

The God Who Dwells

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 December 2014

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] As we stand, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we have just confessed the hope that you give to us in Jesus Christ. And we pray that as we hear your word, that your hope will fill our minds and our hearts and our souls.

That we will love you with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And love our neighbors as ourselves. We pray, Father, that the goodness of your hope will fill us and change us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Well, this is the last in a sermon series on Ezekiel.

And as I'm looking around, I'm trying to see whether there is relief or sadness. Or actually, there's conflicting emotions I see out there. What it means to finish this book.

I get to finish up with the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. And I'm also aware that we have all the whole church family here.

[1 : 09] Except for the younger children. But the children's teen club, the CTC, is here with us. And I don't want the sermon to be too long. So I've got a big task ahead of me.

But the great thing about this section of Ezekiel is it has everything to do with hope. And so what I'm going to speak about through these chapters in Ezekiel is the hope that we have in God.

And how that changes us. And how important it is for us. The hope that is talked about here is not like the hope of the world. And I think that the way for me to kind of get at what that means for us. The hope that is Christian and how it is different from the world. Is to think a little bit about presents at Christmas. And I know that you who are in CTC are going to be receiving presents very, very soon.

In our house there is great excitement and anticipation about what will happen. But you may be like my boys in that there was a list of presents that they would love to receive.

[2 : 19] That was placed very prominently up on the fridge. Kind of like the 95 theses. And sometimes it seemed like there were 95 presents requested. But in that list I think I asked about it and they said well we don't expect to receive everything on that list.

I said well that's good. And so they don't know for sure what they will receive. This is the hope of the world. There is this wish that maybe I'll get what I am hoping for, wishing for.

But there is an uncertainty. This is the nature of the hope of the world. There is uncertainty about the future. Because we cannot know the future. But there is a second type of hope.

And it's like the second type of present. It is the present that you know that you will receive. Without a shadow of the doubt. And if you're here at CTC. You may have presents like that coming to you on Christmas day.

And it may be because you have done what your parents have forbidden you to do. Which was to go into that closet or that room where the presents are. And you have sneaked a peek. You have not resisted temptation.

[3 : 34] You've just gone for it. And you know that there is a certain present that you will receive. Or like one of my sons, Alexander. You actually went with your parents and pointed out the gift that you were going to get.

And you knew that your parent bought that gift. And you've already seen the gift. And it's just been put away until you open it and you pretend, what a surprise.

I've received this present. That is the hope of the Bible. Because the hope of the Bible is what you know for sure is coming to you in your future.

And the vision of chapters 40 through 48 is a vision of that certain hope. The nature of it is like that present that you already know.

You've seen a taste of it. You know that it is coming. And that is the theme of Advent as well. It is that we look forward in hope to what we will receive.

[4 : 33] Because Jesus has come at Bethlehem, God and man. And he will come again in glory to bring all of the goodness that God has for us. Which has to do with a relationship with him.

It is an absolute certainty that will never change. That is before every Christian. It is what every Christian knows is coming to them.

And this is important for us. Because this is we were made for hope. Humans, whether they believe in God or not, are made for hope. We cannot live without it.

If we don't have hope, we die. And that's why we humans very naturally manufacture hopes. And those hopes are always in good things.

They're in our money and what it can do for us. It's in our spouses, in our children. We hope in our careers or in our accomplishments or in our homes or in a pleasure.

[5 : 31] We hope in health. All of these are gifts from God. There's goodness in them. But the thing that all of these hopes have in common is that they are temporary. Death will separate us from our relationships.

Our health will fail us. Our jobs, our careers will one day end. We will leave our investments behind when God calls us home.

And our relationships that we can place lots of hope in, especially at this time of year, are often marred by sin. So any hope that we have in this world is by nature temporary.

So that only a hope that is greater than this world, that does not come from within the world, can be a certain hope. That is the only hope that can last and extend beyond what we see in this world.

Well, the Hebrew people in Ezekiel have experienced this difference of hopes. They had come to a place in their life as God's people where all of their hopes were on temporary things, on things that God created.

[6 : 46] Their hopes were in money, in the walls of their city, in armies, in their crops, and being able to amass wealth.

Even in other gods, they were placing their hope in, who could give them power over the things in their life. And they chose to reject, in that process, their one true hope, their God.

And build their lives on those temporary hopes. And God has shown them throughout Ezekiel, this is what we've been going through all fall, He has seen, He has showed them the hopelessness of doing this.

