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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Being A Priest For God's Glory"
Ezekiel 1:1-3

God is dead. **God** remains dead. And we have killed him."
 So said Nietzsche, the German classical Scholar, Philosopher and Critic of culture, 1844-1900.

Then Nietzsche asked, "Is man one of **God's** blunders? Or is **God** one of man's blunders?" Nietzsche continued, "There cannot be a **God** because if there were one, I could not believe that I was not He."

Today there is Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist and popular science author, who has written the "God Delusion."

According to Dawkins, God doesn't exist and if he does. . . . there's really no other way to put this -- jeremiad (righteous prophecy) against the deity, then he's the biggest beneficiary of affirmative action in the universe. God gets away with murder, not to mention a cushy, tax-free existence. Or non- existence. Moreover, those devoted to his worship are trapped in an ancient mindset, ignorant of science.

As far as Dawkins is concerned, the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction," Dawkins writes, and proud of it: A petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent (harmful) bully."

I trust you are glad and thankful this morning, when you hear words like these, that there is the other side of the coin, that of the true biblical, personal, and eternal God.

In fact, Ezekiel, one of God's prophets, knew by experience that there was the true biblical personal, eternal, and glorious God who had revealed Himself to him.

Ezekiel shares his experience with the true and living God in his Book of Ezekiel.

In fact, Ezekiel received a vision of the glory of the Lord unlike any other Old Testament writer. Why? He had been taken exile to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in his second invasion of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. In the midst of his people, who had disobeyed the Lord by getting into idolatry and wickedness, God gave Ezekiel the vision of His glory so in the midst of a rebellious people, who had turned to take glory in man, they might be convicted to turn to the God of glory who had invested His very life in them by leading them out of Egypt and into the promised land.

For who does the atheist, the agnostic, and the unbeliever say gets the glory today? Of course man. That is what happened to the nation of Israel. They turned from the glory of God to the glory of man. When man gets the glory, he turns to his own selfish and immoral ends.

Romans 1:21ff gives the commentary. "Even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, or give thanks professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity . . ."

Leaving God's glory always leads to man's glory which leads to idolatry and immorality, and eventually God's judgment. It happened to the nation Israel. It happened to the nations who have come and gone on the pages of history. It is sad to say that man's glory is being displayed in our country right now, and if there is no turn around, God will eventually bring His judgment upon this beloved land of ours.

How then does the biblical God deal with man getting the glory rather than Himself?

In God's loving way, He acts in grace first. He raises up individuals to be a demonstration of His glory in the midst of man living in his glory.

This is what God did in calling Ezekiel in captivity to show forth the glory of God to God's people who had turned against HIM, and were living in their own glory.

God, in Ezekiel's day and in our day as we shall see, does this by using people who are priests, for did you notice in our text that Ezekiel was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3).

Let's consider that a bit more – that Ezekiel was a priest.

I. Ezekiel's Background.

1. Name.

Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens." Certainly Ezekiel would need of God's strength and strengthening as he ministered to Israel caught in man's glory and totally rebellious against the LORD.

2. Age.

Ezekiel 1:1 reads, "Now it came about in the 30th year. On the fifth day of the month."

Some have felt that the 30th year may refer to Ezekiel's age at this time, 30 years of age.

This meant that Ezekiel spent his early years in Jerusalem until taken captive to Babylon.

3. Time.

Ezekiel gives us the time in which he is living. "On the fifth month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile." This would put the time of what Ezekiel describes and presents as **happening around 593 B.C.** He was among those taken away captive with Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:14-16) which occurred about 597 B.C., 11 years before Jerusalem was completely destroyed (Ezekiel 33:21).

In Ezekiel 29:17, Ezekiel mentions the 27th year in the first month on the first of the month, which would be April 571 B.C. That being true, Ezekiel would have served the Lord as His prophet for 22 years. If Ezekiel is 30 years old at the beginning of his ministry to the exiles, he would have been about 52 when he ended his ministry.

This meant that Ezekiel was one of the writers of the Old Testament who was an exilic prophet. The other being Daniel.

It is well to note that the ministry of Ezekiel to the exiles in Babylon was during the early years of Daniel in the court of Babylon, while Ezekiel ministered to the exiles out in the country side. Ezekiel also ministered at the same time as that of Jeremiah to the Jews in Palestine.

