

**Pentecost 4 / June 16, 2024**

**Ezekiel 17:24**

**“And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, and dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken and I will do it.”**

**The Lord makes the high, low and the low, high**

Ezekiel is one of the most interesting, some would say bizarre, books in the bible. The book begins with a vision of the glory of the Lord. Four winged creatures with human and animal faces, appear out of a bright cloud. Then appears a wheel containing four wheels, in which the four creatures move in every direction, according to the will of the Spirit of the Lord. Towering above all Ezekiel sees the likeness of the Lord in glorious form. The voice of the Lord calls, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.” The Lord spoke. Ezekiel listened. The Lord called Ezekiel to speak His word to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon, so they would know He is the only God and their only Saviour.

He called him to speak, even though He knew they would not listen. Although they would not listen, Ezekiel would express the Lord’s will both through His words and by his actions so that Israel, the Babylonians and all peoples would know that the Lord alone is God and that He has power to make the high, low and to make the low, high. The Lord raised Babylon to the status of empire and made Nebuchadnezzar king, so that through them He would lower Israel and bring them to repentance. In time He would lower the Babylonians, take away their empire, raise up Israel and replant them in the Promised Land. In this, all people would know both His power and His glory. The Lord makes the high, low and the low, high.

Ezekiel was among the first group of captives taken from Jerusalem into exile in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was a priest in the Jerusalem temple. Unlike many of his fellow priests and the majority of the people of Israel, Ezekiel loved the Lord and served Him only as priest and prophet. Ezekiel describes the renewed temple and rejuvenated priesthood the end of his book. Mostly though, he speaks about the faithlessness of the Judeans and the false hope of the exiles who expected a quick end to their captivity. In a vision from afar, he saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the glory of the Lord departing from temple. He saw a lot of sad things. He spoke a hard message of repentance, which generally fell on deaf ears. He was called to a hard and discouraging task!

On the other hand, Ezekiel also prophesied the resurrection of Israel from its national grave and in this foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ and His church. His most well-known prophecy is the Valley of Dry Bones. In a vision the Spirit showed Ezekiel a valley filled with dead, dry bones. This was the whole house of Israel. Their hope was gone. They were as dead as bleached bones in a field. Israel was low as low could be. Israel didn’t realize it, but there was hope in their captivity. The Lord would renew Israel, raise them from their national grave and restore them to the land of promise. Ezekiel saw the bones rise up, be clothed with flesh and become a living nation. The Lord gave Israel a national resurrection, so Israel, the Babylonians and all people would know He alone is God and Saviour. He makes the high, low and makes the low, high.

Apart from idolatry, which is sin number one in the commandments, Israel’s next great sin was their lack of faith, refusing to trust the Lord to help and save them. The people of Judah were going into exile because of their persistent violation of the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me.” The Lord revealed to Israel as of first importance, that He alone is God. Israel’s mission was to make the Lord known as the only God and the world’s only Saviour. The Lord was chastising Judah through the Babylonians for its idolatry. The people of Judah made things worse by refusing to accept the chastisement of the Lord, which was meant for the purifying of their faith and growth in faithfulness. They would not trust the Lord in their chastisement. The Lord calls us to trust Him in all things.

In proverbs King Solomon sang, “My son do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” Even as parents guide their children especially during childhood, the Lord guides His children in faith and life. However, by and large, Israel would not accept the Lord’s guidance or follow His will. Instead of trusting the Lord, they made alliances with other nations who could not help them. They made an alliance with Egypt against Babylon. Their actions just made the Babylonians angry and their situation even worse. Egypt was not their Saviour. We sin against the Lord, both by making other things gods instead of Him, and by refusing to trust Him in all things as our only Saviour. The

Lord is our only God and Saviour. God raised Israel high up by making them His people. When they turned away from Him, He lowered them. God raised Babylon high as an empire in order to humble His people and bring them to repentance. When the time came, God humbled Babylon and raised His people up so that through them, He would show Himself the only God and the world's only Saviour.

Our text isolated from the context of the chapter, may seem a little obscure. The Lord talks about taking a sprig from a lofty cedar and replanting it on the high mountains of Israel. His point is that Judah will go into exile and remain there for a long time. However, a time will come when a remnant will return. The Lord returned a portion of His people and reestablished them in the Promised Land. There was hope for the future and the promise of a better tomorrow for those who would trust and accept His will. Through that sprig came Christ, the world's Saviour. St. Paul spoke to God's power in our sufferings saying, "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, whom He called according to His purpose." The Lord makes the high, low in repentance so He may make the low, high in the peace of forgiveness and promise of eternal life.

The theme of reversal runs throughout scripture. The Lord takes something small and makes it big. The Lord takes something big and makes it small and then raises it up again. He does this to make Himself known as the only God and the world's only Saviour. When Israel was not a people, God made them His people. When Israel turned away, the Lord laid them low through the misfortunes and viscidities of life. When they turned to Him in repentance, He raised them up to show both His promise to forgive and His power to strengthen the weak and raise the dead.

We see this in the life of Christ, the promised offspring of Israel. In Philippians, St. Paul wrote of Christ saying: "He did not count equality with God something to be clung to, but He emptied Himself, made Himself nothing and took on the form of a servant." The Son, who is true God from eternity, lowered Himself to be clothed in human flesh and to share in our humanity. There is no lowering greater than God becoming part of His creation. In Christ, the sinless Son of God became a human being. He who had no sin joined His fallen creation in life in bondage to sin, under the dominion of the devil and the condemnation of death. He did this, so He would lift the burden of sin from our souls and raise us from the dust of death to share in His eternal life.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author says that having become human, Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. He writes, "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears...Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being perfected, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." He joined Himself to our sufferings that we would find His strength in our sufferings. He joins us to Himself through baptism into His death and resurrection, giving us both His presence in our trials and the promise of rising with Him in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. In Christ, the Lord makes the high, low and the low, high.

God always draw to Christ in the humility of faith, so He may raise us up in forgiveness and the promise of sharing His resurrection to a new and eternal life. In Jesus' Name. Amen