

Bible Study Lecture Notes: Week XV (9/2/26)

Written and Prepared by Father Michael Erickson

Ezekiel 37:1-2: *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 caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.*

John 5:24-25: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

Benson Commentary: *The hand of the Lord was upon me — I was actuated by a divine power; and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord — Or, by the Spirit of the Lord. It is highly probable that all this passed in vision. And set me down in the midst of the valley full of bones — The first and great object of this prophecy seems evidently to be the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity. A nation carried into captivity ceases to be a nation, and therefore may be fitly compared to bones, or dead bodies; so that by the valley of bones was first signified, the Babylonish dominions filled with captive Jews. Bishop Warburton observes, “that the messengers of God, prophesying for the people’s consolation in disastrous times, frequently promise a restoration to the former days of felicity; and, to obviate all distrust from unpromising appearances, they put the case even at the worst, and assure the people, in metaphorical expressions, that though the community were as entirely dissolved as a dead body reduced to dust, yet God would raise that community again to life.” But besides the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, this vision is a lively representation of a three-fold resurrection: 1st, Of the resurrection of souls, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life, by the power of divine grace accompanying the word of Christ, John*

5:24-25. 2d, *The resurrection of the gospel church, or of any part of it, from an afflicted state to liberty and peace.* 3d, *The resurrection of the body at the great day, especially the bodies of believers, to life eternal.* This last seems to be one thing particularly designed. “*Though the generality of commentators,*” says Mr. Peters, “*regard this vision and prophecy as no other than a figurative representation and prediction of a return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, or some other of their captivities and dispersions, yet, perhaps, we shall find, upon a more attentive consideration, that whatever hopes it might give them of a temporal and national deliverance or prosperity, yet there was evidently something further designed; and that to comfort them in their distressed situation, with the prospect of a future resurrection in a proper sense, was as much intended by the Spirit of God, or rather more so, than the other.*”

Compare with other “In the Spirit of the Lord” Bible verses:

Revelation 1:10: *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet....*

Revelation 4:2: *And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

Revelation 21:10: *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God...*

Notice the progression of “In the Spirit of the Lord” Bible verses in *Revelation*. The first one occurs on the Lord’s Day, which is to say, the day in which we commemorate our Lord’s bodily Resurrection (Sunday). It is also interpreted as a reference to the future Apocalyptic Day of the Lord, which is to say, the day that Christ Jesus returns in glory to judge the quick and the dead. Either way, this is the day that the old world has given way to the new world. If the Sabbath, or

the Seventh Day, is the restoration of all things back into harmony with God, such that God may be said to be at rest, then the Lord's Day is the new world that emerges as a result. The idea is that we are restored into harmony with God (we are given rest, as God is also at rest) not just to remain passively in that blessed state, but to venture forth into the new world that God has set up for the Blessed. We are at rest, finally, so that we may wake up to a new task. Note that the loud sound as of a trumpet in Revelation 1:10 suggests an alarm, a forced awakening from slumber, to do the work that God has set aside for the Blessed. Then, in Revelation 4:2, being "in the Spirit" accompanies a vision of God on His Throne. We are reminded that, though we are Blessed, we are finite creatures still and subject to God's authority and power. God will work providentially through us in whatever task He has ordained for us to do. Finally, in Revelation 21:10, being "in the Spirit" means being brought up into a high mountain. We not only acknowledge Him as our King, but we are also literally inside Him and transfigured by that experience accordingly. This is the immediate prelude to being brought into His new creation, the New Jerusalem that is going to replace Heaven and Earth, where we now see that our task as the Blessed is to do our part for the polity and the culture of this place. So, we see a progress from call/commissioning (trumpet sound awakening us), to acknowledgment/worshipping (beholding God on His Throne), finally to residing/resting in the new creation (ascent into the New Jerusalem). Being "In the Spirit" is shorthand for progressive sanctification in the Lord by which we are transfigured into His divine likeness. It is not just a reference to the Holy Spirit being the ultimate author of Ezekiel's vision, though certainly that is the case. It is also a reference to the Holy Spirit sanctifying the man who has been brought up into this vision. For God does not just open our eyes. He also transforms us into people capable of seeing through the eyes that God has opened.

Returning then to the Prophet Ezekiel, when he is "in the Spirit of the Lord," he is saying that he is shown a vision of God restoring Israel and he is transformed by that vision. The restored bones are as much a metaphor for his own spiritual development by God's grace as it is a symbol of the future restoration of Israel to her former covenantal glory.

