

The Valley of Dry Bones

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Quite a number of years ago, I got a sermon on the Valley of Dry Bones, an evangelistic sermon, and I preached it around over the country. I wouldn't re-preach it here, but more recently I have been reading through Ezekiel, very carefully reading, and I saw a new thing in this chapter which doesn't touch my previous sermon any, but it's something different. I want to bring it to you tonight, and I particularly want to bring it, at the beginning of this missionary convention, to you, to the people of this church.

Let's look at it together. Suppose you turn to Ezekiel 37 and suppose that we just read that together. Then if the sermon doesn't turn out to be anything, at least we'll have gotten the Word. Ezekiel 37, verses 1 to 10, don't read beyond ten, and you come to that, and they stood on their feet an exceeding great army. There's where we close.

The hand of the Lord, everybody, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about, and behold, there were very many in the open valley, and behold, they were very dry, and he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered and said, O Lord God, thou knowest.

Again, he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus said 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. So, I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone, and when I beheld, O the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above, and there was no breath in them.

Then said he unto me, prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, Son of man, and say to the wind, thus said the Lord God, come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these things, that they may live. So, I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, and exceeding great army.

Father, we pray that Thou will take this old story and make it live in us today. Use it as a lever. Use it, we pray Thee, as a trumpet call. Use it as a signal light, we beseech Thee that we here, may tonight, get in communication with the same Spirit who uttered these words and caused them to be written. Breathe indeed, O Breath, upon us, for Christ's sake, amen.

Now, the only fair thing to say would be that this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. The restoration and salvation of Israel as a nation is yet in God's agenda. He will yet bring it to pass. But its spiritual principles apply universally.

This is what so many of our brethren don't see, that while a prophecy may have fulfillment somewhere historically yet out ahead, and while it may be pinpointed for accuracy as the prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ's life were, the principles that underlie any prophecy apply anywhere, so with the Old Testament teachings. That is why Jesus, our Lord, and the Apostles did not hesitate freely to use the Old Testament in their teaching in the New.

Though they used prophecy and passages which the sharp-eyed expositor would say doesn't belong to us, they used them freely. Apparently, they didn't know they didn't belong to us. They saw something that these expositors don't see. They saw that God is the same God whatever dispensation he's in, or whatever dispensation we're in, and that whatever is a spiritual truth anywhere is always a spiritual truth anywhere.

Therefore, Christ and the apostles could, quote I say, freely from the prophecies of the Old Testament, or from Job, or from Proverbs, or from the Pentateuch, and applying it to the present kingdom of God, the church of Christ now, without in any wise apologizing, because they saw spiritual principles underlying.

Now, let's look at this valley of dry bones. I went over it the other day on my knees, literally on my knees, and I had several versions propped around me, and I went from one to the other trying to see this picture again, and in seeing it I saw some things I hadn't seen before. We're all familiar with it. It was a kind of vision or a picture in the Spirit, for the man of God says, the hand of the Lord was upon me, and he carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.

Now, I submit that that passage, being carried out in the Spirit of the Lord, makes this very difficult to find out whether this actually was a fact, a historic fact, or whether it was a vision, whether he was seeing something that would be. But, whichever, it doesn't make any difference because this is God speaking and putting it before us is a kind of object lesson. And what he saw there was a valley. A valley, obviously a dry valley, and it was filled with bones. The bones must have been rather toward the center of the valley because the prophet was told to walk around them. He walked around them as Nehemiah once walked around Jerusalem.

God always wants his people to walk around the thing and look it over. I have been told, don't pay any attention to circumstances. If you do, you don't have faith. Just look at God. And I have had people pray and then say, Now, don't pay any attention to symptoms. Just look to God. But God always wants us to take in the facts. God believes in a certain realism, and I do. I feel that until we have informed ourselves, our inspiration is very likely to be no more than emotion.

But when we have informed ourselves, have walked around Jerusalem and seen its tragic condition, or walked around the bones there in the valley, and to a Jew that was a terrible thing. And he walked around these bones, when the Bible says it's almost comical if it was not in a very serious setting. And behold, they were very dry. That means, of course, that they were not the hard bone with the animal matter still in them.

