

The Revelation of the Rebirth of Dried-Up Bones

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Let's turn to Ezekiel 37.

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel."
(Ezek 37:11-12)

The book of Ezekiel recorded the famous “vision of the rebirth of the dried-up bones”. This vision is very inspiring, very unforgettable to the readers. But at the same time, this is also a sad picture. One wants to ask: Why the people of God, who should have enjoyed life, eternal life, were at the end completely dead and became a pile of dry bones?

Israel had been destroyed many times but still exists

A lot of prophecies in the Bible were related to Israel. If Israel no longer exists today, the Bible would become unbelievable ancient fairy tales. In our eyes, the nation of Israel in the world atlas is like a sesame seed, insignificant. But somehow God has deliberately kept this sesame seed——the Jews and put them in front of our eyes, proving to us that the words of God are true and trustworthy.

The Jewish people have gone through many catastrophes, the nation was destroyed many times and re-established many times. It is really a living miracle. We cannot understand - those foreigners who

invaded China were all assimilated by us. Why has this sesame seed not been destroyed or assimilated by the Gentiles? They even have gone through destruction, exiles, Holocaust, but this nation can still be restored. If this is not a miracle, what is it? God seems to use Israel to prove to us His reality, to remind us of His eternal promise and covenant with Abraham.

Ultimately when will this vision of the rebirth of dried-up bones be fulfilled? Is it the restoration of the Israel nation in 1948? Or is it talking about the descent of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Lord Jesus, making those Jews who were willing to respond to Jesus to be resurrected spiritually, symbolising the start of a new era – the era of the Messiah? All those who read this Bible passage are very interested in this question. But this is not what I want to find out today. What we want to find out is the spiritual message behind the conversation between God and the prophet Ezekiel.

Dry bones – the self-confident, boastful people of Israel who were rebellious to God

The existence of Israel itself is a miracle, because God used His power to keep this fragile race from becoming extinct. This does not mean that God approved what Israel did. The picture of the dried-up bones is telling us that: God disapproved their deeds. The picture of the dried-up bones awakened Israel suddenly. They finally realised that God had completely forsaken them. God is a righteous God. He would not turn a blind eye to the evil deeds of His people. This picture also reminds us that: As God's people, spiritual blindness and self-confidence would lead us to degeneration and destruction. The people of Israel were stubborn. Therefore, God had no choice but to let them go through the destruction of their nation. The complete destruction of their nation ultimately caused them to realise that God had forsaken them.

The history of Israel let us realise one thing: It is not that God does not give people a chance, it is the people who do not give God a chance! The book of Ezekiel is a tragic book. God asked the people of Israel in chapter 33 verse 11, “Why will you die?” God was like a father, pouring out his heart to talk to his son: “Why do you want to die? Don’t you have other options? Didn’t I give you options?” But the people of Israel refused to leave their evil ways. They did not give God a chance. At the end God had no other options but to let them go through destruction and ruin, to let them realise that God had forsaken them. The purge of the country and families destroyed the self-confidence, self-righteousness and self-pride of the people of Israel at last.

This is a very important spiritual message. God’s people must understand: self-confidence, self-pride, rebelliousness would cause us to be unable to be used by God. It is of no avail even if we are very capable. At the end God has no choice but to forsake us. The entire nation of Israel was full of bones, even dry bones. Only Ezekiel was alive. A nation belonging to God had fallen into such condition, what a frightening and sad picture it was!

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." (Ezek 37:3)

In chapter 37 the conversation between God and Ezekiel stated in this verse draws my attention in particular. I do not know how you read the Bible. I like to put myself into the scene, to be like being present at the place there – I was Ezekiel. God was talking to me. God said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, can these bones live?” If this was what God asked you, how would you answer? Was the answer “can” or “cannot”? Ezekiel understood God’s mind and heart very well. That was why he did not answer “can” or “cannot”. If he said “cannot”, it would be against his sentiment to his nation. These are my brothers, my nation. How can I say, “This is what they deserve, and let them

perish forever”? Ezekiel could not say that.

Therefore there was only one choice. But why didn’t Ezekiel say “can”? Actually Ezekiel understood God’s mind very much because he saw that God had already done His best to save Israel. But Israel despised God’s warning. They had come to such state. It was what they deserved. Ezekiel could not find a word to say. Therefore, at the end all he could say was: “Yahweh, only You know.”

Therefore you have to put yourself into the picture to read God’s words. Only then can God’s words move you. Otherwise we will stay on the surface only for ever. Analyse again and again. God’s words can only stay on the intellectual level. They can never enter into your heart. After you have read them, eventually you still become a rebellious and stubborn person.

Why did God let the dried-up bones revive?

Note that Ezekiel did not plead for Israel. This was not the common practice for a prophet. Ezekiel realized that Israel was already steeped in evil, therefore he dared not plead for them. Before, he pled again and again. Now it was too late. What could he still ask for? But why did God at last suddenly let them revive? Let us read verses 11-12:

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel."

(Ezek 37:11-12)

Notice the word “Therefore” in verse 12 – God mentioned the reason. After this catastrophe, finally Israel realised that they did not have hope anymore. They described themselves like this: “our bones are

dried up and our hope has perished". Their boastfulness and self-confidence caused them to be forsaken by God. But when they knew that they deserved punishment, that they were totally hopeless, God in turn had mercy on them. Have you understood God's principle in doing things?

