

ANOTHER YEAR?

(Led by the Spirit)

Another year_ what does that mean to you? Do you see it as a fresh slate full of new opportunity? Or as just another page being turned in a dull and dismal story? Do you anticipate change or just more of the same? Do you expect good things, or have you resigned yourself to bad times?

To be honest, I am concerned for the future. Though there are things already on my calendar that Lord willing, will not only take place but will also pave the way for a better tomorrow, there are more things that are uncertain and out of my control than I care to admit. I don't like the way some things are heading. I do not know everything what lies ahead_ and neither do you_ but I do know that God gives me some freedom to determine direction.

Turn to **Ezekiel 37**_ as we consider this further as it relates to our future.

¹ The hand of the LORD was on 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. ² 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. ³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, You alone know." ⁴ Then He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ 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.' " ⁷ 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. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army. 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.' "

God's prophet had been caught up by the Spirit_ and given a vision. He was granted insight into the hearts of the people. He saw that their hopes had been dashed. Their dreams had dried up. Their future appeared bleak. The life had been sucked out of them. Not only were they depressed, they are portrayed as lifeless corpses. No, worse than that: they are like dead men's bones_ left for so long in the sun that there's not a hint of life left in them,

That's a pretty sad state. It would seem they are beyond help. There's no chance of revival, let alone resurrection. The only thing left to do is have a funeral and bury the remains. Yet, Ezekiel is told to preach to this "*dead church*." He's to tell the congregants that God's not done with them yet. He's to announce God's intention to re-create them, restoring them to life and health. For He was about to breathe new life into them by giving them His Spirit so they could become a mighty army for Him. That's pretty incredible.

Now_ I'd be surprised if you haven't thought of at least something that you'd like God to do for you personally in this New Year. You may want a relationship restored. Or health returned. Or finances recovered. Or love rekindled. God can do all that and more. But, the primary application here is not what He can do for you or me, so much as what He can do for His church. **Let's be honest, many churches lack vibrancy_** if they ever even had it in the first place. Some are but skeletons of what they once were. Some were never very alive to begin with.

When I was once being interviewed for a pastor's position, I was told by one of its elders that it was a "healthy" church_ and by his standards, it was. The building was in good shape and there was money in the bank. Most people seemed to enjoy one another's company_ and smiled a lot. Yet, before long I saw signs that, like most churches, it wasn't as healthy as he thought it was.

Like in most churches, there were a few "members" who were still "dead" in their sins. Others were stuck in a spiritual rut, unwilling to grow or to learn or to serve. The smiles of some turned to frowns, even scowls. if they didn't like what they heard or were challenged to step out of their comfort zone. Some members were struggling with addictions. Some gossiped and complained. Some marriages were in deep trouble. Some families were dysfunctional. And there was a lot of discontent. If you didn't know better, you'd think I was describing a church full of people trying to rise above their sin and shortcomings by their own strength. Of course, Ezekiel's vision tells us how foolish that is.

Would you believe I was naïve enough to think I could revive that church with a few sermons? That I thought some new music might pump life into it? That some well thought out programs might do the job? Again, Ezekiel's vision tells us how foolish that is. What, if anything, is the solution?

There's only one. I believe God is calling me today to **prophesy to some dry bones**. Be it for you or for me or for this church or any other_ if we are to be what God wants us to be, we will need to accept the simple truth that, in and of ourselves, we are completely without power to live and to breathe as God intends. No matter what our talents, no matter how smart we think we are, or how much we think we got it together, we cannot be the church God calls us to be.

Yet, as desperate as our situation might be, we are not without hope. The only problem is that before the Lord God can knit us together again, before He can put meat on our bones and breathe new life into us, before He can wake us up and raise us up to be a mighty army for Him_ we have to die. And I don't mean just a little bit. Listen carefully to two passages in quick succession:

(ROMANS 6:3-4)

**DON'T YOU KNOW THAT ALL OF US WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH?
WE WERE THEREFORE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE
DEAD THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE.**

(2 CORINTHIANS 5:17)

THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION; THE OLD HAS GONE, THE NEW HAS COME!

So, today_ would you agree with me in prayer to die to ourselves and call upon God to resurrect us? Will you this day admit your absolute dependency upon Him to light the fire in your soul again? Will you join me in surrendering our desires in exchange for His will? In trading our puny agendas for His holy agenda? He is the only hope we have for **raising these dry bones**.