

2026-06-11 Ezekiel: Redemption and the Grace of God

In the series called *The Chosen* – the stories of Jesus choosing and teaching his disciples – they wrote this bizarre vision of Ezekiel and the valley of the dry bones into the episode in which Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane. That scene, although compelling, did not completely compute with me until I read this chapter of Richard Rohr’s book. Let me try to describe the context and the scene... and then the connection.

One cool thing about *The Chosen* is that they have their creators, writers, theologians and resource people unpacking and explaining how the Biblical stories and their interpretations and understandings of those led to how they did the storytelling. So, obviously the series is based on the Gospels; it’s all about Jesus. And for this scene, in the Garden of Gethsemane, they were focusing on Matthew 26 and Mark 14.

In Matthew, chapters 23-26 we read about Jesus moving quickly and decisively toward his final run-in with the leaders – both the Jewish Temple leaders and the Roman government leaders. In chapter 23 he was denouncing the scribes and the Pharisees with his haunting “Woe to you!” messages, calling them out. He named them hypocrites no fewer than six times in 13 verses. He called them blind guides and blind fools. He called them whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead bones and “all kinds of filth”. He called them snakes, a brood of vipers. In chapter 23, verse 34, he railed, “Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth... Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.” And then we see it. Jesus moved from rage to deep lament. In verse 37 he says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Then all of chapters 24 and 25 are Jesus foretelling destruction, persecution, desolation, unfaithfulness, judgment and the need – always the need – for attentive watchfulness.

Then, in Chapter 26 Jesus shared the Passover meal, received anointing from the un-named woman, he took the ultimate step of humility in washing his disciples’ feet, and then retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane where he agonized, wept and prayed for strength, for God to remove this cup from him – if there was, by chance, another way. He asked his disciples to stay awake, to stay alert, to watch and be attentive. And we all know how THAT went. Matthew and Mark tell us that three times Jesus went off by himself to pray and all three times when he returned to his disciples they were asleep.

Now this is the point at which the writers of *The Chosen* used some academic imagination and creative license as they wondered what Jesus’ experiences might have been during those three times of intense, agonizing prayer. And what they came up with was three different visions of significant people – all of which were deceased – who came to Jesus in this time of need.

The first vision that they portrayed was of Abraham and Isaac up on the mountain where Abraham was preparing to follow God’s instruction to sacrifice Isaac but at the very last moment God provided a ram instead. Jesus was watching as this historical event replayed in front of him

in the Garden of Gethsemane. When young Isaac asked his father where the sacrificial animal was and Abraham assured him that “God would provide”, Jesus whispered his own assurance to Isaac that he needn’t worry – it was only a test...a sort of wishful assurance for himself.

The second time Jesus went off by himself to pray, the dream that the creators of the show imagined Jesus to have had was that he was walking and as he walked, his sandals began to crunch over dried bones. There were human skeletons as far as the eye could see in this vision and soon Jesus came upon Ezekiel. They greeted each other warmly with an embrace and many tears. Jesus asked Ezekiel, “Son of Man, can these bones live?” And Ezekiel replied simply, “Oh Lord! Only you know!”

The third and final time that Jesus went to pray, the creators of *The Chosen* imagined that his earthly father Joseph came to him, wrapped him in his arms and comforted him as Jesus sobbed with the realization of what he had to face.

I learned at least two important things from listening to the show’s creator talk about about why they portrayed it this way. And both points were right in line with the broad strokes of Richard Rohr’s points in Chapter 9 about Ezekiel.

First, the references Jesus makes to the cup – asking God to let this cup pass from him. This is how the prophetic literature refers to God’s anger; the prophets describe it as the “cup of God’s wrath”. Isaiah mentions it in chapter 51, verse 17 “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.” And also Jeremiah, in chapter 25, verses 15-16 “For thus the Lord the God of Israel said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them.” And it continues for several verses, to describe the sort of destruction and death that the prophets say God will bring on the nations, including Israel and Judah, because of their unfaithfulness.

So in those hours in Gethsemane and those agonizing prayers, Jesus was absorbing, taking into himself all of humanity’s sinfulness, willfulness, unfaithfulness, in the drinking of this cup of God’s wrath. As we’ve heard now for several weeks about the prophets, they all started from this place. Prophesying and embodying the righteous, fiery anger of God.

Ezekiel was no exception. The first 24 chapters are focused on God’s judgment and Ezekiel describing in violent and terrifying terms how the unfaithful Hebrew people would endure becoming refugees, being forced to deport and resettle in foreign lands, being dominated and oppressed by cruel and greedy kings and their armies. The valley of the dry bones was a clear and stark image of death and destruction.

The second point that the creators of *The Chosen* made in the Gethsemane scene was that after God’s wrath and judgment comes God’s redemption and grace.

One of the ways they portrayed this was when the disciples kept falling asleep. The first time Jesus returned to them he woke them brusquely and scolded them, clearly angry and frustrated.

The second time, after his vision of Ezekiel, we viewers see the disciples sleeping as Jesus sees them – they are young boys, children, beloved and forgiven. They are shown compassion and grace as Jesus smiles gently and does not wake them. The creator of the show suggested that ultimately humanity is seen by God as beloved children, always learning, making mistakes, falling short and being loved.

When Jesus met up with Ezekiel in his vision in the midst of the dry bones, the first thing Ezekiel offered was an embrace. Comfort. Grace. And then the amazing hope of redemption, resurrection. Can these bones live? Yes! Prophecy to the bones and I will cause the breath to enter them, says the Lord God. The first 24 chapters of Ezekiel may be all about God's anger; the last 15 chapters are full of God's promises of grace and redemption.

Rohr sums it up as he writes, "Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel breaks (the notion) that love must be earned, that we can create worthiness... Grace is not what we deserve by doing the right things, but rather a gift freely given by the Creator in the very act of creation... Grace is one of those realities that is everywhere once you stop weighing and counting. (It) follows no logic, explanation, or even human decency... Midway through the book, in Ezekiel 16:62-63, he writes in God's voice, "I am going to renew my covenant with you; and you will learn that I am Yahweh, and so remember and be covered with shame, and in your confusion be reduced to silence, when I have pardoned you for all that you have done."

Here, the people did not even ask for or recognize they might need forgiveness. Ezekiel and Jeremiah were coming to the same conclusion around the same time, in the middle of the exile. In Ezekiel, Yahweh always acts and never reacts... This is divine revelation at its fullest and freest! Restorative justice – the diving freedom to do good at all costs – is quite simply God being consistently true to Godself. It's a total end run around retributive justice, which Ezekiel portrays as being beneath God's dignity.

In chapter 37, Ezekiel gives us the wonderful vision of the valley of dry bones to depict how such restoration might happen... Here we have unearned restoration and renewal given by God to the exiles for the taking: "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from you graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil."

"And this is still the case, continues Rohr, "Our job, too, is to breathe together with God upon the dry bones that are always present throughout our world and make them live, just as God has breathed on ours."

Benediction – As you go out from here, carry the prophets' words with you. Breathe with God upon the dry bones that are always present throughout our world and make them live, just as God has breathed on ours.