

Hear Our Prayers

AC ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPHOS

Lent Course 2026 Hear Our Prayers

Week 3 EZEKIEL Hopeful Prayer

10 March 2026 - Revd Dave Griffiths

In 597BC the people of Israel were conquered by the Babylonians, Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed and the people were carried off into exile in Babylon. It is into that context of crisis that Ezekiel spoke these words of prophesy: **Ezekiel 37:1-14**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What words or phrases struck you in that reading. Why?
2. How could Ezekiel prophesy a message of hope when he was living in the midst of such a terrible crisis?
3. What does Ezekiel have to teach us about what we are doing when we pray?

This week we will be thinking about that mighty prophet Ezekiel. And Ezekiel teaches us how through prayer we can be prophets of the hope, as we find in the cross. Our past two sessions we have thought about how to pray. Today we are exploring what we do when we pray.

I wonder if you know that famous song by D:Ream called 'Things can only get better'? You'll recall perhaps someone managed to play it out at full blast by the gates of 10 Downing Street when Rishi Sunak, soaked by the rain, was trying to call a general election. The song gives a good account of a secular view of hope. The writer has found himself a new partner so now, obviously, things can only get better, can't they? The song understands hope as a wish that life may cheer up in some undefined way.

As people of faith we have a much more robust view of hope. It's as we pray hope breaks into the world, and as we pray that we hear our call to be prophets of hope. As in previous weeks we're going to look first at our Old Testament figure, in this case Ezekiel, and then at the praying life of Jesus to explore how that is so.

First some background to what we are looking at. Ezekiel lived and prophesied at a time of appalling suffering and torment for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. In 597 BC the nation was overrun by the Babylonians, the Temple was destroyed, the city was laid waste and the ruling classes were carried into exile in Babylon. Here wasn't much hope based on what could be seen. It was a time of desperate political and theological crisis. Could God really have abandoned his chosen people? Why did it seem had God broken his promises? Ezekiel prophesied that destruction and many of his words in the earlier part of his book are filled with warnings about the punishment God would bring on his people because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness. But as the book develops, even from crisis, Ezekiel speaks words of hope. Powerful hope.

In Ezekiel Chapter 37 there is perhaps the most extraordinary example of this. God compares Judah to a valley filled with dry bones. It is an image of death, dryness and despair. There's no life, for many the church in Europe and North America has seemed like this with no possibility of life. But in his prayer, God calls Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones which, crazy as it may seem, he does. And the bones come together and grow flesh and sinews.

Then he calls Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath, that it may come from the four winds. The bones breathe and stand and there is life. From the utter hopelessness of dried out bones, a new people is born, filled with life and with the Spirit of God. Ezekiel spoke from a context of sin and brokenness and disunity. Sounds like our world today, doesn't it? But because he prayed, he had hope, a hope rooted not in the vagueness of human decision making, but in the sure and firm promises of the eternal God. For him, to hope was not a vague wish that things might get a bit better. It was trust in the God who can bring redemption and forgiveness and fresh life. Ezekiel teaches us, that to pray, is to hope.

Because in prayer the redeeming power of the God who is doing something new comes breaking into this arid world. This is what we've seen in Africa, Asia and South America for decades. We can see exactly that same thing in the praying life of Jesus. The agony of what Jesus endures on the cross is beyond description. A slow suffocation in which the only way to breath is to push on nails driven through your own flesh. Yet what does Jesus do on the cross? He prays. And perhaps the most remarkable prayer is the one he offers for those who are crucifying him. Even as the nails are being driven through him he prays, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' Father forgive them. Just think about that prayer.

On the cross Jesus deals with human sin. He dies the death we deserve because of the sin that has separated us from the Father, and by dying our death on our behalf, sin is defeated, death is destroyed and we are restored to right relationship with the God who made us and loves us. That salvation is our hope. As Christians our hope is rooted not just in a wish that things might get better in the present, but in the certainty of what Jesus has already done in the past. As he prays, 'Father forgive them,' Jesus asks that the power of the cross might flow down to release his captors from their sin. His praying unleashes the saving power of the cross and so brings the hope of salvation into the world. His prayer is the channel for hope.

Whenever we pray, we are united in prayer with the praying life of Jesus. And so our prayer has power to unleash into the world the hope we find in the cross of Jesus. Just think about that. Your prayer is a channel of God's redemption. Your prayer changes the universe. Your prayer is powerful because it unleashes the saving hope we find in Jesus.

Ezekiel prayed over the dry bones and they had life. His praying unleashed God's redeeming power. When you pray, the dry bones of an arid world can have life because of the hope we find in Jesus. We know that by his saving work Jesus has won the victory. In prayer we ask for the power of that future completed victory to come breaking into the present.

So imagine you are praying that someone might be healed. What are you actually doing? You are asking that God's future hope, in which bodies and minds are made whole, will come breaking into the present. Or imagine you are praying for peace in a war-torn nation, which of course we are. What are you doing? You are asking that God's future hope, in which humanity lives in harmony with God and each other, will come breaking into the present. Or imagine you are praying for a grief-stricken family, what are you doing? You are asking that the resurrection hope, might come breaking into the present and give them comfort.