And what has happened in Ezekiel is that God has taken away everything they had hoped in. The city of Jerusalem has burned. The temple completely destroyed. Their homes obliterated.

Their families separated and scattered. Hundreds, thousands of miles from Jerusalem. In fact, God had revealed that their sin had even taken away their status as God's people.

[7 : 51] They had become just like the pagan nations around them. And they had made God their enemy. So they're completely without hope. They're the walking dead spiritually.

And that's why chapter 37, as you remember, Israel is portrayed as a whole pile of dead, dry bones in a valley.

It's a picture of life, utter lifelessness. It's a picture of a people without any hope at all. But in that hopeless condition, God in His grace, in His love for His people, reveals a hope that lasts and gives life.

It is actually a hope that is greater than anything they would have ever known before. And it is a hope that lasts and gives life. And that's why from the point of the news of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 33 until right through to the rest of the book of Ezekiel, the theme is hope.

And this is what I want to talk about in this sermon. In chapters 40 through 48, there is a massive vision here. And it is a vision of hope. It reveals a new temple.

[9 : 10] And it takes place on New Year's Day, 573 BC, on Rosh Hashanah. And there's no accident here. It's New Year's Day because God is revealing a new work, a new life that He will give to His people, new relationships, and a new world.

And it all comes through hope. And the amazing thing about that hope is that all the pain and sin and evil that Israel has experienced because of their terrible sin, because of their disregard for God, is swept away.

And it is replaced by this incredible hope. And these chapters tell us four things about hope that I want to talk about. The first is, it tells us what the substance of hope is.

And it's important for us to be clear about what that is. And you can't miss it in Ezekiel. It's going to tell us the substance of hope. It will tell us the effect of hope.

It will tell us about the person of hope. It points to the person of hope. And it brings us repentance. It's almost a strange ending, but you'll see how it makes sense.

[10:21] Now, so the first point, the substance of hope, this is all about the temple. Why the temple? How does that show us what hope is?

And you might be thinking, how can a vision of a temple be relevant to me this morning as I get ready for Christmas? Or you might be thinking, it's really relevant because after all, we've been praying for a new church home. Maybe this has to do with that.

But in fact, the point of this vision is not that temple itself. It is what that temple symbolizes. It's what it symbolizes. And Israel understood very well what the temple meant.

The one thing that made Israelites distinct from all the nations of the world was not their great power. There was none. In fact, if anything was distinctive, it was their smallness.

There was nothing impressive about them. The thing that was distinct about them is that God chose them. He chose them to be His people and He chose them as the ones that He would live with.

[11:27] That was the hope that defined them. God with them. Living with them. Dwelling with them. His living presence among them. So if you were a Jew who lived in Jerusalem, the temple was this beautiful symbol that you saw every day that the living God was present in your midst.

That was the purpose of the temple. It was to say that we are in relationship with this one living God and we are His people. It was the place where you meditated, we hear in the Psalms, on God's never failing love.

You looked at the temple and you said, this is true. That temple was a sign that this city of Jerusalem is God's city and it is my city as well.

What an amazing gift. It is a sign that I, as a Jew, am God's chosen people and God is my God. It is about this covenant relationship.

God with us. And that's why when the Psalms talk about Jerusalem, there is joy in it. The joy comes because God's in the midst of her. Psalm 46, there is a river whose stream make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

[12:41] God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. Now if you've been to Jerusalem, you know that there's no river running through Jerusalem to speak of.

It is, in this Psalm, a metaphor of that God's life, the presence of God, flows through that city. His goodness permeates it.

The good things that come from God living with his people flows throughout the city, giving it life.

And that's why the news of the destruction of that temple was an absolute tragedy.

It utterly devastated God's people because their hope is gone. And so that's why you can imagine this incredible change in Ezekiel.

A change from hopelessness as he sees his people and what has happened to them, replaced by an incredible hope when in chapter 40, God brings Ezekiel to that wrecked city and he shows him a new, massive temple, greater than the one that was destroyed.

[13:48] And he gets a guided tour from a guide that God sends and very detailed going through all of the rooms and seeing all the measurements of this temple.

There is a deep meaning to this, much deeper than just the measurements of the temple. That's why he is told by the tour guide, Son of man, look with your eyes, hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I show you.

