

**Grace Evangelical Church
Pastor Paul Bawden
Sunday, April 25, 2010
"God's Glory Displayed"
Ezekiel 1:4-28**

A person asked his friend, "Why do golfers wear two pairs of shoes?"
His friend replied that he didn't know.
"Well," came the reply. "He might get a hole in one."

A wife was telling her husband about her friend who had trained her husband, Frank, to do the dishes, make the beds, clean and vacuum the house, even wash and iron the clothes. Why, she went on to say, if anything happens to Frank's wife, Frank will be able to take care of himself without any problem.

Then she said to her husband, you know I'm really concerned about you, you can't do any of these things. What's going to happen to you if I pass away. Her husband thought for a moment, "Well," he said, "I would move in with Frank."

Which of these stories is true, and which is fictitious? The first one certainly isn't true. But the second one according to the Reader's Digest is a true story.

In our world today we know that some things are real, are true and factual, and then there are many things that are just fictitious.

Hollywood conditions us to believe sometimes that even the fictitious is reality. That's why I like to know if what I'm watching or reading is fictitious or real. I trust we teach our children the difference between what is make believe and what is actual reality. That's what Mr. Rogers did quite well.

For when we shift from the physical/material world to the spiritual world, we immediately face the same challenge – what is real and what isn't real, or what is true and what is make believe, yes, what is true and what is false.

And the world that deals with being critical of the Bible has tried its best to tell us that events recorded in the Bible, like our text today in Ezekiel 1 really didn't happen. What's recorded here is some sort of fantasy, some sort of myth, or mystical experience, in this case, the mystical experience that Ezekiel had. For what is recorded in Ezekiel 1 can't be. Ezekiel was deluded or out of his mind. Then there are some who say that Ezekiel was in contact with the extraterrestrial race and a UFO – aliens from the stars.

Certainly, the deceiver Satan is behind the undermining of the Scriptures' validity while exonerating man's reason to be superior to God's eternal revelation in the Bible.

The bottom line in all of this discussion is this.

What kind of a God does a person believe in? If man is god, he is limited to his own little time box, of being born, living for a while on planet earth, and then passing away.

The eternal, personal, and biblical God, on the other hand, has all power, all knowledge, while displaying love, justice, and mercy in the full revelation through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical God, then, can reveal Himself as He desires as He did to Ezekiel many years ago, when Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon. That particular revelation to Ezekiel came into time, as Ezekiel tells us in verse 2 of chapter 1. around 593 B.C.. The place was in the land of Babylon, modern day Iraq, by the Chebar River, Nebuchadnezzar's Canal, less than 50 miles southeast of the city of Babylon.

It's hard for us to imagine what it must have been like for these Jewish people to be captured in Jerusalem around 597 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar's army, and then be taken some 700 miles away to a foreign land to live in an entirely different culture. Young Daniel had been taken captive in Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation in 606 B.C. Daniel was used by God to minister in the court of Nebuchadnezzar where he gave prophecies about God's movement in the nations along with the coming of Messiah. Ezekiel, on the other hand, was used by God to

minister down by the riverside (out in the field), where the Jewish exiles were living. He was used by God to speak about Israel's idolatrous life style and what would happen to the temple of God in Jerusalem, as God's glory, His presence, departed from the temple due to Israel's idolatrous life-style as Nebuchadnezzar made his final destruction of the city and temple in 586 B. C. Ezekiel would also be used to tell about the future of God's temple during the millennial time of Christ's reign on earth.

Perhaps, as Ezekiel had been in exile for 4 or 5 years, he was wondering what God was up to. Evidently he was in training to be a priest in the temple of Jerusalem before being taken captive along with the other Jewish people. Some feel he didn't really get to be a full-fledged priest in the temple in Israel, but he was still a priest and knew much about the Old Testament worship system.

Ezekiel, though, would have known that the glory of the LORD, His very presence came and filled the temple as displayed in I Kings 8.

In fact, the word, glory, has the meaning of weight, heaviness, reputation, and honor. It can also mean brightness, splendor, or great worth, majesty. It's that which is intrinsic to God's own person and character. It appears that the glory of God is the manifestation of all of His attributes at one time. It is the summary of who God is in His person, which is glorious, filled with splendor and majesty. When God's glory is taken away, His splendor taken away, He is lowered to man's idea of god which is limited and filled with his own selfishness and death.

Having ministered as a priest in training in the temple of Jerusalem, Ezekiel would have known something about the glory of God, the effulgence of His presence.