But you've seen bones, no doubt. If you're a countryman or have ever been much in the country, you've run onto bones that have been there so long that all the animal matter had gone out of it. Nothing was left but calcium and some other minerals that make up bones, and they'd all become porous. You've seen it, all porous. You used to see the skull of a beast lying, and we boys would kick it around, pick it up, light almost as a feather, and porous, so completely dry, that the only way to describe it is, behold, they were very dry.

And God said to the man, Ezekiel, can these bones live? Now, never in the experience of the man Ezekiel had there ever been a bone live. And of course, the answer would be no, but Ezekiel was a man of God. He had seen heaven opened, and he had seen the glory of God, and he had had the hand of the Lord laid on him until he felt it. And he had heard the word of the Lord whispering to him so clearly that he got every word of it. And Ezekiel, therefore, was, so to speak, not going to be caught unawares. So, he didn't reply.

You remember when Jesus was on earth, He used to ask questions. And after His disciples had been with Him a while, at least if I'd been with Him a while, I'm sure I'd caught on that when the Lord was going to open up some new vest of truth, He turned and quietly asked a question. And He wanted to see who could get it, who was alert and awake there, ready to hear. He'd turn and say, Peter. And Peter would blunder out an answer, sometimes right, mostly wrong.

And this man of God was too spiritual a man, too sighted a man, to answer yes or no. If he'd answered yes, it would have been presumption. If he'd answered no, it would have been unbelief. So, he simply said, I'll hand thee answer the question back. O Lord God, thou knowest.

Well, God said, thank you, Ezekiel. That warms my heart. Now I'll tell you what to do. You begin to preach. In the beginning was the Word. Begin to preach. He upholds all things by the word of His power. He sent His Word and healed them. And when God speaks, there's life and creative power in that word. So, he said, Ezekiel, you preach. And Ezekiel began to preach the Word of the Lord. And as he preached, there was a great rattling, and lo, bone came to his bone.

Now the difficulty before, you see, had been that they had lain there so long that the beasts had eaten everything off of them. And then the rodents had finished what the big beasts had left. And then the ants and the bugs had eaten what the little rodents missed. And then the microbes had rotted away what the insects had missed. And then they had been tugged and pulled by the jackals and lions. They'd been tugged and pulled till the bone was not to its bone. They were all mixed up.

And I used to preach about that as a picture of a sinner. And I think it is a pretty good picture of a sinner. It's a picture of some churches. Bone isn't to his bone. Everything's confusion. We're all mixed up. Big bone here, fastened to a little bone. And they don't match. But when the word of God began to sound, bone came to his bone.

Now it's hard to keep from thinking of this humorously because it was an odd and a strange sight. But all the little bones went where the little people were. And all the big ones where the big people were. And everybody got back to where he'd originally been.

And then that wasn't enough. There they were. There they were, lying dry. Bones where bones belong. But they were still dry and dead. And the man of God went on preaching. And as he preached, he saw flesh begin to build up over those bones. Then skin began to pull up over the flesh. And he went on preaching and said, O Breath, breathe on these. It took the Holy Spirit to finish the work. And when the Holy Spirit had breathed on it, theologically sound, that's getting your bones together. That's theology.

And you know my friends, I can't resist saying, though that's not part of this sermon, that's part of the other one. But I can't resist saying that that's the trouble with a lot of our churches that we've got our bones together and we spend a lifetime keeping our bones in the right places. theologically bones, that is. We're theologically sound. Bone gets to its bone. And we have men who spend a lifetime matching bones. And seeing that this text belongs with this text and this marginal reference here belongs here. And they write books and write hot magazine articles and all the rest. Getting bone to his bone.

But you know you can have a church that's got its bones all right. And its bone is on bone and everything is all right. And God himself couldn't improve it as far as its theology is concerned. And yet it can be just as dead as a graveyard. And it was. But slowly the flesh built up. But that wasn't enough. They were lying there still dead.

