

NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS,

MISSIONARY OF THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH TO CHINA.

EDITED BY

M. F. BARBOUR,

*Author of "The Way Home," "The Child of the Kingdom,"
"The Soul-Gatherer," &c.*

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XIV.

THE VALLEY OF VISION.

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Ezekiel XXXVII.

THERE is so much in this chapter, that we cannot attempt to explain equally all parts of it; but shall merely make a few observations on what appear to be the principal objects offered to our consideration, remaining longer or shorter on each as the Lord may direct.

The first thing which seems pointed out, is the valley of vision itself, as it is called in another place, and of which the context clearly shows us the meaning. The valley filled with bones, represents a place filled with the remains of soldiers once alive. It was as the charnel-house of Israel, full of the slain, who, after death, had undergone the process of dismemberment and dissolution. Their bodies had first become lifeless, then suffered corruption, putrefaction, and decay; and not only so, but the very flesh had entirely left their bones, and they had become bleached, and whitened, and separated one from another; the ligaments, sinews, and joints being all broken, and everything but the actual bones dissolved and disappeared. The bones were "very many and very dry." What more complete picture of desolation and death could be given; and yet it is not a picture in the least too vivid of the state of moral death into which man has since the fall been sunk. He is dead, as it is explained in Ephesians,—“and you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

Now, this doctrine, though allowed, is seldom believed and seldom acted on. We come to your city and tell you that you are dead, that it is a valley of dry bones; we call on you to flee and escape from “the city of destruction,” and you are angry, you will not believe it, but you cry out, “It is defamation.” Is it defamation? Then cast it upon the Lord Jehovah. But if you do, take warning of this, for you must abide by the consequences of resisting His word. He has shown us, by the vision of the valley of dry bones, the state of unregenerate man, and we must see by that word that the comparison is just,—“there is no health, no life in us,” “we are full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.” We are first dead by our relation to Adam, our father according to the flesh, having in him sinned, and thus come under the fearful condemnation of the broken covenant of works, and so made liable to the wrath and curse of Almighty God. Original sin, or the sin of our nature, therefore, seems to conclude us all in death. The spirit of life is taken

from us, and the progress of decay is day by day increased by every actual transgression. It takes away even from the form which remained after the life was extinct, until, at length, our whole spirits and souls become corrupted and fast approaching the last stage of decay, illustrated by the dry bones.

One of the effects of our being dead is that we have lost the image of God, so that, with regard to that, we have become wholly unprofitable, like dry bones, in His sight. Man was at first created that he might be a mirror to reflect the glories of Jehovah. Now is that image entirely defaced, and another image is put on his defaced and disfigured soul. He no longer is holy, just, and true, but is (to use Scripture language) at *enmity* with God. What a thought is this enmity! How strange that the creature should ever have come to such a height of folly, of madness and iniquity, as to rise up and rebel against the God that made him,—the God that shall judge him, the God that must for this condemn him to the torments of hell.

Now, such are you all, every one. This is what the true minister of Christ sees. He beholds you standing on the brink of a tremendous precipice, beneath which hell's gulf lies; he sees that unless God stretches out an omnipotent and a saving arm, you must drop into it. The servant of God, knowing and feeling this, cannot rest till he endeavours to make you aware of your danger. He cries out to you, beseeching you to consider; he must *pull* you away, drive you away from the edge of the pit, try to save you, that he may bring you home to God.

But let us now consider the chapter before us. First, the prophet says, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." This shows us what a real call to the ministry is. There are many calls spoken of among men, but this shows us there is but one. "The hand of the Lord was upon me." This primarily alludes to his exalted commission as an inspired prophet at the actual moment in which he wrote, but in an inferior, though not less real sense, does the Spirit descend on every preacher of Christ crucified, and call him to his work, whether in earliest infancy, in boyhood, or in riper manhood.

"And set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about." This is what God always does when He intends to make any man an honoured instrument for the salvation of souls,—He takes him out into the world, takes him all round the valley, and shows him that it is "full of bones, very many and very dry." He leads him from city to city, and, it may be, from country to country. Very often, when ordinary christians are thinking that people are unhealthy and require amendment, they are not well, but their case is not very bad; the true servant of Christ sees that they are dead, that their case is desperate, that they are not only diseased and wounded, decaying and putrefying, that they are dead men, and that their bones only remain to show they are men at all. It is a

dark, melancholy spectacle to such a person to look abroad on the world; he sees nothing but a valley of bones, dismembered and decaying, and he mourns over them, and whether he may disclose it to those around him or not, there is an inward fountain of tears ever flowing over,—he weeps over the souls of men.