Since Ezekiel began ministering in 593 B.C., and he was 30 years old, he would have been born about 623 B.C and would have grown up in Judah during King Josiah's reforms (622-609 B.C.). The date of Jeremiah's birth was about 643 B.C., 20 years before Ezekiel's. Jeremiah began ministering in Judah about 627 B.C., so Ezekiel would have been familiar with him and his preaching.

God always had His man to speak to His people concerning their relationship with Him bringing a message of **repentance and also hope.**

4. Circumstances.

In Babylon, Ezekiel settled in his own house in a village near Nippur (cf. Ezekiel 3:15 – Tel-abib) along the River Chebar (Nebuchadnezzar's royal canal). He lived among the Jews who settled there which is now modern day Iraq.

5. Vocation.

Ezekiel 1:3 tells us that the "word of the LORD (the self-existent ONE) came expressly to Ezekiel, the priest, son of Buzi." As a priest, Ezekiel would be a Levite.

From Numbers 4:3, we are told that the age of becoming a priest (of the tribe of Levi) was 30 years of age. From Numbers 8:24, the age 25 is given. Perhaps, then, there was a 5 year apprenticeship before becoming a full-fledged priest. If that be the case, and Ezekiel is now 30, he may have just gotten into his apprenticeship for becoming a priest, and then was taken captive by the Babylonian army, but never really got to act as a full fledged priest.

But Ezekiel would certainly have fulfilled the requirements for priesthood and started to learn and carry out the duties of a priest before being taken captive to Babylon.

Leviticus 21-22:16 & Numbers 18:1-21 give the stipulations for being a priest in the Old Testament.

- (1) Not to touch the dead, except certain relatives.
- (2) Must not cut his hair or beard – like the heathen do.
- (3) Must be holy in character before the Lord.
- (4) His wife must be a virgin, not a woman divorced from her husband.
Ezekiel had a wife who was the desire of his eyes as Ezekiel penned in 24:16. We are not told that Ezekiel had any children.
- (5) He must not have any physical defects.
- (6) He was responsible for the consequences of any defilement that might come to the sanctuary.

Exodus 28-29 describes the priests' clothing and installation service.

He anointed with oil (Exodus 29:7). Blood was to be put on the lobe of the right ear, on the thumb of the right hand, and on big toe of the right foot. (Exodus 29:20). This demonstrated that the priest was set apart to the Lord to listen to His word, to be His servant, and to follow in His steps to be an example to those he served. He was anointed with oil as a sign that God's Spirit had come upon him and he was to serve in the Spirit's power.

Having been initiated into the office of a priest, Ezekiel would have been very familiar with the various altars in the Old Testament temple, the brazen altar and the altar of incense. He was also familiar with the mercy seat and the ark of the covenant, plus the different sacrifices that would have been made and the celebration of the different yearly festivals. He would have known that the glory of the Lord, the presence of the Lord would come and fill the temple. Yes, Ezekiel would have been familiar with the entire worship system in the Old Testament.

It's no wonder, then, that Ezekiel, the priest, was chosen by God to be the one through whom He would tell those in exile with him in Babylon (modern day Iraq) what was happening back in Jerusalem some 700 miles away from their homeland. In that process, God would use Ezekiel to give the people in exile a message of repentance while telling them what would happen in the future beyond their day and our day as well.

This means that along with being a priest of the living God, God was also using him to be a prophet as God did with Jeremiah (1:1) and Zechariah (1:1), and John, the Baptist (Luke 1:5).

Ezekiel, as we will see, was an amazing young man as God's priest. God knew who He was selecting to minister to the Jewish exiles who lived in a community by the river Chebar near the city of Babylon. Evidently the people were free to develop their life styles and travel about.

What about Ezekiel's book, then, that he wrote about his experience with God, the message God gave him for the Jews in exile, and what God gave him about the future of Israel and the world?

II. Ezekiel's Book.

1. Ezekiel's Book has much to teach us about the person of God.

The theme of his book as I see it is: "For the glory of God." In that theme Ezekiel shows the holiness, righteousness, and judgment of God, but also the love, mercy, and grace of God to those who repent and turn to Him. He also shows that God is the God of the future and has a plan for Israel and the world. As Daniel is used by God to show how God carries out His plan for the nations and the coming of the Messiah. Ezekiel is used to show how the glory of God when rejected leads to idolatry, and to severe consequences of God's judgement, but also when people return to the Lord, they experience God's glory in a renewing way.

