

Listen to the Word of the LORD

'Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have been completely cut off,' records Ezekiel (37:11). There is nothing for us but the grave. All around us is death, despair, and hopelessness. We see this in the world around us, in our personal lives, and in the church.

Today we have superior means of communication, yet we seem to have less and less worthwhile things to say. We have more food than ever before, yet an incredible amount of people the world over are starving. We have more education than ever before, yet one has to marvel at the stupidity often shown by so-called academics. Never before has Western civilisation had to work so little for so much. The result has been to exchange the problem of overwork for the problem of leisure. Nothing but bones that are very dry.

In our personal lives the dry bones continue to show up as inability to conquer a problem or to live with it, inability to find real satisfaction in our work, or even in the inability to find the right woman for a wife or man for a husband. The dry bones have had our best efforts. The bones still stay dry. We give up hope. When that hope is no longer alive, when we have tried with all our might to make the dead come alive and it refuses resurrection, we get to know what bones are like when they are very dry.

The life of the church too, can often seem like a valley full of bones, bones that are very dry. Since the time of the Reformation the church has lavished praise on the doctrine of the priesthood of all the baptised. In practice it has often meant that each man is now free to misinterpret the Bible in his own way, when what this doctrine really means is that each member of the church has the freedom to share Christ with his neighbour, to *"extol the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light,"* (1 Peter 2:9).

These are some of the dry bones we find in the world, in our personal lives, and in the church.

Yet God raises a significant question to Ezekiel, *"Son of man, can these bones return to life?"* This question leaves us with only one answer, *"Lord GOD, You Yourself know."* That is what God wants us to say, *"You Yourself know,"* instead of, "I just don't know." For in saying, *"You Yourself know,"* we begin to taste hope and victory because God does know.

With all the difficulties we face in this world, our protection must be to always listen to the Word of the LORD. We must never grow lazy in doing this. The challenge we all face is that the calling of the world to listen instead to its words, deceptive as they are, is very powerful, and many find themselves taken captive through these words. When this happens, there is no longer any hearing of God's Word, and no desire to worship Him. The church, and its wonderful gifts, take a back seat. God's places of worship, where He offers free forgiveness of sins through Word

and Sacrament ministry, soon fade away, and disappear. We see this all around us, as church membership gets smaller and smaller, with less interest shown in the activities of the church. It is so easy to find time for everything else, but nigh impossible to find a little quiet time with God. No wonder there are many dry bones. *“Dry bones listen to the Word of the LORD!”*