And God said, oh, you preach a little more now. Preach a little deeper life this time now. Preach, O Breath of God, come and breathe. And when the Holy Ghost came and breathed on their theology and breathed on their organization then they stood up a great army and began to march.

Now that's the principle. There it lies. That's good anywhere. Old Testament, New Testament anywhere that's good. Just as good in Vietnam. Just as good in India as it is in Chicago, around the world, the way God works. But I want you to know, here note; hear what God commanded Ezekiel to do, and this is really the sermon. What God commanded Ezekiel to do. He commanded Ezekiel to do an unusual thing, but that's not enough. And then He commanded him to do an absurd thing and then commanded him to do an impossible thing. And these three things, these three adjectives, unusual, absurd, and impossible that lay before the man Ezekiel.

And here we are coming into our 36th missionary convention. And there's no use to hide behind and say let's not talk about it. We'll talk up a depression. We won't talk up any depression. We will just say that we're having a recession. And we will also say that this church has undergone some tremendous blows in the last two years such as we never dreamed could happen to us in losses. Nobody got mad and walked out but they moved out. Moved away.

And when I see them, they run and grab me as if I was their long-lost cousin but they're gone. This town or that town or somewhere else and we lost them by the scores. Somebody says well that church is in a mess of dry bones over there. It could be. But I've got a cure for it and I'm going to lay it before you tonight and I'm going to challenge you if you're still challengeable. Now if you aren't challengeable, I'd like to have you come around one at a time shake my hand and tell me so because I won't waste my time on people that aren't challengeable. But he said do the unusual thing.

Now mostly, God's work follows a common pattern. You can get on to the way God works pretty well, usually you can, because God being God and God having a nature that dictates His, to use an awful word. I don't like methodology, his methods of doing things. God is very likely to do two things in the same way and a third thing the same way he did the two. God's work usually, is usual, if you know what I mean. But unusual conditions require unusual acts and Ezekiel faced the unusual.

Here was a valley full of human bones and they'd been lying there unblessed and unburied and un-coffined and unhealed. And they'd been lying there so long that they were so dead that, and so mixed up, literally mixed up, bone on bone, all mixed up, churned by the passing of time. It looked hopeless and yet God commanded this man Ezekiel after seeing if he was His man. If Ezekiel had flunked God's test when God said, Ezekiel, can these bones live, that was his test.

You may be getting a test this week. I hope you don't flunk it. God doesn't say, now, next week, we'll have a test and here's what we'll cover. God just slips in and gives a test as He did to Abraham and many another one, and they don't know they're being tested. Some of you may be tested this week by some little word one of these missionaries will say or some paragraph some sentence uttered by Dr. Alan Fleece. It'll be your test. I only hope you're alert and awake. I only hope that you won't be asleep at the time, or mentally in a state of suspension.

So, this was an unusual thing and now it's a great weakness on the part of religious people that we get used to the usual and we accept it as all-inclusive, and we expect God whenever He does anything to do it the way we had seen Him do it before.

I was talking to that great English evangelist Stephen Olford in New York City last week; we had lunch together. And he said, you know the trouble with us evangelists is, he took himself in on it, he said, we try to transplant a work of God from one country to another. He said it's been done this way in Korea. It's been done this way in England. It's been done this way in Ireland Then they come from Ireland or England, and they try to superinduce that same kind of revival in America and it rarely works. I've never known it to work.

He's one of England's greatest evangelists and yet he admits, he said there's no use. We were discussing a great Irish preacher that Thomas here could tell stories about him as I can and as most everybody can that ever heard of him, Brother Nicholson. He was the great evangelist in Ireland. But in this country, things didn't go so well. You can't enter an unusual situation and do the usual thing, and yet, we expect God always to work the usual way, and we reject whatever varies from it.

Now, this is one of the afflictions of advancing years. This is one of the afflictions of a society that starts to get old. The Christian Missionary Alliance is now an old society. We're up in the 80s. Now, I learned in New York at the board meeting last week that we have to have 20 replacements, 20 new missionaries each year to hold our own. The reason for that is that our missionary society is old enough now so, that retirements and deaths and illnesses are so many that it averages out 20 a year. Just to keep our own, we'd have to send out 21 missionaries every year if we were going to even increase one

a year. Now there's nothing wrong with that. People do get old. Missionaries get old. They get old and have to come home because they're sick and weary or else they just downright die.