2. Ezekiel's Book provides a panoramic view of God's plan what the future holds for humanity and the world.

It's interesting that a number of Ezekiel's prophecies are reiterated in the Book of Revelation, including the cherubim (Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4), Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38, Revelation 20), eating the scroll (Ezekiel 3, Revelation 10), the River of Living Water in the future millennial kingdom in Ezekiel 47. The River of Life is portrayed in the eternal state in Revelation 22. In the future millennial kingdom there is a New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-4) In Revelation 22, there is the New Jerusalem in the eternal state.

Certainly Ezekiel is a fascinating Book. Let's describe its structure.

3. Ezekiel's Book outlined.

- (1) Ezekiel's Call (1-3).
- (2) Ezekiel's prophecies concerning Israel and the nations (4-32).
- (3) Ezekiel giving God's hope to Israel and the world (33-38).

This leads us to consider Ezekiel's person.

III. Ezekiel's Experience with God.

1. Ezekiel's Person

We must consider Ezekiel's person as a priest, for that gives us insight into who Ezekiel really was.

- (1) He was a man who knew God personally through faith.
- (2) He was a man dedicated to God to do His will by living a holy life. He was a man who was trustworthy and completely reliable in word and deed.
- (3) He was a man who knew what a relationship with God was all about vertically (Sensitive heart to the Lord).
- (4) He knew what it was to minister to people on behalf of the Lord (A true servant of the people).

In fact that is what a priest did. He went to God in his own life and on behalf of others, but he also ministered to others. A prophet, on the other hand, brought a message from God to the people that dealt with the present and the future.

2. God's revelation to Ezekiel.

In this same chapter, chapter 1, God gave Ezekiel an incredible vision of His glory to Ezekiel telling him that regardless of some of Israel being in exile, and those in their homeland being ransacked by Babylon, God was still in control and His glory was in tack.

In chapter 2 God gave His call to Ezekiel, and in chapter 3, God commission Ezekiel for serving Him as His priest and prophet. To do this, God gave Ezekiel His Word and put His Spirit within Him to empower Ezekiel for ministry.

3. Ezekiel's response to God's revelation to him.

- (1) Ezekiel worshipped the Lord(1:28).
- (2) Ezekiel listened to the Lord (2).
- (3) Ezekiel obeyed the Lord (3).

That's how Ezekiel, as God's priest, responded to the Lord when He came to Ezekiel to be one He wanted to show forth His glory in the midst of a people who had turned from the glory of God to the glory of man.

IV. The application of Ezekiel 1:1-3 to our lives today.

What's our response to our God when He comes to us?

When we start considering that question, we need to realize that first of all that God is looking for priests today. Yes, the biblical God is looking for priests today who will experience His glory as Ezekiel did, and then show forth His glory to others who are living in the glory of man.

Let's pursue those statements.

1. The old has been fulfilled and done away with.

The whole worship system set forth for Israel in the Old Testament, the sacrifices, the festivals, and the tent of worship, have been fulfilled and done away with. The veil in the temple has been rent from top to bottom. How so?

That's where Jesus Christ comes in. He as the God-man and tabernacled, tented among (John 1:14). He then was the eternal sacrifice for sins, when He became our substitute on the cross to pay for our breaking God's law which is death. Hear what the writer of Hebrews penned,

Hebrews 7:23 – “The former priest, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing. But Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always makes intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Since, Christ offered the eternal sacrifice for sin on the cross, the old has been fulfilled and done away with. Then He was buried, and rose again to demonstrate that God’s forgiveness and eternal life are available to anyone who accepts the Lord as personal Savior.

Hebrews 9:11-14 adds, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all for eternal redemption . . .”

The old worship system of human priests, sacrifices, temple, and festivals has been fulfilled and done away through death burial and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That means,

2. The new has come.

Hebrews 10:19ff reads, “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place (that is spiritually into heaven by faith) by the blood of Jesus, **by a new and living way** which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart full of assurance . . .”

There is no longer any need for human priests of any kind. There is one HIGH PRIEST, Jesus Christ who through His death, burial and bodily resurrection for us has fulfilled and done away with the Old Testament worship system, and established HIMSELF as the ONLY WAY TO GOD.

That’s why Paul says in I Timothy 2:5 – “For there is ONE God, and ONE mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.”

Jesus Christ as our High Priest was the Sacrificer and Sacrifice for our sins. He represented us, as man, to pay the penalty for our sin of breaking God’s law, and being God, represented His heavenly Father, so as the just ONE, He could bring us to God.

