

Ezekiel 16:1-8 *Can These Bones Live: With His Own Two Hands* SN/WL 1 March 2008

Forgive me if I sound political, but one of the most perplexing things about American policy is how many Americans—on either side of the political arena—are vehemently opposed to immigrants—legal or illegal—flooding into our country every day. “**Close the borders,**” we say, “**Don’t let anyone else in!**”

What is even more surprising is that many Christians are at the forefront of this movement, as if this land is our god-given domain and no one should infringe upon it. Have we forgotten our history so quickly, not remembering that we were the illegal aliens in this land less than 400 years ago, and some of us even more recent than that?

I’m reminded of a picture I’ve seen on the Internet, which was turned into a clever T-Shirt, that shows four Native American Indians a few decades ago. Dressed in their Native American garb, these four Indians are all holding guns closely by their sides. The words “**Homeland Security**” are splashed across the top of the picture, and underneath we read, “**Fighting terrorism since 1492.**” They weren’t very successful in their pursuit of security, were they? And it also puts our place in this country in perspective.

As we, in our deep-rooted Patriotism, insist that this land belongs to us and not the other, would we be willing to switch places with the farmer from Mexico or the factory worker from China? We want to deny such individuals the right and privilege that we’ve been afforded, and I’m sure few of us would try to sneak across the Mexican border to work as a migrant worker on the farmlands of that troubled country.

As we go back to the book of Ezekiel, which will continue to be our study for the next five or six weeks, I'd like to take a look at the stories of four different persons—these are the stories of two individuals who are all went in the opposite direction from one another. Actually, to put it in contemporary terms, one of these individuals is leaving Mexico, and the other one is going into it.

And I must say, the only reason I am using Mexico as the allegorical country is because of the first story, and the usual portrayal in our popular culture to view Mexico enemy number one in this fight against illegal immigration. I have nothing against the country at all, and I apologize if I am offending anyone over this analogy, but you will have to bear with me.

I recently read the story of a man by the name of **Alfredo Quinones-Hinojosa**. You've probably never heard of him. He grew up in a Middle-class family in a Mexican border town. At a young age, he pumped gas at his father's gas station. Life was all right for them, but when the Mexican government devalued the peso, his family lost everything. Alfredo vividly remembers returning to home after the event, and seeing his dad sobbing. It left an indelible impression on him.

With few prospects, he decided to do what many Mexicans do: he ran for the United States border, hoping for a better life. Calling his cousin, who was in the United States illegally, he made arrangements to hop the fence in Calexico. Unfortunately, when he hopped the fence, his cousin was not there to meet him, but the U.S. Border Patrol was instead. In those days, they simply returned the fence-hoppers back to Mexico with little repercussion, and Alfredo found himself back in Mexico 30 minutes later.

Figuring the Border Patrol wouldn't suspect he'd try to do the same thing twice, he hopped the fence at the same place just a little while later, and this time his cousin was there to meet him. Soon thereafter he found himself working on a 10,000-acre farm in California, making \$155 a week picking tomatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, corn, and grapes. That first year he was there he was able to save nearly all of the money he earned—almost \$8000.

But working on a farm for the rest of his life wasn't his dream. Alfredo had bigger aspirations. Despite the fact that he could probably work his way up to become the foreman of the migrant workers and life would be pretty good for him compared to where he had come from, Alfredo had bigger visions.

I'd like you to open the pages of your Bibles to our favorite book now—to the book of Ezekiel. There we will read the story of another migrant worker, born into less than ideal circumstances. Last time I was with you we saw how far God's chosen people had veered from the path that He had for them. So far had they gone that they were worshipping idols, crying over fertility gods, and bowing to the sun. In response to this the Lord has no choice but to promise destruction to this backslidden nation. But before ultimate destruction and judgment comes, God sends His message of mercy time and time again through His prophets, urging the people to turn from their ways and live.

