

Israel, it seemed, had lost hope. We know this, because they say: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are indeed cut off." But they had a very good reason to say this. Because by the time Ezekiel is writing, Israel has been in exile for many years. They've been taken out of the promised land and scattered among the nations. And because it happened so long ago, it seemed as if there was no hope. It seemed as if there was no way to turn this all around. They had been cut off from the Lord. So what hope could they possibly have? It seemed as if it would go on forever.

And so God gives his people an answer today, Christians, through the vision of his prophet Ezekiel, through the vision of this great valley filled with bones. And we can just see Ezekiel walking in and among all of these bones in this great valley. There were so many that they can't be counted. Because this valley was once the place of a great battle. A great war had been fought here where many men had been killed. We know this later in the text when they are described as "an exceedingly great army." But at that time when this battle was fought, it was also a curse and a judgment that had fallen upon them. A curse and a judgment, because when they had died, they weren't brought back home to be buried in their own graves, to be buried in their own cemeteries. Instead, they were just left, left out in the open, left to the birds of the air, left as dead bodies in the midst of that valley. And we know that this was a curse and a judgment, because of what God himself says. We hear in Deuteronomy 28, for example: "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away." So in other words, these bodies were left here by the judgment of God. They had been faithless. They had not been true to the Lord their God. And so God, just as he threatened that he would, brought this judgment upon them of leaving their bodies out in the open, so they eventually turned into nothing but bones.

And it's been a very, very long time, Christians, since these men had died. We know this because Ezekiel describes them as being just bones, and dry bones at that. We all know this from experience, right? We've been out in the fields or out in our pastures. We've seen the bones of animals like deer and cattle who have long since died so that all that is left of them are simply bones. And that's all that Ezekiel saw on this day, the bones of men left out in this valley. And there wasn't much hope for them, either. Because if they were bodies laid out there, there might be some hope. There might be some hope that they'll come up again, that God would raise them up right then and there. Because while there is still a body, there is still hope that life would come back into it again. But these are just bones. What hope is there that they would be raised up? What hope is there that life would come back into them? They are very dry, long past any hope of God being able to do something about it.

That was the situation Israel found themselves in. They too were being punished for their faithlessness. Because God told them: "If you are disobedient to my Word, I will send you out among the nations. I will send you out into exile." And that's exactly what had happened. Israel had not been faithful, so that now they have been cut off and become like dead men, like dried up bones in the middle of this valley. What hope did they have for the future?

But the Lord brings his people hope, Christians. Because the Lord says: "'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy over these bones and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."' Prophecy, Ezekiel! Preach the Word of God over these bones! Preach God's Word to these bones even though there is no ear to hear them. Preach to them the words that I give to you. The Lord God says to these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you. And you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." And that's exactly what Ezekiel does. He preaches the Word over those bones, only to have an amazing sight come before him. The great rattling! This great shaking as the bones come together, bone to its bone. And before his very eyes, he sees the sinews come upon them. Before his very eyes, he sees flesh being put upon them. Before his very eyes, he sees the skin cover them again. God has brought a body back to these bones, even though they have been long dead, because God brings hope to his people. And then he says to him: "Prophecy to the breath. Prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"" And that's exactly what happens. The breath of God enters into them, and they become a living people once more. The dry bones who seemed well past all hope have now become a living people, the people of God standing before him. Because, Christians, nothing is beyond hope with the Lord. Nothing is too hard for God.

And in this way, God gives hope to his people. He says to them that even though they are like dead men laying in their graves, thinking that there is no hope, God will bring them back again. God will gather them from among the nations and put them back into the promised land, just as he said that he would. No longer would they be exiled. No longer would they be cut off. No longer were they have to wonder where their hope would be. Because God promised them by himself that he would do this, that he would bring them back, that he would raise them up again, so that they would be his people forever. And whatever God says, Christians, is binding. He can't go back on his Word. He can't take it back. Once he has said it, he will do it, because he is faithful and true. And nothing is too hard for God. Everything that he promises will come to pass, no matter how difficult it seems to be.

Christians, do you not also sometimes feel cut off from the Lord? Feel as though that there is no hope, feel as if there is nothing that can be done, that we are like dry bones in the middle of the valley? That no matter what happens, we wonder what our future may be? Maybe you're dealing with some personal trouble, troubles in your life or troubles in your family that you can't seem to do anything about. Whenever you bring it up or whenever you try to do something about it, that just seems to make things worse. How are we supposed to deal with that? How can we find hope in the midst of these troubles? Or maybe you're dealing with loved ones who have drifted away from the faith, loved ones who no longer come to church, loved ones who maybe don't even believe in God at all. And every time you try to bring it up, every time you try to invite them, it seems like it doesn't do anything. If anything, it seems like it pushes them further away. How can we find hope in that? Where can we turn in the midst of those troubles? Or maybe you're just concerned about the increasing insanity of our age, the evils which seem to be getting stronger and stronger. And you wonder, will it ever come to an end? Will things ever get back to normal? Will things ever be what I remember from long ago? Where can I find hope in the midst of such insanity? When will God do something about the things that are happening to us? Or maybe

we're just dealing with the grim reality of death, wondering how we can find hope in the midst of death, and wondering how God can do anything about something which seems so final, about something which seems like an end. Where can we find hope in the face of all of these things? Where can we turn when it seems like we have no future? Our bones seem to be dried up, laid out in the middle of this valley.

But Christians, God does give us hope! Because God tells us that these bones can live. That God will do all things for us, because nothing is beyond hope in him. Nothing is too hard for God. And to prove that, we have the resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus lives to show us that we have hope. Jesus lives to show us that we have a future. Jesus lives to show us that nothing is too hard for God. And therefore, because he lives, we don't have just a generic "it might get better," but a certain and confident joy that because he lives, we shall live with him too. Because Jesus lives, all our troubles will come to an end. Because Jesus lives, we know that no one is beyond the hope of God, that God can bring all people to himself. Because Jesus lives, we know that he will be victorious over all the evils that threaten us at this time. God will have the victory in his Son. And because Jesus lives, we know that we shall live with him too. That death cannot take us away from God, and that death cannot take anything away from us that God will not give back to us on the Last Day. Jesus lives! And for that reason, our hope also lives, because we know that God can do all things. God has spoken, and God will do it, because of his Son Jesus Christ.

So let us not lose hope, Christians. Trust in God. Know that he will do the things that he has promised to do. He will not forsake you, because is anything too hard for God? Is anything outside of his power? Even when our bones seem dried up and when it seems like all hope is lost, God will keep his Word, because God has spoken, and God will do it, because he is the Lord.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you that in your Son Jesus Christ you have given us hope in the face of all things. Help us always to trust in you, knowing that nothing is too hard for you, and that in you we have a certain future. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.