Jesus Christ, **then is the HIGH PRIEST**, who provides us the way to God. That’s why He said in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through me.

3. We need to become a part of the new.

(1) Exercise faith.

That’s why when Jesus was on earth He kept telling those who heard Him to believe in Him, the Son, and whoever does will have eternal life (John 1:12; 3:16). Paul taught the same thing (Romans 10:9-13).

We need to accept Jesus Christ as our High Priest, our Savior and God, acknowledging to Him that He died for us, and ask Him into our lives to forgive us our sin and give us His forgiveness and eternal life.

(2) Realize what we have as believers in Christ.

1. He cleanses us of our sin (Hebrews 9:14; Ephesians 1:7). He provides forgiveness for us when we sin as a believer in Him (I John 1:9).

2. He gives us His Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

We become God’s temple, set apart of Him as His property, to live a holy life, yes to show forth God’s glory, His very person.

3. He gives us His title – a new title for the believer in Christ.

I Peter 2:9, which we had on the front of the bulletin today.

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."

Peter takes titles once given to the nation of Israel, and applies to the believer in Christ today, for believers in Christ are a kingly priesthood – priests of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a title is that to have the title of Christ who is our High Priest through faith in Him.

4. He gives us privileges and responsibilities.

(1) We have direct access to God through faith in Jesus.

We can come into His presence anytime anywhere without fear and condemnation (Hebrews 4:15-16).

(2) We can offer up to God spiritual sacrifices.

1. Our worship – Hebrews 13:15 – Give Him our sacrifice of praise, giving thanks to His NAME.

2. Ourselves – Romans 12:1-2 – We are to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices – giving ourselves to Him to live for Him for HIS GLORY.

3. Our service to the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:16 – We are to walk in love and do good (sacrifices that are pleasing to the Lord).

4. Giving of one's material possessions to be used by the Lord – Hebrews 13:16.

"And sharing," which is using what God gives you to further His work and minister to others – a sacrifice well pleasing to the Lord.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul tells the Philippians that the gift they gave Him was a sacrifice well pleasing to God, a fragrant aroma.

5. Share the glorious gospel message with others (I Peter 2:9).

Believers in Christ are a royal priesthood "to proclaim the excellencies (the gracious acts of God) of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

How great is that! Once we become priests of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we have eternal words to share with others that the God of glory can change a life from living for man's glory, to living for Christ's glory and actually demonstrating Christ in one's daily life.

That's what Ezekiel was about to do for his Lord as God's priest. Yes, He didn't have the completed revelation like we do today in Christ, but he was available to show God's glory to his people who were living just for themselves.

Being a priest is very practical.

Yes, first it is having a vital relationship with Jesus Christ through faith letting Him be first in one's life.

Then it is ministering to people. Those we know individually. Looking to see how we can bring a word of encouragement, or how we might pray for one another, or just listening to someone who has a need and shares it with you.

As husbands, and wives it is ministering to each other, being available and taking time with each other. It's children realizing that they can help around the home and be part of keeping family unity.

It's in the church seeking to reach out to those who have specific needs. Perhaps calling someone on the phone, or going to see someone who you know needs encouragement. It's working together in harmony to accomplish God's purpose to build His church and further His kingdom.

But the bottom line in being a priest for Jesus is to be a priest of reconciliation of being a peace maker when reconciliation is needed.

Amy Biehl died a violent death in 1993. She was a 26-year-old Fulbright scholar who had gone to South Africa to help register black voters for their first free election. But even though she was seeking to help the people of South Africa, as she was driving

one day, she was dragged out of her car, stabbed and beaten to death by a mob which was committed to violence in order to overthrow of the apartheid government.

Soon afterward, Amy's parents, Linda and Peter Biehl, quit their jobs and moved from their Orange County, California home to South Africa — not to seek revenge, but to start a foundation in Amy's name. Today, two of her killers work for the foundation. They call Mrs. Biehl "Makhulu," or grandmother, because of the way she treats them. She says, "Forgiving is looking at ourselves and saying, 'I don't want to go through life feeling hateful and revengeful, because that's not going to do me any good.' We took Amy's lead. We did what we felt she would want."

What an example of being a priest. A priest not only forgives, but reaches out to restore. A priest pays back good for evil. He follows the heart and character of God, for the Bible says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5:18).

Let's be a priests and priestesses for God's glory this week!!!