As soon as we mentioned "Rise Up and Build", (the theme of the camp), everyone's blood boiled. Everyone was itching to have a go, but at the end, found out that God refused to use us. Why? What kind of people would God use to do His work? They are those who feel that they are not worthy. Do you find that those people whom God uses are inferior to you in many ways? You do not understand why God always uses someone else except the talented and capable you? We do not realise that it is our self-pride and self-confidence that cause God not to use us. Only when we realise that we are not worthy before God will He then call upon us to rise up and participate in the building work.

We all are the Moses before Exodus. When Moses understood that according to the Israel tradition, the people of Israel were waiting for a saviour to save them, he was hot-blooded to call himself the saviour of Israel. But God did not use him. At last he had to run away from Egypt and became a "hero" that could not even save himself. After Moses wandered in the desert for 40 years, at last he realised that he himself could not save anybody. Then God called him. When Moses was proud of himself, God did not use him. But when he realised his impotence, unworthiness, God appointed him to save the people of Israel. At that time, Moses had learned humility. He dared not respond to God's calling. He tried all means to refuse the mission that God gave him.

Have you understood God's principles of doing things? I hope that you can understand these spiritual principles when you read the Bible, because this is God's will and God's heart. If you do not know how to

work with God, how can you participate in the building work? Psalm 127 verse 1 reminds us:

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. (Ps 127:1)

If you do not rely on God in doing things, all your efforts will be in vain at the end. You must understand that you are incapable of participating in the building work. Do not be of the flesh or hot-blooded, feeling that you are the best candidate to do God's work.

I hope that everyone understands why God made this decision. The word "therefore" tells us that the people of Israel were like the prodigal son who had come to realise his error, finally realised that they themselves were "dried-up bones, their hopes had perished. They were completely cut off." Just because of this, God gave them three promises: "I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel."

Why did God want Ezekiel to prophesize?

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." (Ezek 37:3)

When Ezekiel said, "O Lord GOD, You know", God instructed Ezekiel to prophesize. Why did God want Ezekiel to prophesize?

Try to imagine, if you are Ezekiel, after serving God faithfully for so many years, how would you feel? You must be discouraged, completely in despair. What had Ezekiel built? Many prophets in the Old Testament had built nothing. What had Jeremiah built? What had Isaiah built? They faithfully preached the word of God. The more they preached, the less the listeners. Opponents were increasing instead. At last God's judgement came upon them. What had these prophets

built?

Do you want to be a prophet? Brothers and sisters, I do not want you to aim too high, and imagine that you can do big task for God. You must read the Bible with your heart, understand God's principle of doing things, so that you know how to work according to His will.

We must understand Ezekiel's feelings. He was a very faithful prophet. No matter what kind of circumstance or pressure he was under, he would spare no effort in the performance of his duty assigned by God till his death. Even though he was very disappointed, discouraged with the people of Israel, he had never abandoned his mission given to him by God.

God had great compassion for men. He knew Ezekiel's despair and grief therefore, said to him: "Ezekiel, come and have a look at these dried-up bones." At that moment, Ezekiel was extremely distressed and in despair, having lost his vision. God then talked to him deliberately, in order to comfort him. God asked him: "Can these bones live?" He then told Ezekiel: ""Prophesy over these bones and say to them". God used this to comfort His prophet, to give him a ray of hope, because this was the promise God gave him – "Prophesy over these bones and say to them!" A prophet knows that God's promises never failed.

Therefore, Ezekiel represented God and prophesized. Then he saw a vision. This was a vision. It had not happened yet. I feel that our God is truly very gracious, worthy of our serving Him. He has both righteousness and compassion. You must get to know Him, understand His heart. Thus, we know how to work with Him, perform His tasks.

Only those who feel as God feels can work with God

Through these verses, I hope that you understand one principle: God

wants us to work with Him, to participate in His salvation project. God wants us to learn to bear the consequences of human sins. Being a Christian is not becoming lofty, as if he has suddenly become holy. Once he sees something unrighteous, he will criticize and grumble, as if these problems have nothing to do with him. God is not like this. God not only bears the consequences of our sins, He also wants us to bear with Him together. Only this way can we know the consequences of sins, know the misery and helplessness of sinners.

The most annoying teaching of our Lord Jesus is “Love your enemy, pray for your enemy”. After so many years, I realize that this teaching is too important. This is what every Christian must learn seriously. Sometimes when I heard some problems about the church, as soon as I started to become furious, God would ask me a question: “Have you prayed for this person?” Then I dared not be angry, as if I was better than others.

I believe you also pray for your enemies. I guess that your prayers are like this: “O God, please discipline him, let him have accidents, so that he knows you are God”. This is not the kind of prayers that our Lord Jesus wants. This kind of “prayer” in fact is cursing your opponent. The prerequisite of “praying for your enemy” is loving your neighbour, loving your enemy. How can it be possible to ask God to curse your enemy while you love him?

How should we pray then? Very simple, how you were before you knew God, how you came to know God, you then pray for him according to your experience with God: “O God, I was like him before, you had mercy on me. I pray that you also have mercy on those who persecute me. They truly did not mean it.” This is the importance of understanding God’s heart. Only this way can we know how to work with God, to build according to His will.

I want to emphasize that men cannot build anything. This is what the

very beginning of Psalm 127 tells us: Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. The Bible has said it very clearly. It is not that we can build anything, it is God who chooses to give us a chance to learn to bear the consequences of men's sins with Him, to participate in His plan of saving sinners.

Are you the candidate in God's heart? This candidate is most important. Why in the midst of millions of Jews was there only one Ezekiel, only one Jeremiah? It is not that God does not want to call us, it is that men do not want to respond to God. I hope that God's words can imprint in your heart, let you have a clear direction of life. I hope that after understanding God's will, you are willing to choose to work with God, to walk in His will in your whole life.

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