

The Glory of God

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] Now we're going to read a small portion from the Old Testament in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 1, we're going to read just these verses 25 to 28 and particularly in a moment focusing on verses 26 to 28.

Now Ezekiel, the prophet, the young prophet, has been given a vision of heaven itself. Ezekiel is with the exiles in Babylon as he's given this vision.

Let's just take it up from verse 22. Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness. Notice the number of times when he uses the word likeness or appearance.

It was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one towards the other.

And each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, they heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, the sound of tumult, like the sound of an army.

[1 : 17] When they still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse over their heads, there was the likeness of a throne, an appearance like sapphire.

And seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upwards from what had the appearance of his waist, I saw, as it were, gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all round.

And downwards from what had appeared of his waist, I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire. And there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow, or the rainbow, that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all round.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Amen. I saw it. I fell in my face as I heard the voice of one speaking.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word. In all that we're experiencing in these difficult days, when the focus of the world is daily upon the multiple horrors that we're seeing, the multiple deaths of so many in every country of the world, then we must never forget that God is on the throne, that God is sovereign, that the one who is on that throne is higher than we are.

[3 : 11] He is the rock. He's our refuge. He's the strong tower in whom we find our security and our strength during these times and at all times.

And amidst all the troubles of the world around, it's for the Lord's people to have that high view of God, to see God in all his glory that God has revealed of himself in his word, that glory that should cause us to bow down before him and to admit before God that we're nothing in his sight, to admit before him and confess before him that he is Lord, that he's king, that he does all things well, and that he rules the universe.

And yes, that while we can't always understand his ways, that we still confess that his ways are higher than our ways. Why?

Because he is infinitely higher than we are. And so we contemplate the glory of God. We contemplate that brilliance, that splendor, that greatness, that honor that none else has, that glory that we know what we know of through God's revelation of himself and his word.

And it's that knowing God we've been thinking of even in our midweek meetings, we began to consider this past Wednesday when we were thinking of God, that we have no other gods before God.

[4 : 49] We're knowing and seeing God in his glory, even in that command. Well, this evening that we want to pursue a wee bit more, a wee bit more depth, excuse me, and to consider the glory and

the greatness of God and to do so through this amazing passage that we read in Ezekiel.

It's not often enough to confess that I preach in Ezekiel. As far as I remember, I think I've only ever preached once in the book of Ezekiel. But here, this is God's word.

This is God's word. And yes, it may well be one of the lesser looked at the books of the Bible. And yet, it's a book that's so full of the glory of God as God revealed that glory through his prophet Ezekiel.

And in this selected passage that we read at the end of chapter one, it's what we're seeing. We're given a glimpse of that glory. We're given a glimpse of the glory of God that the prophet Ezekiel saw in his vision.

It's a glory that we're going to reflect on, to gaze on, and to do so for our encouragement in these dark and difficult days. And if we ever did need a fresh glimpse of the glory of God, it's now.

[6 : 08] And I pray that we will be energized in our commitment to trust in the one who's above all. But first of all, let's get a little bit of background on Ezekiel and the context of this chapter, this book even, before we actually look at the words of the passage.

I think I mentioned just a moment ago, Ezekiel was God's prophet during the exile of the people of Judah in Babylon. The people had been exiled to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness to God, because of their disobedience, because of their worshiping idols instead of the one true God.

And Ezekiel lived almost, or some 600 years before Christ. And he lived in a time when the people of God were in turmoil. They were a community far from their home in Jerusalem and in the towns and villages around.

And they were a people that had broken faith with God. But God wouldn't abandon his people for the sake of the glory of his name and for the sake of his chosen people.

And in that situation of exile, God sends Ezekiel. Ezekiel is a young prophet at this time. He's a prophet priest.

[7 : 37] He's been sent by God to bring before the people the reality of the truth, of the glory of God. Yes, the people have defected God.

The people, therefore, must return to God. And in order to do so, to see afresh the glory of God, to see again the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, that holiness and sovereignty that the people had ignored in their time in Judah before the exile.

And you know, it's such a time as this, this time that God has given us during this period of restriction, this time that we've been given, we've been given to reflect, to reflect, yes, in our own lives as believers in the one true God.

I pray that during this time, we'll use this time to recapture an awareness of the glory of God, that we turn from so much of what's been in our lives that's been so futile and so absorbed in worldly matters, and that we'll return with all our heart to the God of mercy, the God of grace, and the God of glory, and acknowledge that he is Lord of all.