It's because there is a deeper significance than just the temple going on here. He is seeing real hope, a lasting hope, and that hope is the glory of God with them.

So look at chapter 43, one through five. This is where you see it. This is the high point of Ezekiel, and this is where you see the substance of our hope. It literally floors Ezekiel, you notice there.

Chapter 43, verse one. Then the tour guide led me to the gate, the gate facing east, and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east.

[14:54] That's the same direction that he left. Remember, that's the last time I preached here, actually. I preached on the vision of God leaving the temple. He comes back the same exact way, and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.

And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Kibar Canal right at the beginning of Ezekiel. And I fell on

my face as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. This is an incredible sight for him.

Ezekiel falls on his face when he sees that glory. It is so great that the sun pales in comparison to the brightness of the glory. The earth shines with that glory.

You see, alone, that temple is not a lasting hope. The true lasting hope is that God's living, holy, glorious presence fills it.

[16:06] And that's what fills Ezekiel with true hope, living hope, certain hope. And this God is what Israel and you and I this morning are meant to hope in.

You see, what had happened with Israel is they had drifted into hoping in the temple itself and in created things around them. And this is how we can drift as well, away from the living God who actually has given all these things.

We can place our hope in things very closely associated with God. We can place our hopes in our programs in this church. We can place our hopes in our godly work.

We can even place our hopes in the knowledge that we get from the Bible. We can place our hopes in the bread and wine of communion that we are about to receive.

But our hearts, as we are placing our hopes in those things, can be far away from our one true hope who is the living God. And that's why Christmas and Advent are so important for us.

[17:14] They point us back, they move us back to know and trust that Emmanuel, that is God with us, is our only true, lasting, certain hope.

the hope that transforms all of the other hopes and fears that we have in our life. And if you go down to verse 7, that is what the great promise here is all about.

God speaks here for the first time since the beginning of the vision and he says, Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the souls of my feet where I will dwell in the midst of the people of God of Israel forever.

forever. Well, those are the words that Ezekiel has been longing for. And those are the words that we are meant to long for as well. God will dwell with his people forever.

And his people will never dishonor him again as the verses go on. This is the certain hope that all the descriptions and the measurements of the temple in the last nine chapters of Ezekiel symbolize.

[18:20] the substance of our hope. It is that God will dwell with us forever. Now there is an effect to this hope.

That's the second part. There is a deep effect. And I want you to, well, you don't have to turn there, but chapter 47 is all about a river.

And it is a river that begins in the temple. There's a little trickle that starts out and as it leaves the temple, it becomes larger. And this tour guide takes Ezekiel along this river.

He takes him about 500 meters beyond the temple and the river all of a sudden is ankle deep. And then he takes him another half kilometer and all of a sudden the river is knee deep.

Then another 500 meters and this river is waist deep. And then at the two kilometer mark it becomes a river that he cannot pass through.

[19:19] It is a deep flowing, fast flowing river that you can't go through. And that river is amazing because it goes down to the Dead Sea and I don't know if any of you have been to the Dead Sea but it is very well named.

It is dead and everything around it is. And in this vision, that water from that river transforms that dead place. And it makes it fresh water and in fact as much fish as are in the Mediterranean are going to be found there.

And he says along that river trees will grow and they will bear fruit every month. What a miracle. That was before GMOs at all. But it, you know, this is an amazing thing that happens with these trees and the leaves of their trees heal.

They have healing properties as well. Now why is that river there? Well, it symbolizes the effect of the true hope of God dwelling with his people.

And that is that God will bring life and he will bring blessing and he will bring healing to the world through that hope far beyond the temple.

[20:32] This is the gift of hope. This is why it is so precious to us and why it is so precious not only to Israel but the whole world. Now the question is when was that fulfilled?

Will it ever be fulfilled? What happened? And the answer is that in the short term or in one sense is no, not at all.

If you look at the history after this vision of Israel there is a kind of a dingy temple compared to Solomon's temple that is built and it is nowhere near as glorious as Solomon's temple.

It's much smaller and it doesn't conform at all to the temple that is in this vision. And by the way Israel is never commanded to build that temple that is described in the last nine chapters which is a very interesting thing.

It is never built in that way. King Herod tried to spruce it up and he made it look pretty impressive but it was nowhere near what this vision shows us.

[21 : 38] And furthermore God's people continued to dishonor their God after the temple was rebuilt. So was Ezekiel not telling the truth? What is going on here?