Perhaps Ezekiel had heard the words of Jeremiah, for Ezekiel was still in Jerusalem when Jeremiah started prophesying. "My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit" (Jeremiah 2:11). Israel had insulted God's glory by creating images of Him.

What was going through young Ezekiel's mind down by the riverside on this day we are not told. But while there by the river Chebar something phenomenal happened to Ezekiel.

What does the text say in Ezekiel 1:3?

"The hand of the LORD – the self-existent ONE – came upon him."

The hand of the LORD touched Ezekiel. When God touches a life something happens.

Note then Ezekiel 1:4 – "As I looked, behold a storm wind was coming from the north (From Isaiah 14:13). It appears that in the north is the place of the throne of God.

In that storm wind was a cloud with fire flashing continually with a bright light around it.

I'm sure we all have seen bright lightning in thunder storm. But this light was unlike anything we have ever seen.

In the midst of the bright light, there was glowing like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

Note here, the word, like (1:4). This word, like, is used in this chapter 10 times. He uses, "something resembling once, the "appearance of" once, "something like" once, and "the likeness of" once. It means that Ezekiel is trying to describe something heavenly with earthly terminology.

Let's look, then, at this vision the biblical God gave Ezekiel in exile 700 miles away from his homeland down by the Chebar River in what we know today as modern day Iraq.

I. The revelation that God gave Ezekiel (1:4-28).

1. The four creatures – Cherubim (1:4-14).

From Ezekiel 10:15, we are told that these creatures were cherubim.

The cherubim are angels that guard the holiness of God. In the garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve were ejected from the garden of Eden (Delight), God had cherubim guard the entrance to the garden. Two cherubim fashioned out of gold were placed over the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. This was a reminder that only the blood applied to the mercy seat would satisfy God's holy demands of His righteousness.

In the text here, there are **four living creatures with four faces and four wings so that their wings touched each other.**

Each of the cherubim also had four faces (1:6). Their appearance had human form.

(The number "Four" could be a symbol of completeness of range, of comprehensive extent. Some tie it in with creation).

Each of the cherubim had four faces resembling:

A man.

A lion.

An ox.

An eagle.

They evidently stood with their backs to each other forming a square, in which square they formed like something that burned like coals of fire with torches darting back and forth among the living beings.

Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze.

Under their wings on their four sides were human hands. With their two wings they covered themselves and with two wings they touched the other.

When they moved they didn't turn but went straight forward wherever the Spirit would go.

The significance of the faces has been explained this way.

The human face - - man is the greatest of God's creation.

The Lion – The greatest among the wild animals.

The ox – The greatest domestic animal.

The eagle – the greatest bird.

God is saying here that He is the CREATOR of all, man and animals.

If we take a look at Revelation 4:6-8 we will find a similar revelation.

God is always the eternal CREATOR.

It has been suggested that the four cherubim, which are created beings, also tell us something about the biblical God. Stewart Briscoe makes this comment about them.

(1) They had the "likeness of a man" (1:5) which reminds us that of all the created orders, **humanity** is the one the Lord uses primarily for His purposes.

(2) "Their feet were straight feet" (1:7) which speaks of the necessity for **stability** in the work of the Lord.

(3) "They gleamed like the color of burnished bronze" (1:7), a clear reference to their **purity**.

(4) "They had the hands of a man under their wings" (1:8), which graphically points out that the Lord's work requires people with a sense of **practicality** to go with their wings!

(5) "Their wings were spread out above" (1:11), which portrays a great sense of urgency and **mobility**.

(6) "Two wings covered their bodies" (1:12), demonstrating their **humility**.

(7) "They went every one straight forward" (1:12), which means that they had a great sense of purpose and commitment and moved with purpose and **integrity**.

(8) "Wherever the Spirit was to go they went" (1:12) is the great statement of **availability**.

(9) "Their appearance was like burning coals of fire" (1:13), describes their **intensity**.

(10) "They ran to and fro like bolts of lightning" (1:14), gives a tremendous sense of their **activity**.

If Ezekiel had been thinking in exile that God wasn't still the CREATOR Israel, and His world, he sure was being reminded otherwise.

But God wasn't finished with His revelation to Ezekiel.

2. The four wheels (1:15-21).

Along side the cherubim was a wheel on each side of them. There are four creatures, four wings, and now four wheels.

There was a little wheel inside the larger wheel so that the chariot could move in any way it wanted.

How great that would be for parking, wouldn't it? Come to a parking place. Push a button and the other wheels would activate, and you would move at a right angle into your parking spot, presto.

The wheels' color: was like sparkling beryl – the gold color of topaz quartz (1:16).

