

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, I want to talk to you about restoration. Restoration is the act of bringing something back to its original condition. When you think of restoration, you probably first think of an old car or house that's in poor shape. It needs restoration, right? Restoration can be a small project or a big project.

Last week, when our car was parked along a street, a woman driving by in her minivan misjudged distances and swiped her vehicle along the front driver's side of the car, mainly hitting the bumper. The damage isn't bad. An auto body shop estimated the repairs will cost about \$800. That's a relatively minor repair. The cost and effort of restoration: not so much.

Other restoration projects take a bit more. When I was in college, my best friend drove a 78 brown Ford Pinto. Yes, the kind that was known for blowing up when you hit the back end. The car was rattling piece of junk. Driving it the highway was terrifying thrill, as the car rattled and struggled its way up to 55 mph, we felt like we must be going 90! A couple years later, my friend told me how he was getting in the car one day, put his foot down on the floorboard, and it went right through to the ground... totally rusted through. That was the end of the Pinto. Could someone have taken that car and restored it? Theoretically, yes, but 1) it wouldn't have been worth it, and 2) it was a job an amateur in his garage could not have handled. It would have needed professional restoration with industrial tools.

So continuing with that restoration theme: I want to propose to you today that you and I are need of restoration as well. We need to be brought back to the original condition humans were in when God created them. The Bible tell us that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. They were holy, blameless and true. The law of God was written perfectly in their hearts, and they had a holy desire to follow in God's footsteps. Spiritually speaking, they were perfectly healthy, vibrant, and whole.

We are not. The question is: How far are we from the spiritual vibrancy of Adam and Eve? Are we like our car with a little paint scraped off and couple dents to fix? Do we need minor restoration? Or are we like the 78 Pinto with the floorboard rusted through, rattling, clanging and shimmying down the road? In other words to we need a professional restoration?

I will suggest to you, friends, that neither would be adequate to restore us to original condition. We do not need minor restoration. Even professional restoration would not help the condition we are in. The truth is, we are in need of *supernatural restoration*. That's right, we are so far from the original condition in which God created Adam and Eve... we are so broken, so out-of-spec, so rusted out, so... DEAD... that it literally would take a miracle to restore us. It would take a supernatural act of God to fix us.

I suspect some of you might be thinking I'm exaggerating. So let's turn our attention to the portion of God's Word before us today and see how God describes our current condition. Then you decide for yourself if "supernatural restoration" is an exaggeration. We turn our attention to Ezekiel 37. Quick context: Ezekiel was a prophet whose ministry took place not in Israel, but in exile in Babylon. He was ministering to God's people in exile. This was an absolute low point in Israel's history. After centuries of wickedness and unbelief, God finally allowed Israel to be conquered, his holy city, Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was destroyed, and the brightest,

strongest, most capable citizens were deported to Babylon. Ezekiel was one of them. The people were in despair. They have been on the receiving end of the wrath of God, and they were hurting. They didn't know if God would ever love them again. They knew they were in need of restoration, but they were convinced it would never be.

Listen to the vivid vision God gave to his prophet:

Ezekiel 37:1-14 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

Can you see the vision Ezekiel saw in your mind's eye? He's taken to the middle of a valley and all around him are human bones. Bones scattered. Bones everywhere. God wanted to make sure Ezekiel understood two things: 1) How many there were. (He led him back and forth among them. 2) Their condition: Dry. These weren't freshly dead people. Or as they put it in the movie "Princess Bride", these people weren't "mostly dead." There was no CPR that was going to bring them back. They are dead, decayed, and the bones are completely dry. Don't even think of skeletons, because the bones were scattered around, not even resembling a human body anymore.

What do these bones symbolize? If it's not obvious enough, God explains for Ezekiel:

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

God allowed them to be taken into captivity. Their country, capital and temple were destroyed. Much of Ezekiel's prophecy in his book continues to speak God's anger at the people of Israel because many of them continue to be stubborn, rebellious and unbelieving.

But it seems the stern warnings from God, and the earthly consequences of their sin (exile) were finally bringing them around. The people had gone from arrogance to despair. Before exile they thought they did not need God. After their exile, the prophecies and the suffering, now they thought they could no longer be restored by God. He cut them off. Their hope is gone. They were cut off. They understood they didn't need minor restoration. They didn't need professional restoration. They needed an impossible restoration. There was not hope. They would not be restored. Their hopes of being restored were no more likely than life returning to dry bones scattered around a desert valley.