And so, as we do that, let's resolve to be more God-ward in our lives, to be more Christ-like in our compassion one to another, and to be the more spirit-filled in our devotion to holiness that God requires of each one of us.

[9 : 21] And it's that God-ward focus, you know, that focus in recalibrating our lives, that our lives be directed by God's word and in his truth.

It's that desire to capture the vision of God's holiness that really should inspire each one of us to live for him and delight in him and follow him as he directs us by his word.

And it's that same direction that Ezekiel was given to proclaim to the exiled community in Babylon.

And we're going to see three things then in this passage, three things in these latter verses really to help us to have that restored vision of the glory of God, to see, as it were, what Ezekiel saw.

But to be the more full, to be the more aware of the fuller vision that Ezekiel saw, that fuller vision of the Lord Jesus in all his glory and grace.

Because that's what these words of Ezekiel point ultimately to, the point to the Lord Jesus in his glory and grace. And there are three aspects, as I say, in this passage I want to focus on.

[10 : 43] Three aspects we can't really separate, but certainly they form the vision that Ezekiel saw of God in his glory.

Three things, God's supremacy, God's sovereignty, and God's glorious presence. So Ezekiel's been given this vision of the throne room of heaven.

And he's been given this vision for a reason. A reason to convey to the people in Babylon, the exiled people in Babylon, that God is still on the throne. He's still on the throne of majesty. He's still God. He's still Lord. Yes, the people have wandered far from God. They've been conquered by our pagan people. And yes, the people are now in exile and they're far from their homeland. They're far from the temple. They're far from what had been their livelihood. But God wasn't defeated. [11 : 41] God was still in his glorious splendor of power. The all-glorious God is still the faithful God of his people.

And we have to remember that, that truth, that God is still on the throne. And we may well be in our form of exile, our form of self-exile. And certainly much change has happened to what's been so common to our experience.

we've got the absence of physical presence from our family and friends and even one to another, our brothers and sisters in Christ. There are real changes in each one of our lives.

There are the hardships, the strains, the many struggles that we're all facing. But remember that God is still on the throne, that God hasn't abandoned his church.

He's not abandoned you. God is Lord. And so as we gaze on this passage before us, the God whom we see in this vision is the same God whom we worship.

[12 : 48] This is the God, the one true God who calls you to himself. This is the one true God who's above all. And again, that truth of the glory of God, that God above all should encourage each one of us as we seek to find meaning in the present circumstances that we're living through.

God is Lord. God is supreme above all. We see that expressed so often in Scripture. For example, when God declared to Job, where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

God expressing his supremacy, his glory in creation. Or the many instances that we read in the book of Psalms, where again the majesty of God is expressed in words so wonderful.

Psalms 89 verse 6 to 7, for example, for who in the skies can be compared to the Lord, who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the counsel of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him.

Or another Psalm, Psalm 113, 13, the Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. So what are we seeing then of the supremacy of God in this vision?

[14 : 17] Well, of course, we're hearing Ezekiel use language that tells of someone glorious. And at first you can detect at first he's so awestruck at what he's seeing and hearing.

He's already heard amazing sounds, as he says, sounds like the sound of the Almighty. And from hearing these sounds, he sees and vision, someone that at first fills him with awe.

He speaks, as we said, he speaks continually of likeness, the likeness of a throne. The likeness seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.

And that brilliance of his vision continues. It's the same language that he's been permitted to use to tell of what he's seeing that corresponds to recognizable things, and yet having the appearance of glory, the appearance of fire surrounding what was the appearance of the waist of the human appearance, the brightness of that vision that's made them more resplendent with, well, as we read there, the rainbow colors all around the appearance of brightness.

It's as if Ezekiel, you know, he's been absorbing all that he's seeing in his vision, all that he's seeing of glorious brilliance, and then he realizes what he's been permitted to see.

[15 : 49] He realizes he's been permitted to see the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. And, you know, in that vision that he's given of the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God, you can sense that joy that he has of knowing that God hasn't deserted his people, that God is still in the midst of the people, even there in Babylon, God's still on the throne, and that revelation that God has given to Ezekiel confirms that God is there, that God's above all, and God must be worshipped then in the splendor of his holiness.

And you see in the last verse that we read there, that realization of God and all his glorious splendor causes Ezekiel to fall on his face, humility.

