

## Sermon Notes – Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September - 'Hope'

What one thing do you hope for?

When the people of God faced suffering in exile, God offered them Hope. One key to holding onto hope in God is to maintain his perspective on all of life. Our day to day experiences can be overwhelming. Unless we can see that God's purposes are to bring about continual growth in us, we can be tempted to despair.

### Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Background)

*Ezekiel was a prophet who lived in Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, about 6 centuries before the birth of Christ. In 597 or 588 BC, he was taken captive along with King Jehoiachin to Babylon, before the actual fall of Jerusalem. And much of his prophetic ministry played out in exile. Ezekiel was a man who suffered much. Not only had he been ripped away from his homeland, but he had watched his wife die. He had been given the task of preaching to God's people in exile. Much of his message was bleak. He was to make sure that God's people understood why they had been taken captive—that it was because they had persistently turned away from God to worship idols, and had willingly engaged in all the horrific practices that came along with idol worship, like temple prostitution and child sacrifice. Ezekiel was also tasked with calling God's people to repent—to turn back from their idolatrous pursuits to the living God, so that he could restore them.*

Read Ezekiel 37:1-4

- Why would God give Ezekiel a vision of a valley of dry human bones?
- What do these bones represent (if unsure, v 11 may give you a clue)?

In v3, God asks Ezekiel if these bones can live.

- What is God trying to teach Ezekiel through this vision?

Read vv 5-6. God is telling Ezekiel to preach to these heaps of old human bones, which seems to be a ridiculous task.

- Has God ever asked you to do something ridiculous or impossible?

Read vv 7-10. Ezekiel obeys in the vision and preaches to the dry bones. The dry bones come together in two stages – first the flesh and then after Ezekiel obeys and preaches the 2nd part of God's message, the breath comes.

- How does this breath foreshadow Pentecost?
- What are the dry bones within us that need a fresh outpouring of God's breath?
- How can we be more open to the Spirit in our lives?

Read vv 11-14. God interprets the vision for Ezekiel: The exiled nation of Israel has lost all hope and God will restore this hope. I count three parts to this hope.

- What are they and why is each one important?
- Is there a personal circumstance so daunting that you have lost hope?

Let's remember to pray that we will gain hope in our Sovereign Lord's ability to work through our modest efforts to make dry bones live. (Jeremiah 29:11).

- What are you hoping for from the Lord today?