Well God in his grace was actually pointing us to the third aspect of hope and that is that hope is a person. And Jesus himself tells us what happened with the fulfillment of this vision at the end of Ezekiel.

If you look at we should turn to this look at John chapter 2 it's on page 887 page 887 and this helps us understand this sort of this strangeness of Jesus' words here because what happens on page 887 chapter 2 verse 18 is that Jesus has just cleared the temple and he has he has gotten rid of all the things that were that were offensive to his father.

And the Jews say to Jesus what sign do you show us for doing these things? And Jesus answered them destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said it has taken 46 years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days?

But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture.

[23 : 17] What scripture was that? It was Ezekiel. They believed Ezekiel and the word that Jesus had spoken. Here is our hope.

Jesus himself is our temple. That's why John starts out his incredible book that we're going to be studying by saying that the word God himself became flesh.

He became a man and he dwelt among us. Jesus is our temple. In him God is dwelling with us. He gives to all that will receive him living water.

New birth from heaven and real healing for our souls. That's why he says if you believe in me streams and rivers of living water will flow out of you. You see by his own resurrection he gives to us all of these things that are promised in our hope.

God is with us. He gives us his Holy Spirit. And one day we will see perfectly fulfilled this God with us. This hope lived out forever.

[24 : 26] And that's in the vision in Revelation that John gives where you hear this loud voice when the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven and it says behold the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more for the former things have passed away.

That is the hope that comes from outside our world. It is the hope of Jesus who is called in Matthew the hope of the nations. He defines that hope.

He is God with us and that changes everything. You see what it means is that covenant that almost like a marriage relationship between us and God is made complete in Jesus.

So that like the marriage vows where husband and wife commit each other for better for worse to give one another and to take one another that is given to us in Jesus so that in the worst times in the darkness of your life God is with you.

[25 : 44] Jesus said lo I am with you even to the end of the age. and there is this light that is in our darkness continually because of it and in the joys of our life our pleasures the goodness that God gives to us the things that we are tempted to place all our hope in those are made complete as we thank God for them as we thank the giver.

It is the only way that our pleasures and the goodness in our life is made complete it is as we thank the giver. this is a hope worth living for God with us it never changes no matter what happens in our lives that relationship with God is permanent it is a hope worth living for and then lastly and we end with this interestingly this is a hope that brings repentance so if you wonder what it has to do with

you this morning it likely it has to do with repentance repentance I want you to look back at Ezekiel 43 and in there in verse 10 God tells Ezekiel to describe to the house of Israel the temple and why does he do that?

He does it so that the people of God may be ashamed of their iniquities and he goes on to say and so that they may observe all its laws and all its statues and carry them out you see God is saying that as Ezekiel tells his people about the fact that this temple is going to happen that God who was their enemy has given them incredible undeserved grace in a future with God dwelling with them forever they will be ashamed of their sins there will be real repentance they will want to carry God's will out in their lives you see if their future life will not have anything that dishonors God they will put all of those things that dishonor God away they will do away with them and they will begin to honor and obey him now because that is the life of that new hope of God dwelling with them and you know Jesus applies these promises to us as well in 1st John 3 he says to us

God says to us beloved we are God's children now so he is with us forever and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he does appear we shall be like him because we will see him as he is and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure you see having that hope of God being with us of being like Jesus who is our temple we are purified there is repentance that happens so if you have believed in Jesus for all your life or if today you are just placing your hope and faith in Jesus this is your future you will see Jesus as he is because you will be with him you will be like him and if you place your hope in him and in the future that he promises you purify yourself as Jesus is pure and that's why in this season of hope and advent we are called to cast away the works of darkness whether that's idolatry or gossip or anger or unforgiveness whatever it might be we are called to look at hope and as a result give away throw away these things that are not of God that don't honor him and instead we clothe ourselves we put on ourselves the armor of light we clothe ourselves with compassion or kindness humility gentleness and patience we bear with one another and the bible especially says that having this hope means that you will forgive one another as the lord has forgiven you and over all these virtues that we would put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity this is how the peace of god rules our hearts this is what it means to live a life of hope and this is what god calls us to today so may we always have this hope in front of us that god is with us forever and he will be with us forever and may we find our lives transformed by that hope continually changed by it always placing our hopes on him in the face of temptation to put our hopes somewhere else and may the god of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing amen