Ezekiel has encountered the living God, Ezekiel is going to send God's work to the people that the people return to the one true God, to the God of glory.

And that vision that Ezekiel was given should encourage each one of us at this time to remember that God is supreme, that he is above all.

He's the glorious one who's exalted above all, and yet he's accessible to each and every one who's his. Ezekiel saw God in vision.

[17 : 21] Ezekiel saw the transcendent glory of God there in the likeness of a human being. And you who are in Christ Jesus, you who are in him by faith, you see in glory of God revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus, or Jesus who's seated at the right hand of the Father in the glory of heaven.

Even in that picture that Ezekiel saw of the glowing splendor of human appearance, surely anticipated and anticipates the glory of Jesus when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. And so we're reminded that our Savior is glorious. He is above all. And so we are to approach him with reverence, and awe because he's so exalted.

Yes, we rejoice and continue to rejoice that the Lord is near each one of us. We abide in him. He is the vine.

He's the Savior who knows our weaknesses. He sympathizes with you in all your needs. He's like you in every way, sin accepted. But remember the same Lord Jesus is glorious in his divinity.

[18 : 42] He's far above us in his supremacy. And that we should teach us to be in that same place that Ezekiel had when he was given that vision, to be in that place of humility, to acknowledge that he is Lord, and that his rule is far beyond our understanding, that we continue to rest in his perfect wisdom.

Then we're not finished of course with the lessons that we can take from this vision, the encouragement that this vision should give to each one of us. And we really do need to focus more on the sovereignty of God that we're seeing here, the appearance of the throne, the very fact of the mention of the throne speaks of God's authority and power.

Because that throne tells us that God rules. The throne speaks of God's justice. It speaks of God, the Lord being King of Kings and Lord of Lords, far above any earthly authority.

Again, that should bring us comfort at this time that tells us that our God reigns, that what God has permitted even in these difficult times, even these things that for many of us are bewildering and perplexing, but yet to be seen under the sovereign permission of God for his greater purposes.

And again, at such times as these, even in these present difficulties, when it may well be that we're tempted even to ask, where are you, Lord? Well, the answer is before us.

[20 : 20] He's on the throne. He's on the throne of the universe. He knows, he cares, and he does all things well and does all things for his glory. And we can say also, I think, that the vision that Ezekiel sees here in Babylon tells us that even in the most difficult and troubling of situations, God will not hide his face from those who seek him.

Remember, this is Babylon, where this vision of God's glory was given to Ezekiel. This isn't the temple in Jerusalem. This isn't Judah. This is pagan Babylon.

This is the place where the exiled children of God were sent by a vicious enemy. It was a strange land. Babylon was a land of many gods.

It was a land, of course, where the writer of Psalm 126, when he wept as he sat by the rivers of Babylon, and he asked, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

But that strange land was the place where God had made himself known to his people in the brilliance of his glorious presence. In that strange land, in a land that was so hostile to God's truth, in a land where the vast majority of people followed false gods, false idols.

[21 : 48] And in our strange land, strange gods, in these strange days when we might be tempted to question, is God still with us?

Does God still love us? Well, the answer, of course, is yes, God still loves and still cares for his own. And be assured that he is continuing to love his people, that he still cares for each one of us. And the measure of his love, one of the measures anyway, of his love and care, is the very evidence of his blessing, his church, even in these days with the continued proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

That same gospel message that we've proclaimed in times past is still being proclaimed and the word is still being preached. And the means of grace that we're enjoying through this format of technology indicates that God has not abandoned his people.

He's not abandoned his church. He's not abandoned you. Remember what Jesus said, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. And there may well be times when we can't doubt God's abiding presence.

[23 : 06] Even in difficult times. But you know, so often these times of doubt are to do with our own sins. You know, when we wander from him, like the prodigal son, when we read often the parable that Jesus taught.

We don't know, we're not told whether Ezekiel himself had times of doubt in Babel and certainly in the first five years that he was there. Because we can work out in chapter one, it was five years before Ezekiel was actually given this vision.

Five years of Ezekiel being with the people of Judah and Babylon five years before God gave him that vision. Five years is a long time for any period of exile, any time of refuge in a foreign land. But God hadn't abandoned Ezekiel, he hadn't abandoned his people. Of course, in that time that Ezekiel was given to proclaim God's word throughout, as we can see in the rest of the book, were many words of judgment, words of judgment given against the people that Ezekiel was given, the words that Ezekiel was given.

