

## **Thankful || Ezekiel 37:1-14**

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When my brother and I lived together while I was in seminary, he would watch countless movie trailers in his spare time. He loved them. Have you ever gone to the movies and watched the previews at the beginning, and thought after watching the trailer that the movie looked AWESOME! Then you go see the full movie and you realize it's not so awesome? Or the opposite can happen, where the trailer isn't that great but the movie is amazing. The trailer has nothing to do with how good the movie is. It's job is to get people in the building to see the movie. A bad trailer or a good trailer doesn't make any difference on how good the movie will be, the movie is already made.

One way I believe we can view our lives as Christians is to be trailers for God's movie. Our lives are called to be short previews of a life lived in God's Kingdom. Truth is, we probably won't make the best previews. Thankfully, the preview doesn't affect the real movie. Our job, just like a good trailer, is to get people in the building to see the real thing. Get people to move toward a relationship with Christ that we all know will change lives.

### **Ezekiel**

This morning, we'll talk about some good previews in Scripture. Two scenes in Scripture that give us a preview of resurrection. We are promised in Scripture a day when Christ will return God will raise the dead as he establishes the Kingdom of God on

earth. Until that day, we look for signposts or previews of resurrection. Let me show you what I mean.

A few weeks ago, the Children's Choir gave us a preview of Ezekiel 37 when they sang Dem Bones, and it inspired me to read the real thing. This is a remarkable chapter, and I've never preached on it, so even though this wasn't on the schedule, I couldn't help it. It fit in this week, so let's get into it. Special shout out to Allen and our kids for providing a preview to get us into the building to see this movie.

In Ezekiel 37, we find Ezekiel, a prophet, led to the middle of a valley that is filled with bones. This valley was likely the scene of a great battle, where the dead were left behind. Ezekiel tells us that these bones were 'very dry,' which is a significant detail because it was believed that this was as dead as someone could be. Nothing left but bones, and the bones had been dried from time. So that's the scene, God leads Ezekiel to a valley of death, a valley of dry bones.

And God asks Ezekiel, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Easy answer: No. If anyone else asked Ezekiel this, that would be his answer. But it's not just anyone asking. Ezekiel answers: "O Lord God, you know." Sometimes I think we can take a page from Ezekiel's book and face God and say, "O Lord God, you know. I'm not going to assume what can happen because you can make anything happen."

And indeed, God does know. He tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, and tell the bones that they will live again. That God will cause breath to enter them, cause sinews and flesh and skin to come back to them. So Ezekiel says all that. And suddenly there is a rattling, the bones begin shaking and moving and the bones come together a form skeletons. Then the skeletons started gaining sinews and flesh and skin. But they were not alive. This recreation of human bodies is a reminder of God first creating the first human body. When God formed *Adam*, meaning man, from the *adamah*, the ground. But when God formed Adam, and when God reformed these bodies in the valley, they did not yet live. What was needed? The breath of God. Breath is a fun word, because the same word can be translated wind, breath, and...Spirit. God had not yet breathed spirits into these bodies. God had not yet breathed life into these bodies.

So God does so, and the vast multitude of bodies came alive. What was once a vast valley of dry bones was now filled with living bodies. And the scene stops there. And then God gives Ezekiel a translation for this vision. God tells Ezekiel what it means.

To understand this translation, let's look at Ezekiel's life. Ezekiel was a prophet, just like Micah last week. Only these two are in vastly different contexts. Remember Micah, a prophet who lived at a time when Assyria attacked Judah, and Jerusalem was saved but the cities around Jerusalem were destroyed? This was around the 690s BC. After this happens, Judah rebuilds, and life is starting to get good again. Assyria begins losing power, which is

great for the Israelites. But in the power vacuum of Assyria comes another empire, one that grows larger and more powerful than Assyria: Babylon. Babylon comes and conquers the Israelites about 100 years after Assyria had attacked. Babylon, as was the custom of the day, rounded up the wealthy and elite families in Israel and brought them back to Babylon as exiles. Ezekiel was in this group. Ezekiel was taken from the land of Israel and brought to Babylon. A few years after this group was taken, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and, more importantly, the temple that Solomon had built. Now, the Israelites were exiled in Babylon *and* the Temple where God was worshiped was destroyed. The situation was hopeless.