Your praying channels God's future hope into the here & now. And this helps us to understand what some people call unanswered prayer. It can be a real challenge to faith when we pray with all our hearts for an outcome and God appears not to hear us. At times God answers prayer in immediate and dramatic ways, but sometimes He doesn't, at times God's timing is different from ours.

Sometimes it's simply someone's time, as Ecclesiastes 3 tells us There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die. But, as Ven Paul reminded us last week God also does intervene here today. I myself have been healed in the last few months of a gluten intolerance that I have had for years.

Sometimes when we pray God will strengthen our hope by answering that prayer with some more immediate gift or act of goodness. Those immediate answers to prayer are an anticipation of the resurrection life. But through the resurrection every prayer will one day be answered in a more glorious way than our earthbound minds can ever imagine possible.

So far we have done a lot on the theory of prayer. When we pray, we unleash resurrection hope into the world. But what does all this mean in practical terms?

Let's get back to Ezekiel and the Valley of Dry Bones. God commanded Ezekiel, 'Prophesy to these bones...' . Our confidence to pray hopefully and with confidence is in the prompting of God. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19), so He was too prompted by the Father to pray for His tormentors from the cross, seemingly impossible situations. To pray hopefully based on the truth of scripture, and an experiential act of being prompted by what we see the Father doing. Later, God commanded Ezekiel, 'Prophesy to the breath...' Through his prayer Ezekiel was able to prophesy. That meant he was the bridge between the present reality of the world and the future hope of God's plan.

When the Spirit came upon the church on the day of Pentecost, that spirit of prophesy became not the vocation of the few (priests, prophets & kings as in the Old Testament) but the gift of the whole church. That means you are called to prophecy. As one who believes in the resurrection, you know about the triumph of Jesus and something of the joy of the world that is to come. And you are called to speak that hope in today's world, so often a valley of death and despair. You are a prophet of hope. But to be a prophet of hope Ezekiel had to pray or he would never have heard God's voice. And you cannot hope to fulfil your call as a prophet of hope unless your life is rooted in prayer. Because prayer equips you to be a prophet in two ways.

First, prayer strengthens your belief in the hope we find in what Jesus has done. You can't pray to a dead man. When you pray to the Lord Jesus, you are praying to someone alive and real. And that's because of the resurrection. It is as you pray that you come more and more to see that Jesus is alive, and that if he is alive all his promises are true. The more you pray the more you inevitably reach the conclusion that there is hope for humanity in the resurrection. And once you have that hope in your heart, you want to share it.

Second, prayer gives you courage to live as a prophet of hope. We live in a culture where it is increasingly hard to live out the Christian life in public. Many Christians feel silenced in the workplace, they fear causing offence, they struggle to see how a revealed faith can fit in with such a fast-changing and complex culture. You need courage to stand up for Christ, and that courage comes from prayer.

In many parts of the world you can be imprisoned or worse for being a Christian. Yet, in those parts of the world the church of God is growing massively, despite the persecution. Often people have linked persecution and God's power being shown. In the UK there is what's been called a quiet revival, were God is speaking to people in their dreams, people are suddenly wanting to read scripture, and are turning up to church wanting to know more about this God who has encountered them. (See www.biblesociety.org.uk article Is a 'quiet revival' taking place in England and Wales?).

If you are nervous of sharing your faith, get praying. If you want to bear better witness to Christ, get praying. Because Jesus says to you as he did to Ezekiel, 'Prophesy over this damaged and sinful world.' It is through prayer that you can fulfil that calling. As you work for reconciliation and try to bring people together, you are a prophet, pointing to the unity of all people united by the Easter triumph of Christ.

As you model honesty and integrity in the community, you are a prophet, bearing witness to the Risen Christ and his plan for his people. As you take a stand against injustice and give a voice to the poor, you are a prophet, standing up for every single human person for whom Christ died, you are a prophet. As you share your faith with others, you are a prophet, inviting them into life-giving relationship with the God who has died to save them. In all these ways you are being a prophet. And it is your praying that makes that possible.

In our first session we considered how we could grow in our personal prayer lives. In the second session we talked about greater ambition in prayer. Next week we will think how we can pray communally. In our last session we will set for ourselves a rhythm of prayer. Combined together those four components can develop your life of prayer. And that will both strengthen your hope and equip you to live it out as a prophet of hope. Because think what power is yours. Whenever you pray, you live the resurrection. Whenever you pray, resurrection life flows out from you and changes the world. God's future triumph breaks into the present. Through prayer, you are a prophet of hope.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is hope?
2. When you look around the world today, where do you find hope?
3. How do you find hope in your relationship with Jesus?
4. In what ways does your life of prayer enrich your hope in Jesus?
5. 'There is no such thing as unanswered prayer.' Do you think this is true? How have you felt when it has seemed that God has not heard your prayer?
6. In what ways can you be a prophet of hope in your daily life?
7. How might you need to grow your life of prayer to be a Prophet of Hope?

Lord Jesus, as you taught your disciples, so teach us to pray. Give us honesty in our confession, ambition in our intercession, eloquence in our praise and humility in our thanksgiving. Help us to trust in the power of prayer, and as we pray, give us renewed joy in the hope of your salvation. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God for ever and ever. AMEN.



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