The Lord then said to the prophet, “Can these bones live?” This, again, is a question put by the Lord to every minister, to see what manner of spirit he is of. Now, some ministers answer, “We think they can live. Many are diseased, but we shall preach much to them, we shall pray much with them; they have been born of Christian parents, brought up in a Christian country; they were brought to baptism in their infancy, they drank in the gospel truths with their mother’s milk, were early brought to know the Word, learnt it on a mother’s knee, learnt it by a father’s side, they have been instructed in the doctrines of their holy Protestant faith, and, later in life, have been duly examined by a good minister, who has passed them as communicants worthy to sit down at the table of the Lord, and therefore we think that they can live.” But what does the faithful minister of the gospel say in reply to such a question? He puts it back to God, saying, “Lord, thou knowest.” Ah! it is a blessed thing when believers learn to do this; whenever a hard question is asked them, or a hard doctrine held out for their belief (many are the questions thus proposed), they honour God by simply giving it back to Him, and praying, “Teach me.”

Again He said, “Prophesy upon these bones, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” It is the duty of every minister to preach the word of the Lord; and this command to preach the Word to *dry* bones even, alone encourages us to do so. I have often said, and still oftener thought, that I might just as well, and with as much hope of success, go and preach to the gravestones in your Greyfriars churchyard, as come here to you—knowing that man can do nothing at all. “Why, then,” some say, “do you preach? Why do you go to church, why then do you tell men to come to Christ if they cannot repent, which you yourselves allow and say they never can?” Because it is commanded; and this very command is our authority, this command is our support, this command is our encouragement. When ministers get a sight of the valley of vision, and of the bottomless gulf into which bone after bone is sinking, they *do* feel that it is of importance that they should warn and alarm sinners; and then alone do they preach for death, preach for eternity, preach for the judgment-seat, preach for heaven, and preach, too, for *hell*. He at once goes, then, to call to the dry bones, and often, too often, does it without effect; but when he has done so, and spoken the words of the Lord, according to the will of God, then the Almighty Himself speaks to them through him, saying, “Behold, I will cause breath to en-

ter 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.” The prophet obeyed the command of Jehovah, hopeless as his endeavours might have appeared to him, and, lo! a shaking among the dry bones. Sinners first begin to be concerned, then anxious about their state, and then alarmed, and *that* sometimes so greatly, that it cannot be concealed in their outward deportment. Sleep flies from them, and tears are their portion night and day. But is this not very natural and yet, when it is so, it is often called enthusiasm and madness. In Dundee lately, something of this kind was witnessed, and it was therefore denounced as not being the true work of God, because some cried out and wept bitterly, groaning as they felt themselves under the dominion of Satan, and got a sight of sin in their own hearts. It was on that occasion said by a well-known and very godly minister, from the north of Scotland, who visited Dundee in order to assure himself whether it were, indeed, the Spirit of God who was working there,. “When bone comes to bone, will there be no shaking heard?”

And what time is more likely for such feeling as this, as when numbers of sinners are at once and together convinced of sin. Ah! will there be no extraordinary feelings, no excitement more than usual, when men first awake from the sleep of death, when they first see that hell from which they are escaping, and whose iron gates are newly barred behind them? No commotion when they first catch a glimpse of their heaven, to which they are joyfully turning that newly opened eye? Will there be no heart-stirring emotions when they see sin, not as condemning them, but as wounding the Crucified? If there is no deep feeling, my dear friends, whether it be inward or outward, when a mind is renewed, and undergoing that thorough change which must accompany regeneration, there is great danger, we think, of the apparent change not having been real. A man *must* feel at such a time; it is impossible but that he should feel, and that with a depth unknown to him before.

After the coming of bone to bone, the next thing that happened was the covering of the bones with sinews, and with flesh, and with skin. The body formerly decayed, was renewed; but ah! 'twas lifeless still. I fear many present have got this length, and yet are not saved. Some of you have been getting sinews and flesh on the formerly naked bones. That is, you have been seeing your deformity in part, and you begin to perform neglected duties, to attend meetings, to study the Word of God with regularity, to go through your morning and evening devotions punctually; all around you, perhaps,

are admiring the change, and you yourself are convinced that you are changed; you have come to ministers, and followed them. Ah! you are *our* converts, and not the Lord's. Beware of this—*beware of this*. If you are only the converts of ministers, woe, woe be to you, and woe be to us if we deceive.