But at the same time, as these words of judgment were given, the great assurance was that God was with his people and that God's word would be continued to be heard through his prophet.

[24 : 30] It's that aspect of judgment that really we have to see also in this vision. Because look at the words again, Ezekiel saw the appearance of fire surrounding the waist and the lower half of the appearance of that human figure.

Now, fire on other occasions in God's word speaks of the radiant glory of God. But fire also speaks of God's judgment. As the vision progresses, as Ezekiel is given further visions of God, in God's speaking to him, the word of judgment is continued to be given.

And as that vision progresses, you see that message continually being expressed, the message of the fire of God's wrath against his people because they had refused to follow him.

And so God's glory is going to be seen in his justice, his justice towards his people. His judgment has to come before God is seen in all his mercy.

You know, in the midst of God's wrath, there's the promise of God's mercy. The very last verse that we read in Ezekiel 1, we see that, the presence of the bow in the vision.

[26 : 03] Let's read again, verse 28, like the appearance of the bow that's in the cloud in the day of rain, so is the appearance of the brightness all around. That word bow in the Hebrew language is the same word for rainbow.

It's the same word that we read, of course, after the flood, when God gave the promise of his preserving the world from flood.

And it's the same word that we see here in Ezekiel 1, the appearance of the bow that's in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. And surely we see here then in God's dealings with his people, yes, God is speaking in judgment against them, but God will show mercy.

God will show mercy to his people that they're in exile, that God will bring them to that point of restoration. The exile will not continue indefinitely.

The people will return to their homeland, they'll do that, but first there has to be judgment pronounced against the sin of the people before mercy is given to them.

[27 : 15] Mercy will follow judgment. That's the economy of God's dealings with his people. And surely that points to the mercy of God, the mercy of God towards his people.

When God sent the Lord Jesus for us. God was angry with man. Man had sinned against God. Man had offended God and man must face God's judgment.

But God sent his one and only son to bear the judgment of God against sin. when the Lord Jesus faced that judgment on the cross so that those who are his might not face the judgment of God against sin but instead know the mercy of God and salvation.

It's that mercy that we know of, that mercy that we're secure in, that mercy that we find and have through the work of the Lord Jesus. What if any of you don't know the Lord Jesus as saviour?

What if you don't know Jesus as your saviour? Well, I say through the authority of scripture that you are still under the judgment of God, that righteous judgment that God directs against all who will not bow before him in repentance and who won't receive the Lord Jesus as saviour and Lord.

[28 : 38] so what of you? There's still time to repent. There's still time to give your life to the Lord Jesus to know that great salvation in him.

So don't let this opportunity pass you by. But what of you who know the Lord Jesus as saviour? Yes, you're trusting in his finished work for your eternal safety.

But I say to you as I say to myself, we still cry out to our Lord in Lord and wrath. Remember mercy. That we acknowledge that we deserve his judgment for our sins.

That we acknowledge that we've wronged him. We've wronged him by our sins. And we pray that even through these times of crisis that we're facing in the world, this time that we're facing, that this time will bring us to where Ezekiel was found.

In that position of humility. In that position of reverence. And of awe as we repent of our sins and thank God for his mercies towards us in Christ.

[29 : 47] And so we cry out for that mercy. And I pray that as we do so, that you who know the Lord Jesus by faith, you'll see that vision that Ezekiel saw and more.

You'll see as with the Apostle John, the vision that he saw in the book of Revelation. It was that vision of the same heavenly throne that Ezekiel saw, the same heavenly throne with a rainbow surrounding the throne.

It was that throne in which the Lord is seated and with the saints of God crying out, worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power.

And in all the midst of our privations and our lockdown and restrictions are, well, we've been given this time, surely, given this time to reflect on our ways, given this time to mend our ways and to return to God and to behold his glory and to resolve in our hearts to have done with lesser things and follow the one who is Lord of Lords, King of Kings above all.

Amen. May it truly be, Lord, that we see you in the glory that you have made known to us through your word.

[31 : 13] And as we behold your glory, even as we see your glory in the person of the Lord Jesus, may it be that we follow you, as we follow you with all our heart and strength and mind.

Lord, teach us, we pray, by your word, to look upwards, to look beyond self and to look to you in all your glory and all your majesty and all your goodness and grace.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue to worship you. Bless us, we pray, and go before us and forgive us for all our many sins, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, both now and forevermore.

Amen.