Now, that doesn't happen to a young society for the first 25 years of a missionary society, scarcely anybody dies unless they die as they did in our African fields of malaria. They don't die or retire because they're very young like a ball club. Some ball clubs I've been reading; I never attend the games, but sometimes I'll read the sports page, and they say, well, Brooklyn is old. Brooklyn won't make it because they've got too many old men on the team, and by old men they mean men your age, not 45 and 6, and they don't mean old fellas like me. They mean fellas in their 30s, middle 30s. And they say they're old.

Well, my brethren, a missionary society can do the same thing. It can get old and begin to die and retire. And churches can do the same. This church is about 36 about 38 years old now, and that means we've literally buried a generation of our people, literally buried a generation of our people, and we who are left of the older generation, that's those of you whose silver hair or grey or white hair, I mean black hair has turned to silver. You've gotten used to things being done a certain way, and that you have equated with the Bible; and Dr. Simpson and John Wesley and everybody to a point where to vary from that is to be unbiblical and unspiritual.

Now that can become a dangerous thing. Churches die that way, my brother. Churches die that way. That's why it's always good to keep putting young blood into a church, getting young people in positions; getting people who see from a different angle. We tend to go to church and sit down and look at the same, from the same direction.

Now there's some of you that have never occupied a different seat in the last 15 years. You sit in the same part of the church except on those rare occasions when your seat has been taken. Some of you have never seen the left side of my face yet. You sit on the right side, and you have come, you have come to feel that that's the religious thing to do, and you have equated that with spirituality and New Testament doctrine.

Well, that's what we call getting in a rut, and you know what a rut is, brother, it's a circular grave. It is a grave in which you walk around until you beat it down until finally you can't see over. And when you can't see over, they usually retire. But it's too we don't retire before we get so far down in. That's our problem now, rejecting what is not usual and fearing the unusual. And yet, here was God calling a man to do that which positively was not usual. The usual thing to do would be to bury those old bones, but the Holy Ghost had another plan. He wanted to resuscitate them, resurrect them, put flesh on them, skin on them, breathe in them, and have them start all over again, when the devil thought he had them.

Then the second thing was getting worse all the way. It was absurd there's no question about it. This was an absurd thing, and yet I learned from reading church history that oftentimes God causes men to do things that seem ridiculous, they just don't check, you know. We have rules in every society and church. We have rules in the Alliance that they've got to be a certain age and have a certain number of children. If you have more

than a certain number of children, you can't go. But I'm glad we still have spirituality enough to wink and break our rules when they get in our way.

We did it last week. Here was a fine young couple. They were going to one of our fields; they were all set to go. She was brilliant and he was just bordering on something unusual. We were going to send them; they had two babies and then they got a letter up at headquarters and said there's another one on the way. What are we going to do? Does this mean that we won't get to the field. Does this mean now that we're sunk? And those men had enough spirituality to break the rules and appoint them to the field with three kids.

Now that looked absurd, I know. It does to send folks out there with a family so big that the mother has little else to do but to look after them. But I believe God was in that instance. It's the same with age. We had an age, thirty years, and nobody goes out over thirty. It's strange how we do, twist and wiggle calendars when people get up around. We want them on the field and God has honored it. The absurd thing: send anybody beyond thirty to a mission field looks ridiculous because after you've talked English for thirty years, your tongue is so Englishized and Americanized that it's pretty hard to get it twisted around any other language. Yet, some of our greatest missionaries have gone out there when they were above thirty. We break our rules and thank God we still have spirituality enough to do absurd things now.

And then I remember some years ago, a woman applied to the Alliance to get out on the field, and they turned her down. She's too old. I think she was forty some at the time. They always said, we can't send old people to the field. And they supplied around here and there. Nobody wanted her, so she went anyhow. I forget that woman's name. She went down to South America. Brother Thomas no doubt knows who that was, but she went down to South America. And though she was what would be called, middle aged, she got that language. And when I knew her, she was quite an old lady. And she'd had twenty or some years down there of wonderful fruitful service.

