

The Valley of Death and Resurrection (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

* The unmatched revelation from (Ezekiel 37:1-14) we decide to take as the center point for preaching because it perfectly matches with tradition to speak of the death and resurrection on the 5th Sunday of Lent. However, the solemn preaching on these subjects is still two weeks away. After a brief introduction, let's dive into the matter beginning with something painful. The Scripture says that by the hand of the Lord Ezekiel was brought to the valley of Death, (v1). God showed him the huge communion grave from a different perspective, and it was incredible! The prophet had seen a great number of bones scattered throughout the valley floor. While wondering about Ezekiel, I pondered the idea of quantity. Then I asked myself, *If these human remains were gathered at one place and stacked as a pyramid, then how high and wide would it be?* When I looked for ideas from available resources, I found an interesting one among the works of art. That one belongs to the Russian painter Vasilij Vereshchagin, titled *Apotheosis of War* (1871-1872). It shows a light brown valley. Hardly to be seen are the ruins of an ancient city on the horizon. For the emptiness of land the painter compensated with drawing several desiccated trees. But these things are only details, meanwhile the impressive object is in the foreground of the scene. It is an enormous heap of white human skulls built up into the cloudless sky. If we look at this construction from a distance, it seems pretty much like one of the Egyptian pyramids. The last detail in the scene can be attributed to a saying in (Mat 24:28), *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.* Accordingly in the picture we see several black vultures. They search for a prey but in vain because there are only dry bones scattered around. Friends, have you had feelings that the scene portrays the idea of a post-apocalyptic desolation, signified with a battle in past, (Rev 16:16).

* Now, we get back to Ezekiel where he had a dialog with God after the vision of bones. And God asked Ezekiel, *Son of man, can these bones live? O Sovereign Lord, You alone know,* was the answer, (v.3). Please note, the question is not about God's abilities to bring the bones into life but His sovereign will to raise the dead. The following dialog shows God's will as He said to Ezekiel, *"Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD,* (v.4). It is beyond of our knowledge how the dry bones or the dead people like the son of a widow or Lazarus could hear and understand the words of the prophets, but in fact they had heard, (1Ki 17:21,22; Luk 7:12; Joh 11:43,44). Therefore, after proclaiming God's words, the bones came together in order; they were covered with flesh and became men and women, but they were still more dead than alive. To make people alive, God commanded Ezekiel again, *Prophecy to the wind, prophecy, son of man, and tell the wind, Thus says the Lord: Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live,* (v.9). And Ezekiel prophesied. To that effect the corpses received

a breath and stood on their feet. It may seem more than amazing but it happened and the number of risen people was exceedingly great, (v.10).

* It seems that the next passage (v.11-14) is a repetition of all story in a metaphorical connotation as it relates to the Jewish people in exile. When God speaks of "opening graves," then for Ezekiel and his listeners it meant that God will bring Israel back from exile to their land; they will mourn and grieve no more.

After that, God's people will know their Savior and the Lord, (v.13). It is an inspired message to the historical house of Israel scattered in Asia, Africa, and Europe until now.

* While discussing the joyful message addressed to Israel, it suddenly flashed back to the vast desolate valley with an enormous pyramid of white human skulls in its midst. Now it seems as a communal grave where the bones of all dead people will be laid together, there who had died and those who will. Isn't it a sorrowful imagery of human destiny if there would be no joyful message of resurrection? In this case we should cry out, *Our bones are dry, our hope has perished; we are cut off*, (v.11). Friends, the reality of our age speaks loud that many people don't know the God of Ezekiel, who also spoke to us in Christ Jesus at the end of ages.

* As it was said before, the number of risen people was exceedingly great, (v.10). *So I prophesied as God commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army*. No doubt, the number of risen people mentioned by Ezekiel was much greater than all the people of Israel in the time of exile. Please note that after resurrection Ezekiel had seen a great multitude that actually is the spiritual Israel, whole number no one could count (Rev 7:9); they are the people from every nation, tribes, and languages. However, if we take into account all that we know about resurrections, we can state that not all bones had heard the prophet and not all come back to life, (Rev 20:6). The truth of selected resurrection also can be seen in the works of several medieval painters who drew the pictures from Ezekiel 37. For example, Matthaeus Merian, Gustave Dore, Bernard Picard, and some others artists left a number of bones, skeletons, and skulls untouched in their paintings. It turns out that not all people were raised up at that particular time.

* The Scripture bears witness that by nature we were born spiritually dead. In this sense all people can be compared with the dry bones scattered throughout the valley of Death. It states that all human beings come to life but spiritually they are dead, as God said to Adam, (Gen 2:17). The great problem here is that the dead cannot know that they are dead. However, many of them don't look like the dead. Instead they are very active in this life, they hurry for pleasures, and *their god is their stomach, ... they set their minds on earthly things*, (Php 3:19). This is a common characteristic of dry bones that cannot hear the voice of the prophets because they plug their ears and close their eyes, *so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears*

and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them, (Mat 13:15). And they will be remaining spiritually dead until the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed, (1Co 15:52).

* Friends, you know that we are living in the time of great opportunity. Today the voice of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, our God can still be heard where the Word of God is preached in truth and where the means of grace are available. The Heavenly Father sent His Son, who was born in the flesh to redeem us from our graves. He suffered death on the cross and died for our transgressions. For a short time Jesus body was laid in the valley of Death but God the Father raised him on the third day and appointed him *to be judge of the living and of the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* (Act 10:40,43).

* Now the sad picture of the valley of Death turned into the valley of resurrection, the word of God was spoken, *Lazarus, come out; Peter, Andrew, John, James come out; Mary, Elizabeth, come out; Friends come out.* All who had heard and believed the Son of Man left their graves, and their number are extremely great, thanks be to God.

Beloved, peace, grace and mercy to you from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.