Being an exile of the mighty Babylonians was as hopeless as hopeless got. It was as hopeless as...a valley of dry bones. And in this hopelessness, God speaks. In this hopelessness, God promises the breath of new life. In this hopelessness, God promises resurrection.

After the scene of bringing dry bones back to life, God gives Ezekiel this explanation for the vision: "Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on

your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.” God tells Ezekiel that God’s people will return to their home. Separation from the land was likened to death, to feeling like dry bones, and God promises redemption. In this hopelessness, God promises resurrection.

## **Hope**

When your life feels hopeless, when you feel like dry bones, God asks if these bones can live. We respond, O Lord God, you know. And then we wait for God’s breath of new life. And when we experience new life, we can share that with others, providing them a preview of God’s ultimate resurrection power. Our God is a God a resurrection. Never forget that. Never underestimate that. Our God is a God of resurrection, and if I had to categorize resurrection, I’d say there are two types.

## **Previews**

Ezekiel provides a preview of both kinds of resurrection. The first kind is what I would call an everyday resurrection. God promises new life for the nation of Israel in this passage, a return to the land. Israel was hopeless and God promises new life. God promises us these types of resurrections in places of hopelessness as well. Resurrection in relationships, in physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health, in our faith, in our hope and joy. God provides these types of resurrections daily.

The second preview Ezekiel gives us is that of ultimate resurrection. What I would call last day resurrection. He gives us a preview of God's power to not only resurrect Christ, but also to one day resurrect us all in the last day. This is the resurrection demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 15 read for you earlier, where "the dead will be raised imperishable." There's another powerful preview of that resurrection in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 27 describes Jesus' death in this way: "Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split." This is the part that's familiar, but then there's this little detail: "The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many."

That part of the story might sound odd to us, but it shouldn't. Christ's death saved us from death, Christ's resurrection is the first fruit of our own resurrection. God gives us a little preview of the larger resurrection here when graves are opened and resurrected people start walking around.

## **Dillon**

Ezekiel provides a preview, Jesus provided the best preview, we are called to provide small previews of resurrection.

One of my best friends is working on a second career, but his first career was producing movie trailers. I hope that doesn't sound too

cliche coming from the pastor who moved here from LA and worked in Beverly Hills. When you go to the movies and watch the previews before the actual movie, or go to the internet or watch tv commercials about movies, this friend would create those. Once I asked him what it was like making movie trailers and what he liked about it. A few of his comments made me think of how we can live a life of faith that gives a preview of the hope of resurrection.

When I asked him what he liked about it, he enjoyed the creative process and the teamwork. We might not think about the teamwork idea for movie trailers, but it takes a team of people to make those little previews.

When I asked him what the goals were, he said there were two: first, make the client happy, and second, create the best representation of the film, using the best lines and scenes to to both compel people to see it and to demonstrate the best of the message that he saw in the film in a two minute window.

Here's why I bring this up. I think there is wisdom for us in what my friend said about the movie trailer world. If we are called to provide a preview of God's Kingdom, of resurrection, we can draw from my friends work. First, it's a team effort and creative. We need th church to do this, we need the varied gifts God has given each of us and need to depend on the way God has weaved us and our gifts together in the church, and we need to be creative in how we demonstrate the Gospel - hospitality, love, art, etc.

Then, our goals can also line up with my friend: first goal, make the client happy. The one who commissions us to do this work, we are called to make that one happy. For us, that is God. May our work please the Lord. Second, we need to know the source material well enough to explain it simply. Scripture, the story of the Gospel, the story of how God has moved in our individual lives, we need to be able to tell that story to get people interested. Provide the preview that gets people in the building to see the movie.

## **Thanksgiving**

This week is Thanksgiving. Here's what I want us to think about this week. We are often thankful for what is and what was. We are thankful for what is: the people in our lives, the homes we have, the food we receive. We are thankful for what was: the people who came before us or who have since left us, moments of healing, moments of joy.

But, as people who are rooted in Christ's resurrection, we should also be thankful for what will be. Thankful in advance because of hope. Thankful that the dry bones in our lives will be made alive again. Thankful that death is not final and that God's power of resurrection is. Thankful that this perishable body will be raised imperishable. Thankful that God has the final say, and that God is good. This Thursday, as you celebrate Thanksgiving, think about that. As Christians, we are thankful for what is, what was, and what will be.