It's absurd to send anybody to a mission field after a certain age, but sometimes the Holy Ghost says to some man, can these bones live. And if you're a Bible student you tell God. But you know, if you're a theologian, you tell God off right there, yes or no. You can tell, you know where the text is.

But if you're a prophet you'll listen and wait for God to tell you. And Ezekiel was a prophet, so he didn't try to pin God down to the King James Version. He said O Lord God, you know I don't know about these bones. You've been around longer than I have, God, the Heart from eternity, Thou knowest. And God says, yes, they can live if you will work with me, preach. So, sometimes God does absurd things.

I mentioned this morning about that man fifty-five or six years old that had a bad heart and diabetes, and his friend said, retire. And he said, I'll retire. And he put on four more wheels and more and more tires and went on. That was Jaffrey.

And you will find God doing these things right along, absurd things. But what is an absurdity? It is that which doesn't fit in with our pattern of thinking. But God says the gospel itself is absurd. He says the gospel itself is foolishness unto men. And all these

modern intellectuals that are trying to show how reasonable the gospel is don't know what the gospel is. The gospel is one of the most unreasonable things in the world, and yet in God, from God's standpoint, it's perfectly reasonable, but seen from our fallen world it's an unreasonable thing. And those wise intellectual Greeks, they laughed at it. They said it's foolishness. And the Jews with the theologians, stumbled over it, but Christ said it's the power of God and the wisdom of God to them that believe. There's nothing absurd about it but just looks that way.

Now, here we are 36 years, we've been around here. I have not been, but this church has been, and we've gone through the ringer. Somebody says, all right now, what are we going to do? We're going to do unusual things this year, and we're even going to do absurd things, and things that the world will look at us and say what a bunch of fools those alliance people are. That's the best news I could possibly hear then, the impossible.

Now this was impossible, medical science; no science of any sort, anywhere, could ever have gotten those bones back on their feet. And the greater the work and the nearer to being impossible, the more pleasure God has in doing it apparently. The history of the church is replete with impossibilities, literally replete with impossibilities, God simply fills His history with impossibilities, because you know, ultimately the work of God is creative. Here was nothing. Here was nothing and God spake and there was something. And then here was darkness upon the face of the deep, and a voice said, let there be light, and instantly there was light possible. But there was light impossible.

There was light, and here was a maiden. They don't know how old; some say fourteen or fifteen. I would judge she'd be older. I would think that the little Mary was older. I'd say she's nineteen maybe. And she was there praying, looking up to her heavenly father and a voice said, Mary, don't be afraid. I've come to tell you something you're going to have a son, and she was shocked. She said, oh no, oh no, impossible. This is impossible. And God said in effect, don't say it's impossible. Behold, the Holy One, the Mighty One, the Spirit, trust God.

So, Jesus was born, and Elizabeth so old, and God appeared to her and appeared to the old man first, that you're going to have a son. He said, how will I know these things are so? What a stupid thing to say for a creature, but that's what he said, how will I know these things are so. And Gabriel leaned back on his dignity and said, I am Gabriel, why should you be asking me how can it be? You'll be struck dumb until the baby is born and never opened his mouth again until the baby was born. And they named him when they said, what are we going to name him? He opened his mouth and said, John, and everybody said he's seen a vision. And this is God.

Well, the whole Bible is full of impossibilities and God is the God of impossibilities. But I want to point out something else to you here. It is that on the part of Ezekiel, God can do the unusual and the absurd and the impossible, but on the part of Ezekiel, there had to be clear hearing and deep humility and raw courage and great faith. Now there's a sermon if anybody wants it. You can have it. It's not copyrighted.

But on the part of Ezekiel there had to be clear hearing When you're expecting to hear a thing you don't have to have such good hearing, if you're expecting to hear it. Your

decibel count can be very low, and you'll still hear it, because you're expecting to hear it. But when you're not expecting to hear a thing, it takes a pretty sharp ear to get it. And Ezekiel had that kind of ear. He'd been in the presence of God and seen God lifted up and had heard God speak until his ears were tuned to hear God's voice. And he had to know it was God's voice and not some other voice, because there are all kinds of voices Paul said in the world. It had to be clear hearing and there had to be deep humility.

