

Ezekiel 37: 1-14  
Revival. Church vs World  
Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007

This morning is the second sermon in a three sermon series entitled Church v World. This week, as we look at Ezekiel 37:1-14, we will look at the Church's view of hope and revival and contrast it over and against the world's view. I want to begin our look at this morning's passage with an analogy and some historical background - so that we parachute down into this passage with some idea of what is going on either side of it. Firstly, the analogy.

A

The 1930's in England were a very nervous time. Germany was rebuilding its armed forces at a tremendous rate. Many people feared that there would be a war. But on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1938 the then Prime Minister of England, Mr Neville Chamberlain returned from Germany with the best possible news – he had done a deal with Germany over Czechoslovakia and announced to the British public “Peace in our Time.”

For a nation that had in recent history experienced the First World War and the Great Depression it was tremendous news. The British people were overjoyed and Chamberlain was, for a time, the most popular man in the country.

In the middle of these celebrations, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1938, Sir Winston Churchill M.P. made a speech in Parliament flatly contradicting Mr Chamberlain. He made it clear that he thought war inevitable. “This is only the beginning of the reckoning, the first foretaste of a bitter cup, which will be proffered from year to year...” (from Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat - The Speeches of Winston Churchill pp143)

Do you think that Churchill was popular after his speech? No!! The Times newspaper said that Churchill had “treated a crowded house to prophecies that made Jeremiah appear an optimist.” (From the same book at pp129).

BUT, Churchill was right! AND, it was essential that the people's false hopes be destroyed, so that the people could prepare their defenses.

Segue

Prophets are always saying unpopular things and today as we look at Ezekiel, we will find that he was no exception. To understand why he was so unpopular, we need to examine the times in which Ezekiel lived and spoke.

A1

In the year 605BC, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon attacked Jerusalem, the Holy City and carted some of the Israelites off into exile. Nobles and others including the prophet Daniel are amongst this group.

About seven years later in 598BC, King Neb attacks Jerusalem again and carts more Israelites off into exile. Ezekiel is amongst them.

Ezekiel begins his prophetic ministry while the people are in exile in Babylon but before Jerusalem is finally and completely destroyed. The people in exile in Babylon cling to a hope that Jerusalem will quickly be restored and that they will soon return.

Ezekiel, God's prophet, keeps telling them that Jerusalem will soon fall and to get used to exile. And, guess what happened. In 586B.C., Jerusalem was completely destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar and a third and final wave of Israelites went into exile.

Do you think that preaching Jerusalem's destruction made Ezekiel popular? No! But Ezekiel was right!! And it was essential that the false hopes of the people be destroyed, so that they would learn to hope for and in the things of God.

Segue

So, Ezekiel turned out to be right. And of course, the people said to Ezekiel – now we know that God really speaks to you – you were right and we will listen to what God tells you from now on - NOT!

No! The people fell into a deep pit of despair! Turn with me to Ezekiel Chapter 37: 1-14 on page 878 .Verse 11 – The people say “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.”

Verse 12 (and here, God is looking into the hearts of the exiles) – "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you my people will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them”.

In exile, the Israelites felt like they were living in graves – that they had stepped into their graves and that dirt was being shovelled in on top of them.

Segue

The exiles had false hopes. Ezekiel demolished them. And so now, the people have no hope. What does Ezekiel have to tell them? What story does he have to speak into there despair? He tells them the vision that God gave to him. Lets look at that.

B1

V1-2 Ezekiel is taken to a valley of dry bones – where he notices two things – there were lots of them and they were very dry.

V3 God himself questions Ezekiel “Can these bones live? – O Lord, you alone know – says Ezekiel (Good answer!)

V5-8 God commands Ezekiel to prophesy life to the bones and Ezekiel does as he is commanded. The bones come together, then tendons, flesh and finally, skin. Bodies, but no breath – no spirit, no soul in short.

V9-11 God commands Ezekiel to prophesy “breath” to the bodies. Ezekiel does as he is told – breath comes into them and they stand on their feet, a vast army.

From a valley full of dry bones, God brings flesh and spirit. You see, the people of Jerusalem had ignored God and gone their own way. They had made up their own story. And where had it taken them? Into exile, 10,000 kilometres from home and in a spiritual state of complete and utter despair. In the midst of a people without hope, Ezekiel preaches God's message of hope and revival.

Segue

We have this same message of hope, a story, if you like, that we must speak into a world without hope, into a culture that increasingly knows only despair.

C

**We are the custodians of story.** And what is the story? Well, briefly. In the beginning, God created the universe, the world and everything in it. And it was very good. But man disobeyed God and now every man, woman and child stands under God's righteous judgment. *It's our bones that have dried up and our hope that is gone!* BUT God, who is rich in mercy, sent His only Son Christ Jesus into the world so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

AND, we also have this hope - that Jesus will return to bring history to a close, and that those who believe will form part of a vast and mighty eternal army. Revelation 7:9 says this:-

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."(NIV)

THIS is the story that we have to tell. From Creation, through the Fall, through to Redemption, Return and Revival. This is our hope, that through Christ's death and resurrection, many will come to faith and hope - people out of every nation, tribe and language.

Segue

So, what story of hope and revival does this world have to tell? None really. In fact the culture that we live in is increasingly taking the very idea of story and ripping it up

C1

The sad truth is that most people in our Western culture no longer believe in story. That is to say that lives are being lived without any sense of meaning or context. People no longer see themselves as being part of an overall story in which they have a part to play for good or evil, for better or worse. As a culture, we are rejecting the idea that we are spiritual beings. And the consequences of this are devastating.

By way of example, recently, the Sydney Morning Herald has been running a series on the city of Gosford – a city that has been expanding so rapidly, it is making peoples head spin. The sense of isolation and alienation spreads right across the

generations. But the part of one article that caught my eye was the caption under this photograph. It reads, "Self-harm – a 14 year old girl at Erina Shopping Centre on a Friday night. A friend explains that they cut their arms with razors to overcome emotional pain. "You're focusing on the pain that you have just done and not what you were crying about."

As I looked at the photograph, I noticed that she was wearing the latest fashion and carrying an IPOD. That is to say, she appears materially well off. But, she is in a state of despair – where she feels that she has two choices – emotional pain or physical pain.

The SMH thinks that Gosford is a special case. My view, and it is a personal view, is that it is pretty much typical. There is pain and despair pretty much everywhere that you look.

## Conclusion

So, how do we as a congregation respond? In two ways, I think.

Firstly, we must immerse ourselves in the Story. Really soak ourselves in the story. Read your Bibles and get to know them very well. For some of us, this may mean recognising the impact that the culture that we live in is having on us. The honest truth for some of us is that the Bible just doesn't seem relevant to the lives that we are living. We can't seem to synthesise it – to conform the Bible to our everyday cultural experience.

But there is the deception. The Story wasn't written to conform to us. The story was written that we might conform to it. You see, it's not easy to conform to the Bible – it's the difference between popping down to the supermarket for a nicely packaged "T" Bone steak and being a cattle farmer. On the one hand, a ten minute round trip to the supermarket and on the other, a lifetime of dedication. It may call for serious and sustained repentance among us before we can even begin to understand the Story and the cost that we must be prepared to pay if we are to play our part in it.

Secondly. We must increasingly look outside these four walls. We must develop compassionate hearts for the lost and for each other - we all carry burdens and are in need of healing. And I make this observation. It is often from out of our own brokenness that we gain the insight and desire to help others.

It is a privilege to be a member of this congregation, to share with you what we have in Christ. **We have the words of eternal life.** It would be a crime to keep what we have and who we are to ourselves.

Amen