"In the midst of the valley" in the context of progressive sanctification:

St. Gregory of Nyssa, *From Glory to Glory* (Fourth Century AD): *And so, man separated himself from the fruit of all good things, and by his disobedience he was filled with the fruit that brings destruction. And the name of that fruit was mortal sin. Straightway he died to the more perfect life: he passed from a divine life to one on the level with irrational beasts which is akin to the valley of death. Once death was mingled with his nature, mortality was passed on to all generations of his children. Hence, we are born into a life of death, for, in a certain sense, our very life has died. Our life is indeed dead because we have been deprived of immortality. But the man who is aware that he lives in the midst of two lives can cross the barrier between them, such that by destroying the one he can give the victory to the other. Man by his death to the true life entered into this life of death. So too, when he dies to this irrational life of death, he is restored to life eternal. And so, there is no doubt but that we cannot enter into this life of blessedness unless we die to sin.*

St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Sixteenth Century AD): *God in order to exercise the soul in humility, usually makes it ascend by this ladder so that it might descend, and he makes it descend that it might ascend.... The soul, therefore, must of necessity be tried in the one and the other... until, perfect habits having been acquired, it ceases to ascend and descend, having arrived at the summit, united with God.*

Psalms 34:19: *Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.*

Since being “in the Spirit” refers to the progressive sanctification of the person caught up into God, we see that the first stage of this sanctification is to be brought into the valley. Just as Our Lord descends into Hell before He resurrects into eternal life, so the spiritual pilgrim who has been caught up into God will descend before he ascends. This is necessary, for he must confront his own living death before he can be refashioned by grace into blessedness. Also, in descending

first, he may ascend by grace later without endeavoring to do so pridefully; for he will know all too well that God is the Author of that ascent. Our Lord does not need that reminder, but given that we do, He goes into Hell so that His triumph over Hell may become our triumph over the same in Him. Whether brought down into the valley so that God may break us down and remake us, a kind of spiritual bootcamp, or so that we may be freed from our own pride, the godly must suffer afflictions in proportion to their righteousness by grace. The reason is that God is just, so there must be a price paid for sin; but at the same time, God is merciful, so the price paid is also the occasion of our further sanctification. In the end, we are sanctified much more than the price we had to pay for sin. God is not the Merchant of Venice. He does not take a pound of flesh from us for a pound of grace. In the fullness of our sanctification, we shall scarcely recall the past pain suffered because of our affliction for sin.

Romans 8:18: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

With God nothing is impossible:

Ezekiel 37:3-4: *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, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.*

Matthew 9:5-6: *For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

Ellicott's Commentary: *Can these bones live? —The question is put to the prophet in order to emphasize the human impossibility of that which is immediately brought about by the Divine*

omnipotence. (Comp. Matthew 9:5-6.) It was precisely this teaching which the people needed. As they had formerly refused to believe his announcements of impending judgment, so now that this had come, they were utterly incredulous in regard to his declarations of future blessing. It seemed to them impossible, and what they needed to be taught was that “what is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Thou knowest. —The prophet sees the natural impossibility yet perceives that there must be some deeper reason for the question and therefore replies in these words. It may be, too, that the question thus asked, before its object is suggested, connected itself in his mind with the thought of the literal resurrection of the dead and the difficulties it suggests.

The Breath of Life:

Ezekiel 37:5: Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.

Genesis 2:7: And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Benson Commentary: Again, he said, Prophecy upon these bones — Here sense and understanding are attributed to the dry bones; and as these bones signified the captive Jews, they are with strict propriety called upon to hear the word of the Lord. But this is also to be considered, as has been intimated on Ezekiel 37:1, a prophetic representation of that voice of the Son of God which quickens and raises to spiritual life such as are dead in sin; and which all that are in their graves shall hear at the last day, and shall come forth out of them. Thus saith the Lord, I will cause breath to enter into you, &c. — The breath of life, as it is expressed in Genesis 2:7. And I will lay sinews upon you, &c. — All the expressions made use of here are such as describe the resurrection of a dead body.

This is critical. For as much as this is a prophecy of God's deliverance of the people of Israel from their Babylonian Captivity, so it is also a prophecy of God's deliverance of all men from their sin. The "breath of life" reference makes this clear, for the phrase harkens back to Adam and, therefore, extends the prophecy to the affliction of all mankind since Adam's fall into sin. God's providential work on behalf of Israel is in keeping with His covenantal promise to His chosen people, but this work is also caught up into His larger eschatological work on behalf of all people who will be justified in and through Jesus Christ. Thus, the history of Israel will be inexorably linked to the New Covenant in Christ Jesus – the Old Testament is not jettisoned by but rather fulfilled in the New Testament. At the same time, the history of Israel in this world will be in time properly viewed through an eschatological lens, which is to say, as His chosen prelude to the End Times restoration of all things.