I remember to have read of the great Whitfield, that one day, as he was returning from preaching, he overtook a man, who was intoxicated, driving a cart. When the carter recognised Whitfield, he called out, "O Mr Whitfield, is that you? I'm glad to see you. I'm one of your converts." "Yes," said Whitfield, "I *see* you are one of my converts, and not one of the Lord's." Ah! what good will it do you in the day of judgment, that you have been outwardly changed, if the Spirit have not changed your hearts. Now, we don't deny that the change which has taken place is good; but don't rest there—don't rest in that outward form. I doubt not, 'tis lovely to look on; ah, 'tis fair and beautiful. No eye, perhaps, sees a defect in the newly-formed character, in the virtues so carefully cultivated, in the duties so scrupulously performed. No human eye detects the faults. All are deceived, and admire the change.

Thus, when the spirit has just fled from its earthly tenement, the body sometimes appears alive still for a little, and the unpractised *eye* says, "Ah, I see no difference. My brother is not dead. The expression of intelligence and wonted sweetness plays round the lips. Still I can see no change." Yes, that form is fair, is oftentimes passing lovely,—the colour, that once glowed upon the cheek, still tinges it, perhaps, in death,—the chiselled features have not suffered the slightest change,—the eye is not yet dimmed, the smile has not yet left the lips that never spoke but in love; and yet—yet—the eye that penetrates deep, the discerning eye, sees that death is there,—sees a pallid hue fast o'erspreading the whole countenance,—sees that, though the eye is there, no life is darting forth from it. And there is a death-like chill fast coming over the members of that frame; while the eye looks, it is all the while sealed in death, and you know that a body such as that,—a body on which decay has, as yet, made no inroads,—is as ready for the coffin as the dry bones are,—is just as ready for the grave as the putrefying corpse by its side. Though no hideous deformities which disfigure the one, are to be traced in the other, both are dead. There is no difference as to any power of action or of thought. And so, if the Spirit of God has not begun, and is not carrying on the work of conversion, the most amiable, dutiful, and devoted individual, is not more *alive*, more endued with the Spirit of life, than the man who is sunk in guilt and in crime. Far be it from us to say, that there is no difference as to *this* world. The man who has openly sinned, alike fallen a victim to dissipation and to vice, is like the decayed body or the dry bones, or, perhaps, in that last stage of all, just crumbling into dust. But what we

desire for you, above all, is, that ye be not deceived. We fear there are many (and it is natural that such should be the case) who are imagining themselves to be indeed converts to Jesus Christ, who will soon, very soon, fall away, and whose souls, much changed as they seem, are dead—entirely dead,—dead to God, dead in sin. Many outward marks of a child of God are in the character, but ah! there is an icy coldness in the heart. It beats not with love to God, beats not with heavenly love to man, beats not at all. The veins, the sinews, the joints are there—all in lovely proportion; but there is no life, no blood, no heat.

Hatred to God lies hid within: you imagine it is gone; but ah! in the case of many, it is not driven out of the soul at seasons like this,—it is not driven *out*, it is merely *driven in*. Outward circumstances are pressing you so hard, that even Satan may not dare to let that fearful enmity appear. And so, assaulted on all sides, it retires, and retires, and retires, till it is concentrated in the heart, taking up its dwelling in the very strongest fortress, in the citadel of the soul, and there it remains, and there it is chilling and congealing all, and so it will continue to do, till it consumes your fancied religion, and torments you so completely, that it will soon, very soon, seal you in the cold sleep of death. You are polishing and beautifying the exterior of your sepulchres, but they will at last be discovered to be full of dead men's bones, of decay, and of corruption. The kernel, as it were, is still as hard as ever, as unbroken as ever, though it lies within a beautiful and finely-painted shell.

Now, what is it to give you life, animation, power, to serve God acceptably,—what can do this? “Lord, *Thou* knowest.” The prophet sees that all his labour is vain, as far as having raised up living men is concerned. “There is no breath in them.” “Then said He unto me, Prophecy 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. So I prophesied, as He commanded me,”—as *He commanded me*. Ah, here is the strength of the minister of the Gospel. He prays for the Spirit of the Lord; that it would come down and bless the word, causing the seed to spring up and bear fruit; and when the Spirit *does* accompany the words, how marvellous are its effects,—it breathes on the slain, they live, and “stand on their feet, an exceeding great army.” It is sad when ministers do not come from the closet to the pulpit, for then they do not come with the fulness of the Spirit. Pray much for us, that all who preach the Gospel be much in prayer,—yea, live in prayer for the descent of the Spirit, and the blessing of the Holy Ghost, or else we may as well not preach to you at all. Pray that we may all see the bones to be “very many, and very dry,” and

thus be filled with compassion on perishing multitudes, and declare to them the whole counsel of God as for *eternity*.

