

Waiting On Resurrection

by pastor Jon Odom

December 18, 2016

Ezekiel 37:1-14

This is the 4th Sunday of the season of Advent in the church calendar

Advent simply means “coming”

During this season we remember the first coming of X at Christmas

And we eagerly look forward to his 2nd coming to renew/remake the world

Throughout this season we are focused on the theme of waiting

We’ve said through this series that while we’d like God to press a button

And help us fast-forward through our season of waiting

To get us to the good stuff in life

God consistently avoids doing that

Which, quite honestly, just stinks b/c waiting is the worst.

There are superficial things like waiting for our computer to un-freeze

Or waiting on the tarmac for the plane to get clearance to take off

Or waiting for the cable guy to show up sometime between 10am-7pm

In these situations, waiting can be agitating.

At other times, waiting does more than agitate you; at times it *empties* you.

You’ve prayed & prayed for something & it hasn’t come yet (fertility)

Or you’ve been pleading w/God to give clarity on a decision & radio silence

Or you’ve been interceding for another person & seeing no signs of life

A group of people in an excruciating season of waiting right now

Are citizens of the city of Aleppo in Syria

Who are being bombed and shelled and hunted down by their government

As those who can grope and crawl their way to safety, crying out for rescue

I urge you to pray for peace in Syria (we’ll do more than pray—more in 2017)

During the series we’ve been looking at big ticket items the world is waiting for:

Waiting on Justice

Waiting on Healing

Waiting on Peace

Today: Waiting on Resurrection

These are all things that were initially fulfilled

At the first coming of Christ some 2000 years ago

But they won't arrive in their fullness until Christ's ultimate return

Even though these are not not here in fullness; though we're still waiting...

The death and resurrection of Jesus was a watershed moment in history

It represented the beginning of the end of the world as we know it

A world inundated with sin and death and decay

And it began a new era of the in-breaking of God's Kingdom

We see this in the miraculous healings by Jesus & the apostles

The blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised

Those uneducated, bumbling disciples

Are transformed into apostles w/authority and courage

The death/resurrection of JX was like D-Day in WWII

When the Allied forces landed on Normandy Beach—

The outcome of the war was basically settled

The days of Hitler & the Nazi Reich were numbered

But that reality was not fully enacted until V-E Day

When the German army unconditionally surrendered

In between D-Day and V-E Day there was war/suffering/loss of life

Similarly, in between the 1st/2nd coming of X there is struggle/pain/heartache

But we can't overlook the fundamental ways the world forever changed

When the Son of God took on flesh & moved into neighborhood in Nazareth

Because we live on this side of Christ's 1st coming, we have to be people of hope

We're Romans 8:28 people

Believing, "*In all things* God is working for the good of those who love him."

God is working to enact the victory of the cross in all the world.

This morning, our text comes from Ezekiel 37

A text in which we hear whispers of final victory of God at X's 2nd coming

Ezekiel was a priest of the people of Judah (some of whom had been exiled)
These were people in a season of waiting
Ones who had been forcibly removed from their homeland
And taken to the land of their enemies.
They were waiting, not only for a return to their land
But for a return of that sense that God was watching out for them.
They were overwhelmed/afraid/ashamed of their disobedience
That had led to their exile
And they were hungry to know what God was going to do next

And so God selected this priest, Ezekiel, to be his mouthpiece to the people
God gave Ezekiel powerful visions—like he was caught up in a trance
And he described to the people what he saw.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Pew Bible, p. 1345)

The hand of the Lord was upon me and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They said, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘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. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in

your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares.'”

Have you ever been in a truly hopeless situation?

Have you ever been so emptied of hope you felt like one of these dry bones?

Your family is breaking apart, or infertility, or you’ve lost someone you loved

Maybe you are in job transition, you feel lost in life

Or you’re in a dry spot with God where you don’t want to pray/read/church

Or you’re battling depression

I was in one of those spots 8 years ago

When Emily and I were missionaries in Honduras

I was in depression, I felt lost spiritually and emotionally and vocationally

I didn’t want to go to church, I didn’t want to pray, I didn’t want to worship

And I was a missionary for crying out loud; you ever been there?

God leads Ezekiel out to a valley filled with bones

Bones that are brittle, long since stripped of life

Everywhere Ezekiel looks, it’s bones. It’s hopeless situations.

What a dark, morose scene that God invited Ezekiel into

It’s like visiting a holocaust museum (DC/Israel)- piles of shoes/jewelry

To be around that much death feels like being in the presence of evil

And in the middle of that, God asks Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?”

Is there any reason to be hopeful here?

And Ezekiel gives his churchy answer: “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

You know what he was really thinking? “OF COURSE there’s no hope here.”

Are you crazy? It’s almost offensive that God would ask.

You’ve been here.

You have tried *everything* to get your situation to change.

You’ve argued w/God; you’ve come at this from every angle

& you’ve slammed up against that brick wall so many times you’ve given up

And when some well-meaning person comes along and offers a suggestion

You want to slap them b/c more than anyone you KNOW there’s no hope.

You’d say w/the people of Israel:

“Our bones are dried up; our hope is gone; we’re cut off.”

Here’s Ezekiel, standing in a mass grave and God asks: “Can these bones live?”

Ezekiel thinks: “Well, God, I don’t know what to tell you here.”

And God instructs him to speak, to prophesy over the bones to reassemble

And so Ezekiel does what he’s told and says, “Hear the word of the Lord.”