And what is one of the tactics that He uses through Ezekiel's pen? He tries to remind Israel and Judah of their history, of how He's lavished them with love in the past. The reality is, friends,

when the going gets tough, God always reminds us of our history. He constantly calls our attention to His working in the past. The Old Testament is always steeped in the historical language of the past. Time and time again God says, “**Remember what I did for You in the past.**”

In fact, keen observers of biblical prophecy will often note that many of the prophets often utilize language that is taken directly from the Pentateuch—or the five books of Moses. Why? Because God wants to remind Israel of its past. He wants to remind His people how He delivered them from the house of bondage so that their hearts will overflow with appreciation for His goodness. It’s no wonder that Ellen White reminds us, “**We have nothing to fear for the future, except . . . what? Except as we shall forget the Lord’s leading in our past history.**” Such remembrances produce appreciation for the God who gave of Himself to infinite degree for us.

And so God comes to Ezekiel once again in **chapter 16** and instructs Ezekiel to call history to Judah’s remembrance. Incidentally, **Ezekiel 16** is by far the longest chapter in all of Ezekiel. Sixty-three verses long, this one chapter is longer than half of the minor prophet books in their entirety. So obviously God had something to say in this message, and we are going to look primarily at the first part of this chapter. Because of our limited time today, we will not be able to look at all 63 verses in-depth. You will have to forgive me.

But God comes to Ezekiel, and in His usual address, He says, “**Son of man, cause Israel to know her abominations.**” That is not a nice way to start a conversation, is it? But this word “**abominations**” keeps creeping up in Ezekiel’s book. Ezekiel uses this word more than any

other Old Testament author, hands down. But surprisingly, instead of going into a diatribe about all the abominations that His people have committed, God's narrative takes a different turn. He does exactly what we had talked about before: He reminds His people of their fortunate past and how His infinite goodness toward them.

In essence God reveals His people's illegitimate background. Although the history lesson is not factually accurate (it is more concerned with imagery than historical accuracy), He tells His people that they were from the lowest of the low. **"You were born in Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."** Rest assured, this was not a compliment to Judah. Essentially, what God is saying is that His people were born to a couple of dead-beat parents, on the "other side of the tracks."

More than that, however; at Judah's birth, her parents did not even love her. She wasn't provided the basic provisions that a baby receives under normal circumstances. Her umbilical chord wasn't cut, she was not washed and cleansed, she was not rubbed with salt—which, in those days, was a custom in the Middle East, and still is today—and no one placed nice baby clothes on her.

More than that, God goes on to say that "no eye pitied" her and she was left for dead in an open field. Nobody cared for her at all. She was nothing; lower than the lowest. I'm reminded of the haunting reality of what took place in the 1950s and 60s in this very country. Children who had mental handicaps were essentially abandoned in state homes in those decades by parents who didn't want to deal with them. In 1964 alone, 58,000 kids, 14 and under, lived in these state homes, essentially never heard from again.

I am going to share one such story in three weeks during my sermon. You will not want to miss this amazing story. So here's a plug for you to come back!

This is what God declares about Judah's history, though. Worse than being abandoned in a state home, she was left for dead in an open field. She was worthless.

Such strong imagery about God's people, I know. But this is the lowly past that God's people had. And yet the chapter doesn't end there, of course. No way! The Lord goes on to say that when He passed by—and there's that same Hebrew word we saw last time; when God instructed the man in bright linen to pass over the city; the same word that is used in Exodus the night when the angel passed over Egypt and looked for the blood on the doorpost—but God says that when He passed by forsaken Judah and He saw her struggling in her own blood, what did He do?

The Lord says, **“I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ ”** What a beautiful picture, isn't it? God saw this poor, decrepit, worthless baby girl, abandoned in an open field, and He stoops down and says, **“Live!”**

The verb is in the imperative form, of course. And isn't it a wonderful imperative at that! The same God who said, **“Let there be light!”** and there was light, reached down to wretched, poor, blind and naked Judah and said, **“Live!”** and she lived. And that is the gospel right there in a nutshell, isn't it?