As scarcely any time remains, we ask you but one question, Have you any grounds for believing that you have received the Holy Ghost? or have you not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost? If you have not, the consequence is you are still unconverted, unsaved, for you cannot yet have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, without the Spirit of Jehovah. The error of some is, that they trust to themselves in part, while they likewise in appearance trust in part to Christ—that is, they believe they are obtaining strength from Christ. They are growing on their own roots, and in their native soil. This will never do. You will never become true converts till you are quite translated from the soil of nature to the soil of grace. You must be taken out of self altogether, and be engrafted into the true vine, even Immanuel, and from Him you will receive strength, support, and consolation. Do you want life from the dead? He is our life, He is light, He is love. Join yourselves to Him in a perpetual covenant, which shall not be broken. If you have received Christ, He will be precious to you. If He is your portion, you will want, you will desire, no other.

When a poor man comes to a great inheritance, he will not seek to keep possession of the little hut or cottage which he formerly inhabited. That would be given up to the first beggar who comes to ask it. He will rather be glad to get rid of what reminds him of a state of wretchedness. And so with those who have obtained Christ, and seen His glory. You don't need the world, or anything in it, to complete your bliss; you don't want gay amusements, and trifling pleasures; you don't occupy yourselves with ornaments, and studied dress, and apparel. You say, "We don't need the world's amusements; we have got Christ. Take your world, take its pleasures and its gains." The believer does look with contempt on the world, and on its trifling occupations, saying, "What have I to do any more with idols? Henceforth would I glory in nothing but the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." You have got Christ, and with Him His holiness, His righteousness, His consolations, His glory, His Father, His heaven. "For all things are yours." You have got Christ for the hour of need, Christ for life, Christ for death, Christ for prosperity, Christ for adversity, Christ for trials, Christ for bliss, Christ for judgment, Christ in time, and Christ through all eternity. And what need you more? "Christ is yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Will any *one* of you go away without Him tonight? If you do, you cannot go away without Satan. Satan in your bosom, and you are just cherishing the viper which will cut and sting you to all eternity. We ask you this question, in the view of that great meeting,—that glorious assembly before the great

white throne, from which there will not be a single absentee, though there are now so many from a throne of grace. You shall be there, I shall be there, all now absent shall be there, and we shall give account to God. The only question then will be, Who is Christ's? Who?

I speak to you in view of that nearer parting, which must soon take place between us,—when we, who speak, can no longer speak to you, for we are come here only for a short period, to stand and preach the Gospel, and tell that Christ is free, that salvation is free, that heaven is free, to all. When one city falls asleep, we must just go to another (and many other cities are eager for the glad news), and tell them too that it is free to them. These meetings which, praised be God! have been blessed to many, are now necessarily nearly at an end; and will you, who have come night after night, and week after week, and so patiently listened to us, let us part for altogether, or part tonight, without listening to Christ, without coming to Him, as many have been all along doing? You have received us with the greatest kindness, and shown us, in every possible way, that you would do much for us; but will you not come to Jesus, and come out of yourselves?

Here, in this heart, there is no good thing,—nothing but emptiness, pollution, corruption, and sin; but yonder! ah, yonder! all fulness dwells. You may look within all your lives, and you will find nothing—nothing but guilt to be repented of, depravity to condemn; but yonder, in Jesus, all righteousness, all peace, all love abide: if you will come to Him, they are yours. Now, won't you look, won't you live? Some of you have been long kept in doubt, and darkness, and despair; and why? Is it God's will that it should be thus? No, no! Then whose fault is it, if not your own? You've been trying to convert yourselves, trying to effect a change; and so long as you try that, you will never be saved, you will never have peace. Just try, now, to look out of yourselves, and *into* Christ, and up to Jehovah's throne of grace, and up to the blood on the mercy-seat; and while looking, try to get very low, infinitely low; for what other posture befits the worm Jacob, when he approaches his great Creator, his Eternal Judge? Yet fear not; for even the worm Jacob may look up with complete confidence, for he is commanded to look in Christ, and by Christ, and to Christ alone. Come in then, come in to Christ. The neighbouring villages are, many of them, crying out for Christ. Will you not be provoked to jealousy? will you not join them? Oh, that the whole city would lift up its gates, that the King of Glory might enter in.