

## Sermon – 19/08/2007 am

### Resurrection Triumph

Study Text: Revelation 11:11-14

*The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley that was full of dry bones (Ezekiel 37: 1).* In a vision Ezekiel heard dry bones rattling and coming together. He saw sinews and flesh and skin cover them. He saw the breath of life return to these dry bones. God was revealing to Ezekiel his plan for the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon.

The vision which the Lord sent to John has many similarities to Ezekiel's vision. It speaks of the resurrection of two faithful witnesses who represent the church, the people of God. The people of God were first delivered from bondage in Egypt – salvation for them and judgment for Egypt. They again came under bondage in Babylon. This was because of their own sin but God still held their captors responsible. God would judge Babylon and bring a remnant back to Jerusalem.

In the New Testament we find another great salvation/judgment event in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In fact this is the fulfilment of these Old Testament events. Jesus died to set free the Lord's chosen people. He paid the ransom. With great power God raised Jesus from the dead, demonstrating acceptance of his sacrifice and declaring judgment on his enemies. That final judgment is the subject of the visions which John had, including this vision of the two witnesses. Their faithful witness for 1260 days provides the basis for divine judgment. *The gospel will be preached throughout the whole world as a witness to the nations and then the end will come* said Jesus (Matthew 24:14).

### Resurrection Glory

The beast, symbolising Satan, overcame the two witnesses and killed them. Their bodies lay exposed in the 'street of the great city' (not 'holy city') for three and a half days. The followers of the beast would not allow them a decent burial. At the end of this relatively brief period God intervened to vindicate his two witnesses.

After three and a half days the breath of life from God entered the dead witness and they stood on their feet. Death could not hold them. The God who first gave them life, who breathed into the nostrils of man when he was first created, breathed anew into these faithful witnesses.

They did not stay any longer in the world of fallen men, but were called up to heaven. *Come up here* a loud voice said, and a cloud carried them up to heaven (11:12). Some commentators link these words with those found in 4:1 and speak of a secret rapture of the church. But there is nothing secret about this resurrection and ascension. The only rapture of the church will be when Jesus comes on the clouds – again this will not be secret (I Thessalonians 4).

This resurrection reminds us of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. He was taken up and a cloud received him (Acts 1:9). The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our hope in the resurrection of the body (I Corinthians 15:12f). In this vision 'the ascent of the witnesses

figuratively affirms the final, decisive deliverance and vindication of God's people at the end of time'. Faithful witnesses of the gospel will suffer and even be put to death by 'earth dwellers' who find their message 'tormenting', but their time of suffering will be short and in the end they will be vindicated by God.

## Resurrection Terror

God will judge according to truth. No one will escape his judgment. Glory, honour and peace await those who do good – both Jew and Gentile. But affliction and anguish awaits those who are self-seeking evildoers – both Jew and Gentile (Romans 2). The partying of the beasts followers came to an abrupt halt when God raised the two dead witnesses in the street of the great city. Great fear/terror struck these wicked revellers, these enemies of God and everything good.

'Earth dwellers' think death is the end. Have you noticed at funerals these days there is often more celebration than mourning. It is a hollow celebration of the past life of the dead person for that is all the wicked now about. There is no thought to what comes after death. 'Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die' is all many can say. They thought by killing these witnesses their torment would stop.

What a shock it was for these unbelievers to see these witnesses rise from the dead. They not only feared these men, but realised that God is not dead and were terrified – and with good reason. The enemies of God's people are enemies of God, and to have God as your enemy is most terrifying.

Are you an enemy of God? You were born an enemy. If you walk in sin, if you refuse to repent and believe in Jesus Christ you are an enemy of God. The wrath of God is upon all who fail to worship and glorify him as the only true God. By his death Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against sin, so it is only in Jesus Christ that you escape the wrath of God. Only in Jesus Christ can we have peace with God. Are you still at war with the Almighty God or do you have *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1).

## Great Earthquake

The resurrection of the witnesses occurred in the presence of their enemies – and God's enemies. God's vindication extends beyond personal resurrection to judgment upon the city where they were killed. *In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake 7000 people were killed* (11:13). In the Greek it reads 'the names of seven thousand people'. All those who were killed had names.

Flood, fire and earthquake can kill large numbers of people – not to mention man-made bombs. Although we are not so familiar with earthquakes they are perhaps the most terrifying and deadly of all 'natural' disasters. When the earth shakes buildings collapse and many get crushed to death.

In the book of Revelation the earthquake is a symbol of God's judgment (8:5, 11:19, 16:18). With the opening of the sixth seal there was a great earthquake and terrified people fled to the hills. Now as the sixth trumpet comes to the end (*the second woe is past*), a great earthquake destroys a tenth of the city and kills 7000 people.

The death of the last and greatest prophet of God was accompanied by an earthquake (Matthew 27:51). Those watching Jesus die were terrified when this happened saying 'truly this was the Son of God'. When Jesus was raised from the dead there was another earthquake and the guards were terrified and became like dead men (Matthew 28:4).

This of course is historical fact – it happened 2000 years ago in Jerusalem. What we have in Revelation is a vision full of symbols, but symbols that are to be interpreted in the light of Scripture. These visions refer to the future return of Jesus which is no less real than his death and resurrection.

A tenth of the city, a round figure, seems a small proportion in the light of the wickedness just perpetrated in this city. 7000 people were killed and the rest were terrified. This number is interpreted in various ways – some even take it literally. The population of Jerusalem has been reckoned at 70,000 in AD 70. Bauckham in 'reverse arithmetic' twists it to refer to remnant imagery in the Old Testament, specifically the 7000 who did not bow the knee to Baal in Elijah's day.

The terrified survivors *gave glory to the God of heaven* (11:13). Many believe this to refer to repentance and conversion. Dispensationalists see in verse 13 the final conversion of the Jewish people as a whole, a mass conversion of the Jews. But there is no indication of this elsewhere in this book or in Scripture (apart from Romans 11). Others think it refers to the conversion of the majority of Gentiles on the earth at the conclusion of history. But do these words point to true conversion?

The 'God of heaven' is a rare title given to the true God. In the New Testament it is found only here and in Revelation 16:11 (*they blasphemed the God of heaven...and did not repent*). It is however, a popular title in the book of Daniel. Daniel was living among polytheists in Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar saw the power of Daniel's God he said *truly your God is the God of gods* (Daniel 2:47). After experiencing the power of God personally he said *I blessed the Most High and praised him* (Daniel 4:34). But there is no mention of Nebuchadnezzar ever repenting. And no mention of him ever turning away from other gods.

Similarly there is no word about repentance by these survivors even though they *gave glory to God* (11:13). They were simply 'scared to death' we might say. This was not a positive fear of the Lord as found in the heart of believers but a terror of the Lord (the Greek word is different). The glory they gave to God was more from a terrified heart than a changed heart. It was a case of the knee being forced to bow to Jesus out of fear and expediency.

The majority of people in Australia write 'Christian' on their census form. But have they all repented of their sin and believed in Jesus Christ? When some calamity strikes they may be 'forced' to pray, and may even go to church for a while. But do they truly glorify God in their words and works? Are they any different to majority of people in India who are Hindus but happily worship Jesus as another god when it is convenient or expedient.

The sixth trumpet or third woe is past. The seventh trumpet is about to announce the final judgment of God.

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