I can't help but be reminded of Calvary's grand and glorious reality. This poor, pathetic, forsaken and wretched world was left to itself—all alone in the open field of this universe. We had nothing going for us, no value that we should be esteemed. But Christ came down to this earth, taking the initiative, and picking us up with His own two hands and saying, "**Live!**" And on His cross that Friday afternoon, He cried out with a loud voice, saying, "**It is finished!**" In so doing, He thus declared that every man, woman, boy, and girl would live. He secured life for every one of us.

It reminds me of that beautiful quote in *The Desire of Ages*, where Ellen White wonderfully writes,

To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring.¹

Do you realize, dear friend, that the only reason we even wake up every morning is because Christ came down to this earth and said, "**Live!**"? And the only way He could say "**Live!**" is by He, Himself, dying.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't point out the reality that God did all this long before we ever asked for it. Indeed, He secured this life for everyone on Calvary, long before we were even born. Indeed, Paul says that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. More than that, while we were enemies Christ came to us, stooped over, and with His own two hands, picked us up and said, "**Live!**"

¹ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 660.

What kind of love is this? In one sense, Christ had to hop a fence to Mexico, live 33 ½ years in that country as a poor laborer, just so He could finally rescue us and bring us back to the United States. But He didn't simply return to the United States with us, He surrendered His life to the authorities on the US-Mexican border and they executed Him, just so we could be free.

You see, our lives drive us to climb higher, but Christ's love compels Him to go lower. While we try to get to where the grass is greener, Christ went the opposite direction for us so He could say, **“Live!”**

I want to return to our friend, Alfredo. Having finally made it to the United States and working on a farm picking tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables, Alfredo wasn't satisfied with that for the rest of his life. So he soon moved to Stockton, California, where he enrolled in a night school to learn English. Eventually, after graduating with an associate's degree from the school he was attending, Alfredo was accepted to the University of California, Berkeley where he started biology. Impressed with his passion and hard-work, his mentor suggested that he apply to Harvard Medical School.

Wondering if that's what he was supposed to do, he decided to go ahead and apply to the esteemed Medical School. To his surprise, this man who jumped the fence in Mexico, who picked tomatoes and cauliflower and broccoli and grapes, he was accepted into Harvard Medical School—about a year after he became a US citizen.

After going through Harvard, he ended up giving the commencement address at the Harvard graduation. He went back to California and did his residency in neurosurgery. Today, Alfredo Quinones-Hinojosa—who came from a poor family in Mexico; who hopped a fence not once, but twice, to get into the United States; who spent a year picking tomatoes and cauliflower and grapes under the hot California sun, while living in a truck camper out in the middle of the field—today, that man is one of the top neurosurgeons at Johns Hopkins in Maryland.²

God, indeed, passed by this poor, wretched little boy, as he laid there in the open field; He reached down and with His own two hands, picked Him up and said, “**Live!**” And what about us? Has God not done the same? Did He not already do that for us at Calvary?

You see, God wants to remind us of that history. He wants to remind us where we came from, and what He did for us. Sadly, **Ezekiel 16** takes a turn for the worse. After lavishing Judah with love and care, Judah turns her back on God, unappreciative for what He has done for her. It’s not a pretty picture.

But God comes to us, reminds us of our history—of the fact that He reached down to us in our sorrowful state and said, “**Live!**”—and He wonders, “**Do you appreciate what I’ve done for you?**” We have the opportunity to succeed where Judah failed. All of us have been bought with the blood of Jesus. That’s why we celebrate the Lord’s supper!

Are we going to appreciate that gift? Are we doing to appreciate the fact that Jesus—whose two hands were nailed to Calvary—looked at us and said “**Live!**”? In some small way, we can do that

² Max Alexander, “With His Own Two Hands,” *Reader’s Digest* (February 2008): 104-111.

right now as we serve one another in the ordinance of humility. We have the opportunity to, just as Christ lowered Himself to the depths of humanity, take our own two hands and serve one another. We can hop the fence on the Mexican border and show our friends, family, and fellow church members that we would rather serve them in bondage than allow them to live in their low state. Will we pay forward Christ's humility?

Join with us now as we celebrate this great act of communion.