The wheels' movement: They could move in any four directions (1:17). Suggesting the omnipotence of the LORD.

The wheels' rims: Were full of eyes (1:18). Suggesting the omniscience of the LORD.

II Chronicles 16:9 tells us that the "eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the earth so he can support those whose heart is completely HIS."

The wheels' ability: Wherever the Spirit goes they go in that direction. Suggesting the omnipresence of the LORD. He can touch both heaven and earth instantly.

God is not only the CREATOR as depicted in the cherubim to Ezekiel, but God is also telling Ezekiel that HE is in CONTROL of the nation Israel and the world.

Still God has more for Ezekiel to see, for the God's vision to him goes on.

3. The platform – or the expanse (1:22-28).

As God's vision to Ezekiel continues, he has more difficulty in describing what is taking place, for Ezekiel uses more of the words, "like," or "something resembling," or "something like."

Over the heads of the cherubim (1:22), there was like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads (cf. Revelation 4:6, which describes a sea of glass before the throne of God).

The wings of the cherubim were outstretched, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of abundant water as they moved, like voice of the Almighty (God's voice) from above their heads (1:22-25). The voice may have been directing the chariot.

Ezekiel 1:26 is one awesome verse.

On top of the expanse there was something resembling a throne (1:26), like lapis lazuli in appearance (a rich azure blue).

On the throne was the appearance of a man. His appearance was like glowing metal like fire all around with an amazing radiance, and the surrounding radiance was like the rainbow in the clouds (1:26-27) I encourage you to read Revelation 1:12-16.

This has to be a revelation of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, which is called a theophany. No man has seen God at any time, except Jesus Christ who came down from heaven to take upon Himself

sinless flesh to be your Savior and mine through faith in HIM. But Ezekiel was given a picture of what the presence of the living Christ was like before His incarnation.

This is one of the most incredible manifestations of Jesus Christ before His incarnation.

Then Ezekiel adds, "Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." (1:28).

What was God telling His priest Ezekiel? I am not just the CREATOR, the ONE in CONTROL, but I am the CHIEF, the SOVEREIGN ONE!! My GLORY is in tack. I have not been captured although my beloved city Jerusalem and temple are being ransacked and destroyed due to the idolatry of my people back in Israel.

Take heart, Ezekiel, I will not give my glory to another. I am still the KING of Israel and the world. I am the CREATOR, IN CONTROL, AND THE SOVEREIGN LORD OVER ALL!!

How did Ezekiel respond?

II. The response of Ezekiel to God's revelation (1:28).

1. He fell on his face – He worshipped.

Ezekiel was not just overwhelmed by what He saw of the LORD in His glory, but he gave worship and adoration to his glorious LORD.

As the nation of Israel had turned from worshiping the glorious Lord by turning to idols, Ezekiel worshipped the LORD of glory when He came to him.

2. The further meaning of this vision to Ezekiel.

It has been suggested that this chariot with the cherubim, platform, and the pre-incarnate Christ sitting on the throne could also be a picture of the mercy seat in action. God will certainly judge His people for their disobedience, but in His wrath, God also remembers mercy to those who repent of their sin and turn to Him in faith. God was telling Ezekiel that where my justice is there is always mercy. My throne is a throne of judgment for those who turn against me, but those who turn to me in faith it is a throne of grace and forgiveness.

How does this incredible vision of God's glory given to Ezekiel around 593 B.C. by the Chebar River in what we know as modern day Iraq apply to us. Here we are some 2600 years away from that actual historical event.

III. Our response to God's glory.

God is not giving a vision today like He gave to Ezekiel those many years ago. Now God has done something even greater.

1. God sent His eternal Son, Jesus, to become incarnate – In Him was the glory of God shown.

The pre-incarnate Christ that Ezekiel saw in that vision by the riverside in Babylon has taken upon Himself flesh. If we want to see the glory of God manifested today, we need to come to the living Christ who walked the dusty roads of Palestine.

What did John say of the Lord Jesus Christ?

"The Word (Jesus) became flesh, and tabernacled (tented) among us, and we saw His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

If we want to see the glory of God, the presence of God, in action, we need to take a look at Jesus Christ as set forth by the four Gospel writers.

In one sense, Jesus' glory was clouded glory as He walked on planet earth, because He gave up that insignia of His majesty (His heavenly glory) when He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh.

That's why in His High Priestly prayer, Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father before His crucifixion, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do (In every facet of His life on earth, Jesus

demonstrated who His Father was – He glorified HIM),” but then Jesus added, “Now glorify me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was” (John 17:4-5).

At the same time, those of Jesus’ disciples and those who saw Jesus in action, saw the glory of God, His presence being displayed.

