

It's the driest and hottest spot in North America. During 1929 it didn't rain at all. The highest temperature ever recorded in North America was there in 1913. You thought last summer's consecutive days over 100 degrees was bad. Try 154 days straight over 100 degrees back in the summer of 2001. Hot temperatures, lots of sun, very little clouds, hardly any rain and you get a place where not a lot of life survives. This is Death Valley California.

Thanks to air conditioning when the temperature gets over 100 degrees and it's just unbearably hot we can sit inside comfortably and talk about how hot it is outside. When it downpours rain we can still drive our cars because of windshield wipers and headlights. These and all sorts of other advances all work together to give us the impression that we've got our lives under control. We actually live pretty well. With minor adjustments we'll just keep on going and we'll be in control of our future.

It's hard to imagine life not continuing as it always has. The destruction of everything we know and love or our own destruction is almost impossible to imagine. The people of God couldn't either, even though they were in captivity in Babylon. They believed Jerusalem was alright and soon they'd be returning. God sent Ezekiel the prophet to harshly tell them, no. Jerusalem was destroyed and they weren't returning quickly. God's judgment was upon them. But there was hope. On this Pentecost Day we examine Ezekiel's vision from God in the first lesson to see how God connects his people's future to our future...

Pentecost power in the valley of bones
Dead and dry without God
Alive in the Holy Spirit

The residents of New Orleans fleeing Hurricane Katrina didn't have a clue when they'd be back. As they left and waited to return each probably hoped and prayed their house or apartment would be spared. That's all they could hope for. God's people, Israel had to leave involuntarily. God was using the Babylonians to punish his people and haul them off as slaves. They didn't know when they would return, if ever. They didn't know what would become of their beloved nation, homes, or the temple. They hoped for the best. Through the prophet Ezekiel God gave them the worst.

Israel fell into despair. Hear their words. **"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off."** Ezekiel's vision showed they were right. In the vision Ezekiel stood in a large valley. The valley floor was filled with bones. All through the valley, as far as he could see were dead dry bones. God led Ezekiel to understand just how dead these bones were and that nothing he could do would bring them back. God asked him, **"Son of man, can these bones live?"** Ezekiel could only answer, **"O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."** Israel in captivity was dead and dried up just like these bones. They were without God, and without him they were nothing.

It's the time of year for commencement addresses at college and high school graduations. The lofty language of a commencement address is meant to inspire. It's meant to remind the students now graduating of the possibilities for them. Really most commencement addresses are all about the graduates. Pumping them up, building up their egos, and telling them they can do anything. A good one will have the students thinking only about themselves and what they can accomplish going forward. That might be the way you feel today, like you can't be stopped. You might be thinking you've got your whole future planned and you'll do okay. The picture of dead dry bones in the middle of a true death valley isn't even registering. We get thinking there's no harm in living for today and enjoying the successes and the pleasures. We think we're living it up. God sees us as dead dry bones in our sins.

Wait just a minute. God isn't done with the vision to Ezekiel. **"Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord!'"** Ezekiel was to speak to the dead dry bones the only thing powerful enough to overcome; the dead dry bones were going to hear the Word of the Lord. It is a powerful unstoppable force that brings the Lord's promise of renewal and restoration. These don't happen apart from the Word. There renewal and restoration centers on Christ Jesus and comes through the Holy Spirit. Death must always give way when Christ is proclaimed by the Holy Spirit in the Word. So Pentecost power happens in the valley full of dead dry bones that don't have God.

That same promise of renewal and restoration is promised to us. We live like dead dry bones in our sinfulness without God. But we have been brought into contact with the Word of God. The Holy Spirit has utilized that Word to get into our hearts. Pentecost power has worked its way through our hearts and we're no longer dead dry bones without God. The gospel and the Holy Spirit conquered our spiritual death and brought us to Jesus and Jesus to us. We're restored. We live confident in this restoration.

The noise sounded like a rattling. It was the sound of the entire valley of bones moving. A miracle was taking place all around Ezekiel in the vision. **"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."** The bones became fleshy bodies again. But then it stopped. The flesh and skin were there but they still seemed dead and lifeless. God's Pentecost power wasn't done. They would be made alive in the Holy Spirit.

The “so what” moment for the Israelites regarding this vision was for them to see they had specific promises. God hadn’t forgotten about them in Babylon. Once left for dead they were going to be raised and God the Holy Spirit would breathe into them and they would be restored. This restored Israel would be the nation out of which a Messiah, a Savior would come for the whole world. Restoration of Israel was of extreme importance because it was how God would save you and me. Only God the Holy Spirit could do that.

Not convinced you’re like dead dry bones without God? Not convinced that your spiritual situation is bad, even deadly? Listen to the description Paul leaves us with in Ephesians, **“You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.”** Spiritually dead you could do nothing that pleased God. It takes a miracle of God for you to become anything else but dead dry bones.

This is the miracle of Pentecost. Jesus’ physical presence in the world is gone but he’s closer than ever. He sends the Holy Spirit to work among people of this world and bring their dead dry bones to life with the breath of life. The breath of life brings with it eternal consequences. That breath is the new spiritual life we have in the Holy Spirit. But where can you get that breath? It comes only through means, the Word of God and the sacraments. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God you read, listen to, and think about to focus you on Christ. The Holy Spirit works through the sacraments to connect you to Christ. So you are brought to faith in Christ. Such a gracious, life-giving act reveals the Lord to be a God of grace and mercy.

So we are to continue to share that life giving act many times over. As Peter said in his sermon on the first Pentecost, **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** We must bring the people we know into contact with the Word and let the name of the Lord work on them so they might be saved. We are to make use of the Pentecost power to bring dead dry people back to life. We are to bring the Word into contact with them so that the Holy Spirit might breathe on them the breath of life.

Death Valley is a place you don’t want to try and live. In fact many things can’t live there. The valley Ezekiel saw had no one alive. Just dead dry bones picturing people without God. This is how you and I would be without God too. But God worked a miracle among us like he did in that vision. We have been raised to new life. Not a physical resurrection yet, but rather a spiritual resurrection to new life. God has breathed on us the breath of his Holy Spirit which gives life. That life is the new life we will inherit in heaven. Pentecost is the day we remember the work of that Holy Spirit to create faith in our hearts and give life to our dead dry bones in Christ.