

Can These Bones Live?

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Did you see the Superbowl last week? I only got the second half, but it was the only half I needed...

Everyone knew it was coming. Second-and-1 on the 1-yard line.

Marshawn Lynch of the Seahawks was waiting in the backfield, poised to do what he was put on this Earth to do:

Get a touchdown — *this touchdown*.

It was over...people already knew the outcome...the Seahawks were gonna win. All was lost for the Patriots. It was over...

And then something unexpected happened...

The play call came in, Russell Wilson attempted a doomed pass that Malcolm Butler intercepted, and it was Seattle that **punched** and **screamed** its way off the field.

The Patriots were the victors – the least favored team were the champs.

Totally unexpected! Not what you would think was even possible!

Neil Paine of the Harvard Sports Analysis Collective laid out the facts and said simply this: **We thought it was over. We thought we knew the ending...But we didn't.**

Depending on which team you were going for it was either good or bad; but for everyone it came out of nowhere and the Web erupted with all kinds of reactions and commentaries on the game.

Imagine Ezekiel now, the prophet to the Jewish people who are exiles in Babylon...imagine Ezekiel being swept up in the Spirit and being transported to a valley of dry bones.

And this is not just a few bones...a little pile of them in a corner somewhere. We get the sense that there are mountains of human bones in that valley...skulls, femurs, hip bones, pelvic bones, ribs, and spinal columns strewn about down in there – bleached and dried out in the hot Mediterranean sun, a motionless graveyard of the remnants of something that used to be...and is no more.

These bones actually are a metaphor for the nation of Israel. What has happened prior to this vision is that not only have the Jews been taken captive in Babylon, but Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon has now destroyed Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and the temple were the hub of Israel's identity; the place where the exiles had hoped that they would somehow return, someday...and be a nation there.

But with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish people, captive in Babylon fall into despair.

Their land is now ravaged, their temple is destroyed, and their families scattered.

They are refugees in a strange land.

They regarded this political and military defeat as an irrevocable historical judgment.

Marduk, the God of the Babylonians, had prevailed as far as some of them were concerned.

Yahweh had proven impotent,

their faith had proven inadequate, and the covenant promises had proven insufficient.

Ever feel like God's promises are not for you?

Ever feel like you have messed up so badly that blessings cannot come your way?

That's how the captive Israelites felt.

The formation of a kingdom with a king didn't turn out so well either – they should have kept God as their King and not had the human kings.

They had gone the way of all empires and now they had fallen, and they were in despair.

Stuck in Babylon some sat by the river and sang old songs, while others scoffed. (Psalm.....)

Disappointment makes us cynical

They were like a field of bones: dry, dusty, sun bleached, and dead.

Without breath.

Without help.

Without hope.

It was over. No longer could they hope of being a nation chosen by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

They were at a

Dead end.

And God asks Ezekiel a question. He asks him **“Son of man...can these bones live?”**

Can the nation of Israel still be a nation, still be my people, still conquer and be victorious, even after all of this destruction and despair?

I know what I would say...I would say...NO WAY...ITS OVER...its been over for a long time and its still over...dry bones, very dry bones do not live again...

Watch this reading of the scripture, on the screen, and note Ezekiel's response when God asks *him* ...can these bones live?

(VIDEO OF DRIED BONES)

(ENSEMBLE SINGS “DEM BONES”)

Son of man, can these bones- this valley full of dry bones (and dry is emphasized in the scripture/they were VERY dry meaning they'd been there for a long time) – can these bones, these very dry dry bones...can they live?

What does Ezekiel say? **“You alone Lord...only you know.”**

In another words, anything is possible with you God.

You alone are able. I am not going to decide ahead of you when something is over, says Ezekiel the prophet.

I've been filled with your presence, and scooped up in the Spirit, I have seen powerful things – visions, and angels, I've seen a wheel and felt the burning fire of your holy presence - and you have spoken through me again and again. Who am *I* to say whether its over...can these bones live, you ask me?...**You alone Lord, only you know.**

That was a response full of faith and hope in a God who can do the impossible.

In the midst of a valley graveyard, Ezekiel knows that God is able. When everything is saying death, Ezekiel says, not unless God says its over is it over.

When everything is pointing to destruction and despair, Ezekiel says if you want to God...you are able.

When everything says dead end, its hopeless, its over, its done, its finished Ezekiel holds onto the God of his salvation...the God who always keeps his promises...the God who is faithful...the God who never gives up on his people.

Standing there up to his knees in dry dry bones, as he walks among the dead, back and forth, Ezekiel still looks to God and does not look around him, but he looks up.

And as is so typically gracious of God, and you might not have caught this, God involves Ezekiel in the process of bringing life and has HIM prophesy to the bones.

And that is when this vast mountainess disarray of bones come together...bone to bone, and tendons and flesh appear and the skin grows over them....and human beings are formed.