But the glory of God was not just seen in Christ’s person as He served His heavenly Father and humanity while on earth.

2. In Christ’s death, burial and bodily resurrection the glory of God was displayed.

That glory that Christ prayed for would come through His suffering and death on the cross to pay the penalty for our breaking God’s law with is death.

That’s why the glory of the Lord is also vitally linked to Christ’s salvation for us through the cross and open tomb.

Paul told us in Galatians 6:14 – “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In I Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul penned that the cross is foolishness to those who reject Christ as their Savior, but those who accept the crucified risen Christ find Him to be the power and wisdom of God. **Then Paul ends that section by saying that if anyone is going to glory, he should glory in the Lord.**

The cross displays the glory of God because the justice of God and the love of God are brought together in Jesus Christ and redemption is won for us. Amazing, no matter how many times we hear it, Christ was made sin for us who knew no sin. God’s wrath and mercy were brought together in Christ on the cross so that His forgiveness and eternal life could be gained for us who need His forgiveness and LIFE being dead in trespasses and sin.

3. We can participate in the glory of God.

Come with me to Revelation 1;12-17.

In this beginning chapter of Revelation, the Apostle John in exile on the isle of Patmos, like Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon, receives a vision of Jesus. Both needed a vision of the Lord in order to fulfill what the Lord had for them to experience and teach.

This time it’s not the pre-incarnate Christ, nor the Christ on earth that John saw and fellowshiped with while Jesus lived on earth. Now Christ has died, was buried, has risen from the death, and ascended into heaven. He has been restored to His full glorious position seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

When John sees the risen glorified Christ, what does he do? What does Revelation 1:17 tell us?

“He fell at the feet of Jesus like a dead man.”

When God showed up to Ezekiel in His glory, Ezekiel fell on his face in worship! When the Lord in His glory showed up to John, what did he do? He fell down in worship!!

How did Isaiah respond when God showed up to Him in His glory, His holiness? He recognized who He was a man of unclean lips, he was in the presence of the King.

What happened to Paul (then Saul) when the Lord met Him on the road to Damascus. He submitted Himself to the Lord.

Question? How do we respond to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

FAITH

I trust it’s acceptance of Him as Savior, first of all, like Paul did on the road to Damascus? Acknowledging one is a sinner before God and asking Christ into one’s life (Romans 10:9-13).

WORSHIP

Then it's giving our Lord of glory the worth, the first place honor that He deserves – worshipping Him. We can only respond like Ezekiel and the Apostle John. God is God, a God of glory!!

Worship is a life-style – not just worshipping the Lord in the privacy of one's own life through the Word of God, but also in the family, and in our church family as we are doing here today. Worship of God is really a life-style, in our thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. That's why Paul told the Corinthians that they were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body (I Corinthians 6:19).

TRUST

The believer in Christ has insight into the reality that God is the Creator, the one in Control, and the Sovereign. He is on the throne regardless of what is happening in our lives, our family lives, our church, our state, our nation, and the world. His glory is in tack. He has in no way been captured, regardless of what is happening in the public arena today. Read Psalm 2 sometime to see how God responds and will respond to those who mock His person and power.

He is a God of justice and mercy. Right now He is offering His salvation to all who will respond to Him by faith. One of these days, His mercy will no longer be extended. His justice will be exercised.

The biblical God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present. His glory is a manifestation of all of His attributes, his characteristics. The believer keeps trusting in God to work out His plan for his good and God's glory.

AVAILABILITY

We can only bow in humble adoration and say, "Lord, here am I, use me as you will." What a privilege we have each day to submit to our glorious Lord, and be available to Him for what He has for us to do for His glory.

ACTION

Which leads to stepping out for the Lord when He touches us with reaching out to those we meet individually, to those in our family, to those in our church family, to those at work and at school. As we do all to the glory of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But once we accept Jesus by faith, worship of the Lord of glory is what changes a life and causes a life to have a life-style of worship of HIM!!!

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was present at the Vienna Music Hall, where his oratorio The Creation was being performed. Weakened by age, the great composer was confined to a wheelchair. As the majestic work moved along, the audience was caught up with tremendous emotion. When the passage "And there was light!" was reached, the chorus and orchestra burst forth in such power that the crowd could no longer restrain its enthusiasm.

The vast assembly rose in spontaneous applause. Haydn struggled to stand and motioned for silence. With his hand pointed toward heaven, he said, "No, no, not from me, but from thence comes all!" Having given the glory and praise to the Creator, he fell back into his chair exhausted.

May the LORD always be the glory in our lives!

