

We Have a Life-Giving Spirit

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Pentecost Sunday

May 20, 2018

Pastor Hanneman

How do you know that you are saved? That is the question everyone needs to know. We come here to thank God for the salvation he has won for us. We come here acknowledging that we can't save ourselves. We come here knowing that we shouldn't be saved.

It is that last part that sometimes gets us in life. We know that we shouldn't be saved. In fact, we see evidence of that fact all the time in our lives. So, how do we know then that we are saved when so much of our lives screams at us that we shouldn't?

Just like our salvation we can't look to ourselves for validation of our salvation. Instead, we must look to our God, specifically to the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit we wouldn't have what Christ gave us. If you want to know that you have eternal life, we must look only in one place. At our Life-Giving Spirit.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways". One of those various ways was by means of the pictorial visions granted to the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel had been carried away with the captives during the reign of Jehoiachin, 597 B.C. In the fifth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of the captivity, while by the Kebar River, God called him to be a prophet.

While Jeremiah ministered to the remaining inhabitants of Judah, foretelling their soon to be realized destruction, Ezekiel was God's prophet for those in captivity. Because they had already been deported, you would have thought the idea of Jerusalem's eventual fall would be self-evident, and yet they persisted in falsely believing they would be returned to Judah and find Jerusalem standing.

God could not allow this erroneous idea, this false security, to stand. God could not be God and allow Jerusalem to remain standing! Spurning the grace of God, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had called down upon themselves his judgment. God had warned them repeatedly, and if now like an inconsistent parent God would not carry through on his threat, his words would mean nothing.

But God, the great "I AM," is faithful to his every word. And so, Jerusalem would be destroyed. All those who exalt themselves against God and his Word will be destroyed, including the very nations God had used to humble Judah. Those heathen nations too in their pride would also feel the painful smart of God's righteous judgment.

Was there any possible hope for Judah? Someone hearing Ezekiel speak might have asked that question. So much of what Ezekiel had to report had been God's justifiable anger against Judah. The resulting judgment of God upon Judah, as Ezekiel was to report it to the exiles in Babylon, would culminate now in the total and complete destruction of Jerusalem.

Was this the end, the absolute end for Judah? Would not even a remnant remain, as God had previously announced? Yes, there would be a remnant and more than just a remnant. Out of the destruction of Judah, spiritual Israel, the New Testament church, would rise. It is this remarkable rebirth, this regeneration produced solely by the Holy Spirit, which Ezekiel describes in chapter 37.

Ezekiel is sent by God to a valley filled with dry bones. Who are these bones? We don't know. We don't even know how long they had been there or even if this was a real valley or simply a vision. These details were not important. What was important was if these bones could live again.

Ezekiel gives God an amazing answer, ***"Sovereign LORD, you alone know."*** The answer is amazing because Ezekiel doesn't try to figure it all out on his own but puts his full trust in God to determine. Then the Lord goes to work. He has Ezekiel prophecy to the bones so that they could live. Ezekiel does what he is commanded and right before his eyes he sees his words coming true. Soon these bones came together, they received tendons and flesh, soon skin covered their bodies, and finally the breath of life entered them. When it was all over a vast army stood before Ezekiel. It must have been quite the sight. What did this all mean? The Lord tells us:

¹¹ Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what

the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.”

The people of Israel were dead. Not physically like these bones but spiritually. They had turned their backs on God to the point that he had to destroy everything they loved so that they could turn to him and live again as God's people. When Jerusalem was taken the people realized that they had sinned. They weren't worshipping God, but they were worshipping their city, their temple, their belongings, and their lives. When they realized that their false gods couldn't stand they saw that they had left their real God. Knowing that they had sinned they felt as if they were going to be destroyed and left for hell, as they should.

We too might feel that way when it comes to our salvation. We too have mistaken God's blessings as our gods at times. We can get too attached to our earthly possessions. At the expense of worshipping our God or doing what is right we have chosen to support our families, selfish desires, treasures, or anything else, instead of dedicating our lives to serving and following our God. We know our sins and because of them we should never receive heaven or forgiveness. Instead we should be punished, and it is because of that guilt that we think that when bad things happen we are being punished.

Have you had rough times in your life? Is it directly related to something you often put ahead of God? If you put family first, are you having family problems? If it is life on earth, is your health waning? If it is money, are you struggling financially? Is this God punishing you? Is this God getting even? Is that what he was doing with Judah?

No, that isn't what it is. He isn't punishing you but saving you. He is calling you back to focus on him, so you can live once again or continue to remain in him. Even if you don't value too highly your family, friends, life, or possessions, and still have problems in those areas, God's goal is the same, to save you. He needs all of us to not feel secure in this world just like he couldn't have Judah feel secure in their city or temple.

The Holy Spirit tries to keep you or bring you back to life by reminding you that this world isn't your real home, or your treasures are not everlasting treasure. Our God disciplines those he loves because discipline keeps us focus on what is important. If he must take someone or something out of our life so that we our salvation can remain ours, he will.

But, once our focus returns and we realize we need him and turn to him he doesn't leave us dead in sin. Instead he gives us life in his forgiveness. Judah was going to return and rebuild Jerusalem again. Judah wasn't going to be left for dead and destined for hell. No, God was going to forgive them and bring them back.

This is how our Spirit gives us life. He gets our attention with his law, which can come in a big way like the destruction of Jerusalem to remind the people that this isn't what you need to put your trust in or your hope in because it will fail and fall. Once we realize our sins and repent, the Spirit is there with a new message of forgiveness. He gives us life through the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross.

It was the same at Pentecost. The people were dead, and Peter showed them that by convicting them of Christ's death, but again the Spirit didn't leave them for dead. Through the preaching of Peter and Baptism these people came to faith and lived again.

The Holy Spirit is the one working in your lives everyday to keep you alive in Christ. He really is a major player in our salvation. That is also how we know that we are saved. We have been given the Holy Spirit in our lives to lead us to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God so that we are able to call on his name to be saved. Without the Spirit we couldn't believe this at all. But, it is the Spirit who has convinced us that it is good for us to be here to worship our God for the salvation that he won for us who don't even come close to deserving it.

Because of the Holy Spirit you are not a pile of dry dead bones spiritually. Instead you have eternal life in heaven as your treasure. Amen.