I've been struck as I read the Old Testament, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. I've been reading it devotionally again and going through it and I've got this. I go through my Bible that way all the time. But this time, I've been through Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and it's amazed me how God has humbled most of his servants. He's made them do things that look kind of ridiculous. And this was that ridiculous thing.

Now, if He had placed before Ezekiel a great congregation of men and said, Ezekiel, preach the Word to them, that would have been proper. Nobody would have been humbled. It would have been alright. But He took him before these bones and said, Ezekiel, preach. The bones there, wasn't even an ear there. The ears had been chewed off long ago, dried away. And it took a lot of humility on the part of this man of God to do something that that was just plain silly, but he did it. And when he did it, God took over. It takes clear hearing and then deep humility to obey God.

Think of Elijah when God said to him, go down by the creek Cherith, and he preached and said there will be no rain. And God said go down by the creek and I'll give you water from the creek. And pretty soon, the water began to dry up. Elijah had preached himself out of water for he had said there will be no rain, and the creek had to have rain to keep going. And the thing had to keep going to give water to the prophet and here was the prophet. What a confusion he was in. He wouldn't have passed if he'd had to make a report to the Superintendent. It would have been a pretty bad report.

Why he would have said, excuse me, Mr. Superintendent, but this is an awful report. I said there would be no rain and God said you drink water, and now I have no water. And when he went down the last time and saw a red lizard sunning himself, for where the water had been, he looked up to Him and said, God, what about this? God said, Elijah, you're too big. I'm trying to make you little, to use you. Elijah I've got to humble you. Elijah I've got to humble you. And this Elijah took his humbling, and then later on here this great, bony mountaineer from the heights of mountains, God said to him, go over to a certain village and a widow woman will feed thee.

Now, some people don't mind living off a widow woman, but brother, you get out among the country people, and you won't find them wanting to live off a widow woman. And I'm sure Elijah being the kind of man he was, was deeply humbled by having to go and ask for a crust from a widow woman. God made him do it. He made him do it.

I've always been so independent about financial things that rather than take a dime too much, I'd toss it back with a red face at a fellow. But you know, before I die, God may have to make me swallow all that. It could be I'll be out with my hat and my wife. I don't know, but I do know that God wants to take all of the pride out of you and he took it all out of the man Ezekiel.

Then he had to have a lot of raw courage. It doesn't take very much courage to do what everybody's doing. You know, a lot of these preachers and evangelists go around over the country, and they have learned the public pulse. They know how to approach the public. They just know about how much they'll get in a given place. And they say they're living by faith, and they're not living by faith at all. They're living by expectation based upon knowledge. That's what it is literally. A fellow says, oh, I have no salary. I trust the Lord, but he takes his offerings when he goes to a town. He calls the right people.

When I go into a town, I wouldn't call a soul, because I've got too much pride. But these brethren, they don't. And so, they go in and they call somebody, and they say it's faith. It's not faith if I come back into Chicago, if I were to leave here and come back and call up Chase. And he'd come to the airport to get me take me out for five-dollar dinner, that wouldn't be faith. That would be crust. And a lot of people, a lot of preachers just live on sheer crust. They've got no pride, just crust.

But it takes an awful lot of courage to do things when there's no example and nobody around you can count on. You know, a preacher can beat his Bible till he breaks the binding declaring that he's trusting God, amen, all the time. He's got it figured out. He knows how much he'll get, about how much, if it doesn't rain of course. If it rains it ruins the offering, but he'll make that up the next time. And we've figured out the public, and we run according to what we know the public will do, and then we call that faith. It's not faith. I say it's expectation based upon observation.