A vast army. It is a promise that the nation of Israel will indeed be restored. It is a promise to us that the church (the new Israel) in this age will also be restored and renewed.

Its Ezekiel's words as he cooperates with Gods command that bring that valley of dry bones together, to form human beings.

And although they are assembled, much like in the Garden of Eden (it mirrors the process) when God creates man and woman, it is not until God breathes into them his spirit that these beings come to life.

So again God involves Ezekiel in the process and tell Ezekiel to call on the spirit to fill these newly assembled beings that once were just dry bones - and these beings come to life, and they stand up and the bones do live!!

Jewish theology teaches that God created human beings because he was lonely.

You can debate that if you want. It makes sense if God is love he needs an object for his affection.

All through the reading of the STORY we see God is pursuing his people, and involving them in his work just like he involved Ezekiel in bringing life out of death.

Today we too need to be involved in this ministry of hope. God commands us to speak to the difficult situations in this dark world, and where people are saying "its over", to say theres still God...and he is able.

Lets read that scripture altogether again:

Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Isn't that a theme that keeps coming up again and again throughout our reading of the STORY? When people say its over....God says...wait...its not over. ***I will rescue you. I will come after you. What you have made dead, I will make alive.***

So don't be fooled by what appear to be dead ends.
Don't trust the despair, or hold an affinity for the message of futility that pervades our culture.
Don't believe the way of the world.
Don't believe it when the fat lady sings.

It is not over.
Hope in God.

For when you're without power, when you're weak, when you've run out of options, when you're dead, and dried up, there is still the breath of God.

And, brittle bones will band together and be blown full of life,
and a dry old man and a barren old women will give birth to a son, (Isaac)
and water will come from a rock,(Moses)

and the walls of Jericho will fall down

and a tiny people chosen by God will prevail
and a virgin will bear a son,
and a tomb will be empty,
and the dead will be raised

I am not talking about cheap faith here.

A faith in long shots when we are told if we believe more and more God will turn our scars into stars.

I am not talking cheap faith.

I am talking about the deep hope that scripture witnesses to and that many of you have experienced that God is a God who doesn't change,

and that today, just as he did for Ezekiel and the people of Israel who did return home eventually, and who did indeed rebuild the temple (Nehemiah), he continues to breath life into dead ends and dry bones.

Its not over, til God says its over...

We know what dead ends are.

The world is full of them.

We know the dead ends of bankruptcy, cancer, depression, sexual abuse, lonely loveless relationships, unemployment or employment that has no meaning of fulfillment, heart disease, grieving the loss of a loved one, and family conflicts that just won't budge.

We know the dead ends of peace in our world and armed conflict in the Middle East.

We know violence on our own streets and the profound imbalance of a global economy.

Dead ends and dry bones are the way of the world.

We know dead ends. But we also know the same God Ezekiel knew.

This ancient text opens up a window, an angle, a perspective, a vision....that despite all of that... God is still able.

I've seen the Lord rattle old bones, bones that were very dry
and marriages that were dead – those marriages have been brought back to life

and those dry with greed – I've seen them come alive with compassion,

and those dry with depression I've seen them drenched with deep laughter again,

And those dry with cynicism and doubt...I've seen them come to believe

And those dried up by grief...I've seen them comforted by God's grace and brought to refreshment

One day folks this old world will be turned upside down

And the dead bones of our culture and those oppressed by systems of intolerance will dance of justice and mercy and peace,

That's God's promise.

Our task as Christians is to be faithful, and to stand with Ezekiel in the valleys of dry bones and proclaim to those in mourning and in despair...its not over til God says its over.

All things are possible. God is able. That's our task. To proclaim it to the world that there are no dead ends with God.

God is the author of life, not death. He hates death. And if he can give life to a valley of dry bones, if he can bring resurrection and make a tomb empty, then he can bring life to any situation, no matter how bad it seems. Our task as Christians is to proclaim that truth...

I was talking to Emmie Quan this week and she told me that years ago she read in the newspaper the story of young man who had been badly burned ¾ of his body was marred.

Emmie didn't know this man or anything about him, but she thought to herself, if this was my son, how would I feel?

What would I need?

So she called the father of this boy and she asked him if it would be okay if she came and prayed for the young man during her lunch hour.

And the father was only too glad to oblige.

So faithfully every day found Emmie there praying for this young man, and she couldn't see his face really because he was all bandaged up.

And one day, after doing this for awhile, she turned and asked him, "Do you want to keep praying for you on my lunch hour?"

Is this okay that I am coming to you and doing this? Or have I done enough and you would rather I not come anymore."

And the boy turned to her and said through the bandages, "I want you to come. Please don't stop. I wanted to die. You have saved my life."

We are commissioned and we are called to speak to the dry bones in the power of the Holy Spirit and say to them...you can and you will live again because God IS ABLE...

Lets pray together....