

BONING UP FOR THE FUTURE

“Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord...I will cause breath to enter you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin...And you shall live” From Ezekiel 37: 1-14, The Valley of Dry Bones

In the movie *Little Big Man*, Chief Dan George portrays a chief of the Cheyenne. He’s blind, but he sees how things are. His people are under attack by the white man and can’t fight them off. He says they’re going down a road that leads to nowhere, and so he’s just going to go lie down and die. He’s old and he’s had enough. Have you ever felt that way? So discouraged and hopeless you felt like lying down and dying?

Rev. Craig Barnes once wrote, “I am always amazed by this, but often when people’s lives have been interrupted by a great tragedy, the first thing they do is stop coming to worship. I used to think this was because they were embarrassed by their loss of a loved one, or a job, or health. But I have discovered that more often the reason people stop worshipping is that they feel they have lost their God. To stand in worship beside so many who are singing praise to the Lord is too much. This, of course, is one of the tragic ironies of our soul – in the times that we most need to worship, we find it most difficult.”

Harry Summers once told me about a bumper sticker that said, “If you’re not feeling close to God, who moved?” which would have benefitted Ezekiel’s people in Babylon. Taken into exile to serve the Babylonian Empire after Jerusalem fell, these Jews actually had considerable freedom. They could marry, build homes, raise crops, engage in commerce, and worship their God. But because they weren’t in their own country where they wanted to be, they didn’t feel like worshipping, didn’t feel close to God.

We can find ourselves in all sorts of situations in which we see no good future, just as these Jews in Babylonian captivity saw none. They thought they were going to be stuck there forever. That was until Ezekiel had a vision in which the Lord set him down in the middle of a valley filled with bones. Ezekiel was told to prophesy to these bones (see above). The bones then stand, are covered with flesh and skin, and begin to breathe.

Remember that visions mean what they mean not what they say. God then tells Ezekiel what this one means. *“These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost....’ Therefore, prophesy, and say to them ... ‘I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act.’”*

We can bone up for an unknown future right now. We can gather with others for worship, study scripture, and pray. Engage in the practices that will keep us going should the future not be what we hoped for. But the bumper sticker also bears remembering, “If You’re Not Feeling Close to God, Who Moved?” When the chief in *Little Big Man* realized that lying down and waiting to die wasn’t the thing to do, he got up off his buffalo robe and went home for supper. – DJ