

Can These Bones Live Again?

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

October 31, 2021

During our lifetime, we encounter all kinds of difficulties and sufferings. We have to endure them, both physical and emotional, mental and spiritual. Coronavirus pandemic is certainly one of them. Come to think of it, human suffering is universal. There isn't anyone who doesn't experience difficulties or suffering. It is so universal that Saint Augustine once said, "God had one son without sin; but never one without suffering."¹

The passage we just read this morning is a famous vision the prophet Ezekiel had in Babylon.

When Jerusalem was conquered by Babylon in 587 B.C. the Jews lost their land, their temple, their covenant, and their relationship with God. There was nothing in their future but humiliation, suffering, and death. Their life of slavery constantly reminded them of their defeat. They were literally lifeless and hopeless as a nation.

When life falls apart on us, we may feel that way, too. Many people live their lives as prisoners. They have experienced the manacles of the body or the shackles of the mind. They have been bound by unfortunate circumstances - automobile accidents, Coronavirus or other diseases, natural disasters, business failures, a crime that changed their lives forever, or the paralyzing grief of losing a loved one. People have suffered deprivation and humiliation.

Once a victim of misfortune, they become insecure and allow themselves to wallow in despair. They often turn to unhealthy behaviors, the behaviors that will destroy their lives: excessive alcohol, or drugs, or being unfaithful in their marriages. Many of them live with an intense feeling of guilt and worthlessness. Some of them ultimately isolate themselves and become despondent. Some even commit suicide.

In 2019, 47,511 people ended their lives by suicide and 312,000 people attempted suicide. The number of suicides grew constantly for the last two decades. From 1999 to 2019, there has been 35% increase in the number of suicides. Actually 2018 was higher than 2019.

¹ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/suffering.html>

There are many different reasons as to why people commit suicide, including a sense of guilt, a sense of hopelessness, a desire to punish others, or whatever.

When Israel was conquered by Babylon, the Israelites did not see any hope in their future. In this hopelessness, God gave this vision to the prophet Ezekiel. He brought him to the valley of dry bones and asked him, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (v3). The obvious answer was “No.” The prophet said, “O Lord God, you know the answer to that question.” I am not sure what Ezekiel really meant by saying this. Did he mean to say, “O Lord, there is absolutely no way these bones can live again”? Or did he mean to say something else? Like, “O Lord, whatever you want them to be, they will be. If you want them to live again, they will live again; if you want them to remain as is, they will remain lifeless.” Is that what he meant? I am not sure but whatever he meant the Lord gave him an amazing promise that he would restore the nation of Israel. He said, “I will open your graves and bring you out of it, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel” (v.12). God said that he himself would do this.

When we become a victim of unfortunate circumstances God also asks us the same question, “Son of man, can these bones live?” Will your life be restored? Can that which is dead be returned to life? Can your situation, your circumstance, be restored, revived, and resurrected? Is there any hope?

Many people live in the valley of dry bones. Captain Charles Plumb, the author of the book, I'm No Hero, has been in that valley. He is a motivational speaker now but he was in that valley for a while. He was a pilot during the Vietnam War. One day his plane was shot down. Although he ejected and survived, he was captured and spent the next six years as a POW in a horrendous condition. He was tortured frequently. His captors twisted his body with ropes. When he knew he could not take it any more they twisted him even more. His muscles were torn and his skin raw. This torture went on and on and on while he was kept as a POW. Somehow, he survived all of that.

When he was finally released, Charles was flown to San Francisco, where he quickly tried to call his wife. He couldn't locate her. Then he called his father, who told him that his wife had left him. “Come on home, son,” said his father. “It's a new day. Let's start fresh.”² Was a new start even possible after all that he

² Jane and Robert Handly, THE LIFE PLUS PROGRAM FOR GETTING UNSTUCK, (New York: Rawson Associates, 1989).

had been through? For a while he thought it was not possible. Could dry bones live again?

Many people live in the valley of dry bones. Some live in that valley for a long time, and some for a period of time. All of us face the valley of dry bones at least for a season, a time of depression, a time of hopelessness, a time of despair. There in that lonesome valley we will find ourselves asking, “Is there any hope?” “Can I go on?” “Will this situation ever change?” “Can these bones live again?”

The answer is absolutely, “YES.” There is hope. You can go on. These bones can live again but the question is how? How can the dry bones live again? How can we find hope in the midst of desolation? How can we find courage in the face of failure? How can we find comfort in the hour of anguish? The answer is, “BY THE WORD OF GOD.”

The Lord said to prophet Ezekiel, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.’” When he prophesied, “Suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and bones came together, bone to its bone, ... sinews were on them, and the flesh and the skin.” When God’s word was given to the dry bones they came together and the muscles, flesh and skin covered them. When God’s word was given breath, the breath of life entered the flesh and the flesh became living beings. This was the message given to the Israelites that they will be restored as a nation. They will return to their home country. They will be rebuilt as God’s own people. How did the dry bones come back to life? By the word of God.

How can we have hope in the days of desolation? The answer is the Word of the Lord. Remember, it was God’s word that created the world. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). It was through “the Word” that God revealed himself to humanity. The Bible says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14). It was through God’s Word that he revealed his own presence, and it was by his Word that Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. “Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’” Then the dead man came out, his hands and feet were bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. A corpse came back to life by the word of God. It is by the Word of God that we live and move and have our being.

Likewise, our hope is in the Word of the Lord. Accepting the word of God is the beginning of a new life. This is why **THE SCRIPTURES ARE SO**

IMPORTANT. His Word gives us strength and hope. This is why we need not only to read the Scripture but also to accept and memorize its promises.

When we feel hopeless and discouraged, we need to remember God's word. The Lord said, "I know the plans I have for you, they are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."³

When we are distressed and dismayed, we need to remember the promise of God. He said, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."⁴

Remembering the word, reciting the promise of the Lord is a powerful way to stay positive and hopeful in the days of distress and trouble. We need to remember that it is the Lord who is leading us and guiding us, even when we face seemingly hopeless situations.

During this past Annual Conference which was held in June, Bishop Grant Hagiya introduced the Japanese art of repairing broken potteries, called Kintsugi. Kintsugi is the ancient Japanese art of mending broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver or platinum to create something new and magnificent. The idea is that it treats the brokenness and the repair as part of its history. In kintsugi, one doesn't try to cover up flaws but it highlights the repair. The focus is on restoring the object into something new and extraordinary — something even stronger.

A Kintsugi artist creates something beautiful out of brokenness. That is what God does. He uses the broken lives to create something beautiful. There is a song with the same title, "Something Beautiful" by Bill Gaither. It has wonderful and very encouraging lyrics. It goes like this:

Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion He understood.
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,
But He made something beautiful out of my life.

³ Jeremiah 29:11.

⁴ Isaiah 41:10.

If there ever were dreams
That were lofty and noble,
They were my dreams at the start
And hope for life's best were the hopes
That I harbor down deep in my heart.
But my dreams turned to ashes,
And my castles all crumbled.
My fortune turned to loss.
So, I wrapped it all in the rags of life
And laid it at the cross.

Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion He understood.
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,
But He made something beautiful out of my life.

“Will these bones live again?” God asks. And the answer is “Absolutely!”
When God holds our lives no matter what we face, he will make something
beautiful out of our lives. Now with that faith, let us live boldly even in the days
of difficulties.