Let's pause there and let me ask you: where are you at right now? Are you more like Israel pre-captivity, or Israel in exile? In other words, are you trending toward self-confidence and self-sufficiency? Do you struggle with overconfidence? Do you think you're not in much need of restoration? At most a minor restoration might be in order?

If that's where you're at, listen: you're in danger. And you're only fooling yourself. The overconfident person says, "I'm pretty close to good enough. I doubt God has much against me. I'm only in need of minor restoration. I already go to church. I'm a pretty good parent / child. I'm a pretty good employee / employer / retiree / student. I'm fairly good at praying. I sometimes read my Bible. I often help others. I'm usually patient and kind. I am able support myself. I give some money to church. Am I perfect? Well, no, but the kind of restoration I need certainly is on the minor side of things. I'm not dead! Just a little weak in some areas."

If that's where you're at, hear God's warning: **"if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"** We need to take an honest look at God's holy expectations and realize just how far short we have fallen... just how *wicked* we are. Wicked? That's a bit strong, isn't it? No!

Every place in our life that doesn't line up perfectly with the will of God is wickedness. We do not have spiritual life in us. We are among those dry bones that Ezekiel witnessed. Ephesians 2:1, **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."** Not sick, not weak. Dead. Dry bones.

Some of you are on the other end of the spectrum. Your problem isn't overconfidence. Your problem is despair. You know your sins and failings and shortcomings. You know them all too well. You're the ones that would say along with Israel: **"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."** God couldn't possibly love me. In fact, God couldn't possibly help me. I'm too far gone. Restoration is no longer possible! It would take a miracle.

Indeed it would. Let's look back at the text:

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, **"Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O 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. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 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.'"

God gives hope to the exiled people of Israel who had lost all hope. From their perspective, restoration was impossible. They would never be favored by God again. They would never return to their own land again. They were forsaken by God forever. But they failed to understand that God had a *supernatural restoration* in store for them.

Note how this restoration would come about for them. 1) It would happen solely by the will and power of God. They had no role to play in this, it was God's work from start to finish. 2) It would happen by the Word of God. So Ezekiel speaks what God tells him to speak and the bones begin rattling and coming together. So now there were skeletons all around that valley. Then tendons and flesh appeared on those skeletons. Now there were corpses laying all around the valley. One more prophecy... one more word of the Lord and the Spirit of God entered into those corpses and they came alive. They stood up, a vast army. The dead, dry bones underwent a restoration that was impossible. So what else can we call it, but a *supernatural restoration*.

God promised to do the impossible for Israel: to eventually lead them back to their own land and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. God kept his promise to Israel.

Friends, as you look at your life and your spiritual condition, you may despair and think you are beyond restoration. It would literally take a miracle to bring you from spiritual death to spiritual life! It's true. And the miracle happens through the power of the Holy Spirit through the

Word of God. You're here. The Word of God is being proclaimed. And this Word brings life. Are you in despair? Then hear the Good News of God through his called servant. God gives you life through his Son whom he sent to earth a couple thousand years ago on your behalf. Your mistakes, faults and failings have made you dead to God. You're a pile of dry bones. But Jesus breathes life into you. He took your death upon himself. He took the blame for all your wrongs. And he went to the cross with them. There he suffered and died for all of your sins. On the third day he rose again, to guarantee to you that he was successful and you are forgiven.

This Word I speak to you today is the breath of the Holy Spirit. This breath enters into you and fills you with life! Although you were dry and lifeless bones, he has made you alive, vibrant and whole! By the Spirit's power not only are you alive, but there is an entire army of believers worldwide that now stands, supernaturally restored by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Friends, this what Pentecost is all about. This what we celebrate today. You have no reason and no strength to believe in Jesus or to restore yourself. But the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with his gifts, set you apart and kept you in the true faith. Celebrate this life-giving work of the Spirit today, friends! Celebrate the sure and certain hope that you have in Christ Jesus! Celebrate your baptism where you were crucified and died with Christ, and rose with him in his resurrection! Celebrate the eternal life you will receive when Jesus returns... even if your body is dead and in the grave, by the powerful word of Christ, your body will rise and live, and you will be with Jesus forever in heaven. Friends, on this glorious day of Pentecost, celebrate the supernatural restoration that God has given you!