But Ezekiel hadn't anything to observe. Nobody had ever done this before. Here was a man, talk about original. This fellow had to be original, because nobody else had ever been there before, except rats. And it took raw courage, I tell you, to do what God told him to do, without a single example or a friend or anybody anywhere. It took great faith. He had to expect an awful lot of God. No religious tricks would work here, you know. We learn religious tricks. I won't use them. If I know that I'm using them, I won't use them. But I see them everywhere.

People use religious tricks, you know, just how to lower their voice at the right moment, just what to say, just when to introduce a certain story. It's worked before and of course it'll work here but there weren't any religious tricks among those bones there was nothing you could do; no psychology, no positive thinking, no calling in the mayor to make the opening speech. That's the way we do now. We call in the mayor to make the opening speech, and then the chairman gets up and says the mayor sends his regrets that he was not able to be here, but he sent so-and-so. And then some alderman makes the speech and we've seen that happen so often.

But nobody could work any gag like that here. It was either God or complete defeat for a man to stand up there and practice preaching a sermon to a pile of bones without a precedent, without a friend, without anybody even to say, amen. Nobody to help him there. He stood preaching to bones. That took raw courage, and he had to depend on God an awful lot. Listen to me, in the beginning of a missionary society or denomination, the leaders are thrown back upon God by the hostility of the public and by the fact that they've had a spiritual experience. And the public throws them back on God then, when they go on and get organized and get going according to the rules of the game and get their little black books of regulations.

Then instead of turning to God, they turn to gimmicks. It's happened in every denomination. You say, is it happening in the Alliance? Don't look at me. Of course it is. I used to call a night of prayer and get through to God, and now we turn to gimmicks here and there. Ezekiel hadn't a gimmick, not one. Nothing would work there; psychology, how can you work psychology on a bone?

Psychology, by the very definition of the term, has to have the mind and soul. There's no soul there, no mind there, no place for a mind—bones. But the text I used the last two Sunday nights I preached here was the text, but wisdom is justified of her children, and I can use it again. Here all this looked ridiculous, and all this was a humbling of a great man, but it was justified in the outcome. Lo, they stood up on their feet, a great army.

Now, what I want to know tonight is, are you hearing anything? Have you been hearing anything, or must I make the application? Ezekiel is speaking to us here in this church now. Out of the past, Ezekiel is alive again speaking to us out of the past. Or better, the God of Ezekiel is speaking to us out of the eternal present and is saying, I'm the God of Ezekiel. I'm the God of Elijah. I'm the God of Daniel. I'm the God of the impossible. I'm the God of miracles.

Now, are we going to sit down and nurse our wound? Lick them, and each look at the other and shake a mournful head or are we going to look to God and go ahead. I believe we're going to go ahead. And I call you, I call you to go ahead. I don't mean I'm preaching to bones; I well know better. But I'm saying there are principles here that apply to this church, this thirty-sixth anniversary, thirty-sixth convention and we ought to apply it. As soon as you hear somebody say oh but wait.

But you say, wait a minute, the Lord God of Ezekiel is here. The Lord God of Ezekiel and there never was a bone so dry that the breath of the Holy Ghost won't wake it up. And there never was a life so empty that the Holy Ghost can't fill it. And there never was a life so impure that the Holy Ghost can't cleanse it. And there never was a church that fought tough enough, that if they stuck together and prayed and obeyed God, God wouldn't bring them out to victory. And He'll do it for us. Not only this convention, but for the future that lies just before us.

So, let's not worry. Let's make our pledges. Let's plunge in. Let's do the absurd thing. Let's do the impossible thing. For God Almighty specializes in impossibilities, and who are we but the children of God. And if we're indwelt by the mighty Christ who commanded the waves to be still and the winds to be silent, He'll carry us through. And if anybody tries to put a purple wreath around your neck, you toss that wreath away and say, I'm not wearing graveyard wreaths. I'm believing God and that the God who started us here 37 or so years ago, hasn't left us yet, and He's with us and we're going forward, not back. Amen?

All right I want to ask our district superintendent who carries this work on his heart along with all other, to come down here. We're going to stand. I'm going to ask our brother Thomas to lead us in prayer and to pray that God will so fill us with hope and faith and courage and expectation, that we'll stand up and march, a great army. let us stand.