



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

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Can Dry Bones Live?

There is plenty of angst in the country. The Democrats tried to focus on the positives at their convention, but I don't think most people are doing that.

There seems to be a sense of hopelessness hanging like a heavy cloud over much of the land. Christians are crying out for revival, but not many are defining what that means beyond wanting policies and platforms to align with their own personal agendas. Often we hear the familiar scriptural formula quoted from 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Too often this promise is applied to the USA without interpreting it in context. It was given to a specific people (Israel) under the Mosaic Covenant prior to the New Covenant that defines God's people

today. If we are to apply this promise in light of the progressive revelation of Scripture, it would apply to the Church, the body of Christ. Of course any people who will seek to walk according to the order of God's creation will find life more fruitful than people who ignore God's created design.

Some wish to return to a time when things seemed simpler and more moral. Some want to enact laws that they think will instill morality in the society. It is just possible that we have become so secularized that there is not enough virtue in the fabric of the populace to allow such laws to work. For a democratic form of government to work, virtue is essential. Without sufficient virtue in the culture, there is not enough light to dispel the darkness, nor enough salt to prohibit the rot of a society. This is where the Church comes in.

Let's look at the big picture. Adam and

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Eve were God's first people, and they were made keepers of the Garden of Eden. It was their honor and responsibility to develop and protect their garden. They had the authority and the commission. They failed. The garden was overrun with evil as evidenced in Cain killing Able. The serpent ran roughshod over the ground that Adam and Eve had been given.

Later, God established another people, Israel. He gave them the honor of being the keeper and developer of their garden with the prospect that they would spread over the whole earth. They failed.

The big question that God posed for Ezekiel is the same one we face today: **"Can these bones live?"**

Even later, the last Adam arrived. He chose his small group as his people. He kept them from the evil one. He developed them into such world-changers that their influence shook the known world and is still transforming people today. When he ascended, he sent the Spirit to indwell his new people on earth and commissioned them to multiply through new birth until the earth was worked and kept. The privilege and responsibility of infecting the garden of this world with the transforming gospel is that of the body of Christ. Sadly, that body is not healthy, and the world suffers.

God's solution is counterintuitive. It usually is. We remember when Jesus solved a blind man's problem by putting mud in his eyes first. He asked a paralyzed man to pick up his bed. He killed a tree by speaking to it. He calmed the storm by rebuking it. Interestingly God puts great value on the proclamation of God's word.

God took the prophet Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones. It was obviously the site of a huge army's defeat. That was the army of Israel. The bones were scattered so that no one could tell which ones fit with the proper skeleton. It was an impossible situation for anyone of that time to solve. (CSI was not available then.) The big question that God posed for Ezekiel is the same one we face today: "Can these bones live?"

I am asked often if I believe we as nation or the Church have gone beyond remedy—that we are under the curse of God. Ezekiel's answer is right. "O Lord God, you know." That was not a cop-out answer. He was saying that God knows, and I will submit to his conclusion. God's solution: "Preach to these bones!"

It doesn't seem reasonable. Surely there must be something better. Preaching to dead bones that don't even have ears just doesn't seem like the right thing to do. But when Ezekiel did as he was commanded, the bones assembled with flesh on them, and eventually breath came into them, and they stood as a great army: God's army.

Jesus went from village to village "preaching" the kingdom of God. He

commissioned his disciples to go into the whole world preaching. Paul told Timothy to “preach the word.”

What does it mean to preach? It is not just speech. It is announcing what God says. The word *kerygma* refers to the announcement of the essential elements of what God has done in Jesus. Paul told the church at Corinth that it was through the foolishness of preaching (*kerygmata*) that God saves those who believe. It is not just any message delivered from a pulpit. It is the word of God that is fully revealed through the arrival of Jesus who lived righteously, died as our substitute, was raised by the power of God, ascended to rule over what his blood purchased, and sent the Spirit to empower his new people on earth.

When men and women who do not have the **cross in their hearts** try to preach, they point to a solution other than the **gospel solution**.

There are talks, lectures, teachings, inspirations, moral stories, etc., that do not qualify for the kind of proclamation that causes dry bones to live. When the pulpits of contemporary churches are void of kerygmic proclamation, the sheep are not fed, the lame are not healed, and the blind do not see. When men and women who do not have the cross in their hearts

try to preach, they point to a solution other than the gospel solution. They may be skilled in communication but totally lacking in conveying the power of a crucified and resurrected life.

Albert Mohler in his book, *He Is Not Silent*, points to a crucial element in preaching. He says that the uniqueness of our God demands that we preach. Our God speaks! Idols don't talk. Their worshippers can talk to them, but they don't talk back. Our God has spoken, and every time he speaks creation happens.

It is our privilege to convey what he says to the ears of those who need to hear. We must first ascertain what he has said, so we are obligated to be accurate interpreters of Holy Scripture. What he is saying is not only consistent with what he has said but dependent upon what he has said. God's word to any people at any time is a matter of life and death. It is not just helpful. It is essential. When professional and amateur preachers realize this, it causes them to tremble in the presence of God's written and living Word.

Preaching is not limited to those who are considered clergy. It is the privilege of all who have heard the call of God to salvation. Preaching is not limited to style or place. It can be “talked” by anyone who knows the story and embraces it.

Recently an old friend called to encourage me. He told about hearing a message I preached 30 years ago that introduced him to the life-changing grace of God. He demurred as he said, “You are a preacher.

I'm not. I just talk. I'm an old farmer who was captured by God's love, and I never learned to preach. I just talk." I happen to know that for more than 20 years he and his wife have traveled to most of the prisons in Texas and led thousands to Christ. They have impacted more hurting people than most clergy will ever even meet. They just talk the gospel. It is the lot of all who have heard the God who speaks. They can't help but tell of the Son they've met. We have the great confidence that when we do shout it or talk it, the Holy Spirit will move it from the ears of the hearers to their heart. There is where transformation takes place.

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Let's finish the story of Ezekiel and the bones. The people of Israel were amazingly returned to their land to rebuild their temple and city. But that was not the miracle of dry bones living. Only a remnant returned, and their rebuilt city and temple were not like former times. But after 400 years, when most had forgotten about Ezekiel's vision, the promise began to come to fruition.

Miraculously a baby was born of a virgin. It was the whole nation of Israel as one man: the Messiah. He lived out the stipulations of the covenant, paid the penalty of broken covenant stipulations, and met the devil in the wilderness like Israel had done. But he countered each of the devil's lies, defeated death, ascended to the right hand of the father, and sent the Spirit to breathe his life into his people so that this great army could march through the earth putting up "no trespassing" signs along the way as they claimed the ground that was purchased by their Lord. "It belongs to my Lord, and I am caretaker of this garden." These captives of love are not intimidated by valleys of dry bones. They have the word of God in their hearts and in their mouths. They preach the gospel in any situation and expect the Spirit to do what only he can.

If we are willing to trade the illusion of taking back our land by political maneuvering for the counterintuitive exercise of preaching the gospel, we can legitimately hope for revival.



P.O. Box 2022
Colleyville, TX 76034
(817) 267-9224
Fax: (817) 354-5522
Email: Mail@KerygmaVentures.com
www.KerygmaVentures.com