And suddenly, at the command of God there’s a rumbling, a clattering

As bones organize into skeletons & sinew & muscle & organs & skin appears

& before Ezekiel knows it, there stands a sea of people, but not yet alive

And God prompts Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath

That at God’s command it might enter and animate these who were dead

The picture here takes us back to the creation of the first man, Adam

Who, Scripture tells us, was formed of dust of earth by hands of Lord God

And then the Lord filled Adam’s lungs w/the breath of life

And he became a living being

All around Ezekiel, in his prophetic vision

The Lord God was recreating an army of a people once defeated

Ones who had been slain and overtaken by their enemy

Now standing upright and alive, gloriously reassembled

By the power of the Word of God

They were broken and helpless, brittle and defeated

Objects of pity and grief, remnants of battles long-since lost

Until those dry bones heard the voice of the creator calling them back to life

At the end of the prophetic vision, God begins to explain to Ezekiel its meaning

That the valley of dry bones represented the people of Israel

Despairing for their exile, cut off from hope

But God would “raise the dead”—so to speak—& bring them back to land

“So that [the text says] they would know God is the Lord,” God is in charge.

That’s the 54th time in this book that God echoes that line

“I’m doing this great work among you *so that you’ll know* that I am the Lord”

This reminds us another hopeless situation—when the people of Israel

Were enslaved in Egypt; subjected to the rulers & so-called gods of Egyptians

Time and again, as God unleashed the plagues on Egypt
And explained his behavior to Moses and Aaron
He told them he was performing these great deeds rescuing the people
“So that they would know that God is Lord”; no one threatens his sovereignty

Now, this text in Ezekiel that we’ve just read
Resurrection is clearly employed in a figurative sense
God even says so in v. 11
And the meaning of the text would have *remained figurative*
Until something happened in the first century that retroactively altered
The way the people read the Scriptures (something to reveal fuller meaning)
And that’s the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

This shift of hoping for a *figurative* resurrection to a *literal* resurrection
Is called a mutation; mutations require explanations
Because whole groups of people don’t go from believing “A” to “B”
Unless something happened that was 1.) Drastic; 2.) Visible to community
That mutation was caused by Jesus’ own resurrection, which he predicted

Because Jesus was raised from the dead
The people began to look back on texts like this and see
God wasn’t satisfied to only *figuratively* raise the dead
To bring one group of people back to their land
There’s no lasting victory there if all those people end up dying anyway.

No, God was taking on greater enemies than Assyrians/Babylonians/Egyptians
God was leading a frontal assault on the greatest weapon
The enemy of God had in its arsenal; God was going to conquer death itself
And that is precisely what God intends to do.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a sneak peek of what God will do
When Christ comes for the second time
Graves open up; dead will come to life in transformed resurrected bodies
When, like we read in Ezekiel’s vision, they hear the Word of God
To climb out of the casket or walk out of the tomb

And together we'll attend the last funeral of that old era
When we gather to celebrate the death of death
And throw a wild party to revel in the final victory of God

John 5:25 - Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

So, what does all this mean?

First, Jesus said "a time is coming" when the dead will hear God & live
This is the Christian hope- "The dead in Christ will rise."
I'm finding more and more that I can't preach a sermon
Without directly/indirectly talking about the hope of resurrection
When we can't go a day without hearing about death
We need to keep about resurrection every week

The holidays are so difficult for many of us b/c someone we love isn't here.

Spouses, parents, children, friends
Hear the good news: "A time is coming when the dead will hear the voice
Of the Son of God and those who hear will live."
Death stings today, but it won't sting forever.
May the grace of Christ comfort us as we wait on resurrection.
Jesus said "A time is coming..." [there is a future hope]

But Jesus also said, "And a time has now come." [there is a present hope]

For those who feel hopeless
For those who are lost in depression
For those who have exhausted themselves trying to find peace
For those who feel enslaved by their addictions
For those who carry the shame of guilt for the things you've done
For those who hate life and hate themselves
For those who are emotionally bankrupt and spiritually dead
There is hope for a kind of resurrection for you today in Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that on our own, we are all dead in our sins.

And the dead can't do a thing to help themselves.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

And you can opt-in, say yes to God’s love & find your resurrection (now + later)

By placing your faith in JX, who died for our sins & lives to give us life

1 John 1:9- “If we confess our sin, God is faithful/just & will forgive...”

If you are dead in sin and cut off from a relationship with God

It is no mistake that you are here today.

God has been drawing you in, whispering his voice, calling your name

If you know that at this moment God is working in you

Then when I pray in just a moment, I want to invite you to

Acknowledge your need, confess your sin & ask JX to bring you back to life

If you’re here this AM and you already know Jesus

But because of sin or b/c of challenges in life & your hope is waning

There is grace and hope and new life for you in Christ as well

Hear the good news: We live in a world of resurrection

The God who can cause the dead to come to life

Can cause whatever breakthrough you’re waiting on to come to pass

And even if he doesn’t, there’s STILL more than enough hope to go around

Don’t lose heart, don’t give into fatalism, keep believing in resurrection.

I’m going to invite you to close your eyes & enter a time of prayer & reflection

I want to address those people here who already know Jesus

But who are discouraged, who feel hopeless

Who need God to do a work of resurrection in them

If that’s you, with everyone’s eyes closed, would you raise your hand?

[Pray for those people]

I want to address those people here who don’t yet have a relationship w/Jesus

You are dead in your sin; you know you’ve done wrong in God’s eyes

You’re feeling hopeless or lost in life

And you need God to bring you back to life for the very first time

If that’s you, as a sign of your faith & need of God, will you raise your hand?

[Pray for those people]

