



We Need Revival!

Recently I preached in Tomatin, a village just south of Inverness. It was their communion weekend. At the other end of the parish, near the village of Dores, the annual Rockness Festival was being held. Some 30,000 people gathered there for a weekend of rock music — and, no doubt, drunkenness, drugs and immorality. That Friday night one of the Dores elders came into the vestry and said, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful to have that huge crowd coming to hear the gospel!' Indeed how thrilling it would be to have tens of thousands gathering for a communion weekend, celebrating the death of Christ and worshipping our risen Saviour! Is it possible? Of course it is. Our God is almighty. He converted Saul of Tarsus from being the leading enemy of the early church to being its most zealous promoter. On the day of Pentecost He converted 3000 people and He hasn't changed. His arm has lost none of its ancient power. He *'who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance'* and before whom *'the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance'* (Is. 40:12, 15), can He not cause a nation to be born, and born again, in a day (Is. 66:8)? We need faith — to look for great things from a great God.

A Valley of Dead Bones

One day the Spirit of the Lord took Ezekiel to a valley where there were dead human bones. There were many bones and they were white because they had been dead a long time. God asked the prophet, *'Can these bones live?'* (Ezek. 37:3). The picture of the bones is explained: *'Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts'* (v 11). Look out on Scotland in our day; it is like the valley of bones. Our towns and villages are full of people but as far as God is concerned they are spiritually dead — they are just like white bones, long dead and bleached in the sun. Millions are lying in a state of total depravity and amongst these dead bones only a few living people walk.

The dead cannot see. They have no eyes to behold the invisible, the spiritual and the eternal. They cannot see God in His holiness, themselves in their sin, Christ the great Saviour, the hell to which they are going or the heaven which they will certainly lose. They are deaf to the warnings of God through His providence and Word, the call of the Gospel and the pleading of friends. They are dead to God and spiritual things with a total inability to do anything good or to take one step on the road to heaven. They are rotten and stinking before God in the pollution of their sin.

White bones have no sign of life or interest in it and is that not how we find most people? Many in our society have lots of money, houses, jobs, family, health and strength and have no sense of need for God to help them. Evolution explains away origins and they feel no need to recognize a Creator.

When they think of death and their consciences trouble them modern religion provides them with the answer — your good works will save you, or the Mass and the priest and anyway God is a God of love which means surely that there is no hell and all will go to heaven. If they do feel a little bit anxious about the future then there are drink and drugs and entertainment to make them forget death. Evangelical religion is considered old-fashioned and irrelevant. How white the bones are!

Have you ever visited one of the great cemeteries in our cities? Have you thought of the millions of bones lying buried there? Have you imagined what it would be like if there was a resurrection, the

thousands rising from the graves? But these bones are dead. There is no point in a minister going to a graveyard and preaching to the earthly remains. But is this not the situation in which we find ourselves spiritually? We preach, we witness and we seek to evangelise but the devil laughs at us and says we are wasting our time. Unbelief arises in our own hearts and we despair. 50,000 people will gather to see men kick a leather ball around a field but often 50 will not come together to hear the glorious gospel being proclaimed. And when the gospel is preached to sinners it seems to make no impression. We cry with one of old, *'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain'* (Is. 49:4) and, *'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?'* (Is. 53:1).

Can These Bones Live?

This is a strange question and surely the answer is obvious. Ezekiel never saw a resurrection and neither have I. There were two boys in Old Testament times raised from the dead, one by Elijah and the other by Elisha. There was also the case of the man whose body was hastily dumped in Elisha's grave — the funeral march ending quickly when Moabite raiders appeared. He revived when his body touched Elisha's bones. Those few cases were of people who had only recently died, but here was a valley full of white bones, the flesh all having rotted away.

I remember some years ago a man died just before the service in church one Sunday. The paramedics came and attached a machine to him. They sent a high voltage current through the body which made it jump, but he was still dead. All their attempts to resuscitate were in vain. Sometimes of course the paramedics can get a heart, which has stopped, to start beating again. But what use would there be for the paramedics to come and attach their electrodes to white bones? If the person is just dead there might be some hope but with the scattered skeletons there is none.

Yet Ezekiel knows that God is almighty and so is reluctant to say that the bones cannot live. Is there anything beyond God's power? He wisely responds: *'O Lord God, thou knowest'* (Ezek. 37:3). Can the dead bones in Scotland live? Can the thousands and millions of our fellow-citizens be born again? God is able to do it, but is He willing? *'O Lord God, thou knowest'*.

God's Command

God commands Ezekiel to prophesy with the words: *'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord'* (vv 4-6). Notice the 'I will'. It is God's work from beginning to end. Sometimes people say that you must repent and believe the Gospel to be saved, and that is true and our duty. But at the same time we must realize that dead bones can do nothing. Salvation is not of works lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:9). Similarly it is often said that if the church would humble herself, repent and pray there would be a revival. Now repentance and prayer are indeed our duty but, again, we are as unable to stir ourselves up to repentance and earnest prayer as dead bones. It must have felt very strange to Ezekiel to preach to white bones. Peter questioned the wisdom of launching out into the deep and letting down the nets after they had toiled all night and caught nothing (Lk. 5:5), yet at the command of Christ he obeyed and they enclosed such a shoal of fish that the 'net brake'. We too must preach, witness, evangelise and pray. That is our responsibility and the results are in God's hands. In His time and in His way He will give the increase.

A Mighty Miracle

As Ezekiel speaks there is a noise — a shaking and rattling. The bones start moving. Bone comes together with bone and then joints form, sinews grow and flesh attaches to the bones and finally skin covers them. What an amazing sight! Eventually thousands of bodies are lying there, but they have no life and Ezekiel is totally incapable of resurrecting them. Sometimes we see people showing an interest in Christian things. They begin to come to church, they read their Bible and

they pray. But after a while they return to their old ways. Whatever happened they were not raised from spiritual death nor had the miracle of the new birth occurred. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. Turning over a new leaf will not do. So Ezekiel is given a further command: *'Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live'* (Ezek. 37:9). And we are told that as Ezekiel spoke, *'the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army'* (v 10). God raises an army out of the valley of dead bones.

We too must have confidence in God. It is easy to become discouraged. Without the Spirit nothing is achieved. Ah yes, but when the Holy Spirit is poured out multitudes are converted, a great army is formed and Christ goes forth conquering all His enemies: *'Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him'* (Ps. 72:11). It is vital for us to remember that we are on the winning side. The best is yet to be. The followers of King Jesus will be as the sand by the seashore and as the stars of the sky for multitude. Keep on making known the gospel and looking for God to do what we can't do but what He has promised. Oh for revival! Arise, Oh God!

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