord asks Ezekiel, "**Son of man, can these bones live?**" Ezekiel was wise enough to say, "**Lord God, you alone know.**" Bringing the spiritually dead to spiritual life is something only God can do.

II. It is God the Holy Spirit who brings dry bones to life.

Ezekiel had one job here. God told him, "**Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.'**" Most of us know the old spiritual that goes, "*Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones.*" Do you remember what the repeated sentence in that song is? "*Now hear the Word of the Lord.*" In the vision of Ezekiel, when the bones heard the Word of the Lord, what happened? "**There was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.**" But that wasn't enough. Ezekiel tells us, "**So I prophesied as God commanded me, and breath entered them; the bones came to life.**" It seemed impossible, but God did it. We call this a miracle.

This was the message from the Lord to the people of Israel in exile. Hear the Word of the Lord. Trust what God says. What did he say to them through Ezekiel? "**I will bring you**

back to the land of Israel.” What should we understand by that promise? Never underestimate the mercy and power of the Lord God.

The same miracle has happened to you and me. The miracle starts at the cross of Christ. There Jesus is taking our place on that instrument of torture. There Jesus, through his suffering and death, is atoning for each and every one of our sins. He's doing that for all people. Then, when Jesus rises victoriously on the third day, there is no doubt that every sin has been forgiven. This is the mercy of our God. He offers people real life, a spiritual relationship with him through the work of Jesus Christ.

His work sets the stage for Pentecost. The people gathered in Jerusalem that day were Jewish people from all over the civilized world. When Peter began to speak, they listened. They listened as he proclaimed Law and Gospel. And when they heard the message of how they were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, we are told, **“They were cut to the heart and wondered, ‘What shall we do?’”** They recognized their sinfulness before God. Through the Word the Holy Spirit had convicted them.

Then they heard the word of Peter, **“Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”** At that point it was the Holy Spirit who was working in them through the Word. The same Holy Spirit who had given the disciples the power to speak the message of salvation in many different languages, was now giving these people hope. We know the result. About 3000 people were brought to faith and baptized on that first Pentecost. Never underestimate the mercy of God.

The Holy Spirit is still being poured out on people today. You are the proof of that. Through the Word of the Lord you have been called to faith in Jesus Christ. By the power of Baptism, which is nothing more than the Word of the Lord and water, you have become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a miracle. We, who by nature are nothing more than dry bones, have now been given new life in Christ. This is the miracle of conversion.

Paul summarizes this miracle in Ephesians. **“God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.”** No longer are you and I a bunch of dry bones with no hope and no life with God. Now you and I live because of God's mercy and the work of the Holy Spirit who has brought us to faith in Jesus.

So where do we go from here? Remember what Ezekiel said, **“Hear the Word of the Lord.”** This is what believers in the Lord Jesus Christ do. We stay connected to our Savior as we hear his Word. God's Word fills us with faith in Jesus, with hope for an eternal future in heaven, and with love for our God and love for our fellow human beings.

Here is our motivation: **“Christ's love compels us.”** The Holy Spirit did the impossible. He made you a child of God. That fact compels us to honor our Lord with our words and our actions, to follow his will, to serve him in any way we can, and to live our lives to his glory.

On this Pentecost day, remember what you and I were by nature: nothing more than dry bones with no hope. Remember what God the Holy Spirit has made us: believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has saved us from our sins and opened heaven for us. What a blessed gift that is. Remember this truth: Never underestimate the mercy of our Lord. Amen.