God, the Master Craftsman (the Carpenter) of Life:

Ezekiel 37:6: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

Job 10:11: Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.

Genesis 3:21: Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

Gill's Exposition: And I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up flesh upon you.... That is, before he should cause breath to enter into them; for though it is first mentioned, it is the last done: this is the orderly process; first sinews are laid to join the bones together; then flesh is laid to cover them, and fill up all vacancies, and form muscles to make the bones capable of motion:

and cover you with skin; both bones, sinews, and flesh; for this is uppermost of all, and which makes the whole smooth and beautiful. Job expresses his formation in much such language, "thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews", Job 10:11,

and put breath in you, and ye shall live; which is repeated for the confirmation of it:

and ye shall know that I am the Lord; the Lord God omnipotent, the Lord gracious and merciful, and your Lord and God: so men, when they are called by grace, know the Lord, they did not before; having an experience of his powerful and efficacious grace upon their hearts, they know him to be theirs and own and acknowledge him, and profess him before men.

God restores man in an orderly manner. This reminds us that God is ordered. He is the standard by which we measure reality. And yet, He is not the indifferent divine watchmaker. He obviously loves deeply what He is creating. Each person is assembled as if the only person assembled, and the ordered precision of the work highlights the uniqueness of each one of us. In God, we are not widgets on an assembly line. We are a one-of-a-kind expression of His craftsmanship and artistry set forth for a unique expression of His love and will into the world. Remember how God created coats of skins for Adam and Eve before they set out into the post-Edenic world. The laying on of the skin here calls to mind the coats of skin for Adam and Eve: God gives us flesh not only to be a functional instrument for the exercise of our own human will in the world but also to be a sign of His protection of us. Because of sin, our fleshiness has come down to us to be a symbol of our living death, for our flesh grows old, diseased, and eventually dies, but that was not God's intent at the start. He wants our flesh to be forever young, free of disease, and continuing into eternity. That is, like with the coats of skins, He wants our flesh to remind us not of our mortality, as it is prone to do now, but rather to remind us of God's immortality and of our adoption into His life.

Humanity Quickened by the Spirit of God:

Ezekiel 37:10: *So, I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.*

Revelation 11:11: *And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.*

Hosea 1:10: *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.*

Revelation 7:9: *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

Gill's Exposition: *So, I prophesied as he commanded me.... The second time he prophesied to the wind, as he had done to the bones, as he was ordered: and the issue of it was, and breath came into them; or, "the spirit"; a spirit of courage in the Jews, to go up to their own land; the Spirit of life from Christ, which will enter into the witnesses slain, and revive them; and into the Jews in the latter day, and convert them; and which enters into dead sinners, and quickens them; and this he does while ministers are preaching the Gospel to them; see Revelation 11:11,*

and then lived; as men do spiritually, when the Spirit of God has produced a principle of spiritual life in them; they live by faith on Christ, in union and fellowship with him; they live in newness of life, and a holy life and conversation; and shall live and reign with Christ upon the first resurrection, and for evermore:

and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army; as the Jews did when they returned from the Babylonish captivity; they were many, and in a posture of defense; and as they will be in the latter day, when converted, Hosea 1:10, and as the number of the saints will be upon the first resurrection, Revelation 7:9, so when men are quickened by the Spirit of God, "they stand upon their feet"; they stand in the grace of God, and on the foundation Christ; they stand by faith in him, and in the doctrine of faith, and in the house of God; and they stand firm against all their enemies: they are an "army"; they are in a military state; fighting against sin, Satan, and the world; and though few in comparison of others, yet considered by themselves are very numerous; and as they will appear when the Jews will be converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles brought in; and especially when they will be all gathered together at the coming of Christ.

Note that Revelation 11:11 refers to two unnamed witnesses who preach for 1260 days, are slain by the beast, and then are brought back to life by God after three and a half days. There are two traditions as to their identity. Some say, Moses and Elijah, because they performed miracles like stopping rain and turning water to blood just as Moses and Elijah had done. Others say, Enoch and Elijah, since both men had gone to Heaven without dying the first time, thus meaning that they do not suffer death twice in dying here. Either way, the connotation is that God will raise up those who have fallen to the sword on account of their fidelity to Him. The vanquished will be given triumph over their enemies. What has been wrong will be made right. God will protect His chosen people in bringing back Israel from the valley of death, but this will happen in a greater eschatological context that far surpasses the importance of a political restoration for Israel. The faithful are advised to look for God's salvific hand working in and through Israel but for ends not to be contained by the present-day remnant of Judea. For the future of Israel will be much greater in number and in scope than the remnant of Judea can imagine for themselves.

