

The Glory of the Lord

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Preacher: Jason Nuwayhid

[0:00] I'm honored to be with you all this morning. I'm honored to worship with you all. And I look forward to bringing God's word. Today we'll be reading Ezekiel 1. And I have to warn you, it's a longer chapter. And so this is one of the reasons why we didn't read our first readings, because you'll get plenty out of Ezekiel 1.

So let us hear the word of the Lord from Ezekiel 1. In my thirteenth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles of the river Kabar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

On the fifth of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakim. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi, by the river Kabar in the land of the Babylonians. There, the hand of the Lord was on him. I looked and I saw a violet storm coming out of the north. An immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.

The center of the fire looked like glowing metal. And in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance, their form was human.

[1:22] But each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight. Their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze.

Under their wings, on their four sides, they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings. And the wings of one touched the wings of another.

Each one went straight ahead. They did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this. Each of the four had the face of a human being. And on the right side, each had the face of a lion.

And on the left side, the face of an ox. Each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They had two wings spreading out upwards. Each wing touching that of the creature on the other side.

And each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go. Without turning as they went.

[2:22] The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moving back and forth among the creatures. It was bright. And lightning flashed out of it.

The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning. As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels.

They sparkled like topaz. All four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel, intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any of the four directions the creatures faced.

The wheels did not change direction as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome. All four rims were full of eyes all around. When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved.

And when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go. And the wheels would rise along with them. Because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

[3:26] When the creatures moved, they also moved. When the creatures stood still, they also stood still. And when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them. Because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Spread out above the head of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault. Sparkling like crystal and awesome. Under the vault, their wings were stretched out one towards the other.

Each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings. Like the roar of rushing waters. Like the voice of the Almighty. Like the tumult of an army.

When they stood still, they lowered their wings. Then there came a voice from above the vault. Over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault, over their heads, was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli.

And high above the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what happened to be his waist, he looked like glowing metal. As if full of fire.

[4:33] And that from there, down he looked like fire. And a brilliant light surrounding him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day.

So was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell face down. And I heard the voice of one speaking.

This is God's holy word. Every word in it is true. And he gives it to us because he loves us. Let us pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace and your kindness.

We thank you for your word. Lord, we pray that you would speak to us this morning. And any word that is not from you, Lord, that it would fall to the ground. Be with us this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. I was born as a missionary kid in the Middle East.

[5:31] My dad, who is both Lebanese, was born and raised in the United States. But he met my mom in Jordan on the mission field. We spent many years in various Middle Eastern countries.

I was very young and don't remember a lot. But there are key memories in my mind. I can even remember the first time I saw Petra. Now, if you don't know Petra, Petra is one of the world's most famous archaeological sites.

Where ancient traditions blend with Hellenistic architecture. It sits between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. And it's breathtaking. The city is cut out with an Milwaukee cliff.

It even shows up in various movies like Indiana Jones. But I remember as a child, this place being breathtaking. I remember seeing people coming in on camels.

I remember the path to get there. I remember the busyness of the sites. There were so many people coming to see Petra. As I said, I don't remember much as a kid in Jordan.

[6:35] But I remember Petra. And I remember the Dead Sea. What is it for you? What is the first time you saw... Was it the first time you saw the highlands of Scotland?

The wide ocean? Was it climbing a mountain to see a grand view of the city? I've heard people talk about visiting Japan and that being something breathtaking to them. Maybe you've seen the Grand Canyon.

Maybe you've seen the Northern Lights. These things are bigger than us in some sense. For me, Petra was a place older than me. It was taller than me.

It was wider than me. It was bigger than me. And I didn't even fully appreciate it as a kid. As an adult, I appreciate it more than ever. It's incredible. In so many ways, and even more so, we fail to see and respond to the greatness of our God.

To the glory of God. We fail to see who He is. And we fail to respond in worship. We fail to see, as the prophet Jeremiah writes, But the Lord is the true God.

[7:39] He is the living God and everlasting King. At His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide in His indignation. But this glory that we're talking about is not seen without a mediator.

But we can see through Jesus Christ, our Savior. In the passage this morning, we see Ezekiel in the midst of exile, encountering the living God.

A God who is with him. A God who has not abandoned him. And Ezekiel is awestruck and worships. Far greater than Petra, the Grand Canyon, the Northern Lights, the Highlands, or anything in this world is the glory of God.

Now, of course, these things show up and display God's glory. They can show us the Creator. But these things are not the Creator Himself. The glory of God is so much greater than the great wonders of this world.

And Ezekiel here is encountering the glory of God. This glory is too big to comprehend. And we will see that this experience is not unique to him, but also to those who have encountered the risen Savior.

[8:51] This morning, we'll see that because the Lord is full of glory, we must submit our lives to him in worship. And we will see this in three points this morning.

The glory is fearsome. The glory is omnipresent. And there is the King of glory. So first, the glory is fearsome.

So we must fall on our face. And as we refer back to the passages, we'll be jumping around the chapter because Ezekiel is awestruck. He's rightfully fearful.

We will talk about more what that means, but because of it, he's a little bit disoriented. He's seeing with his eyes wide open the glory of the Lord, and he's trying to describe it. And it's too much to take in.

And we know this because as we look to future chapters of Ezekiel, as he's explaining it, it's a little bit more clear. He's a little bit more structured. So as I was reading this morning, you might be thinking, what is going on?

[9 : 49] All these creatures, and there's all these wings, and they're all connected. And that's kind of the idea, is to be a little bit disoriented with it, to not understand it.

So with that said, let's look back at a few verses, verses 4, 14 and 15, and 28. Verse 4, As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal.

Verse 14, And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each four of them.

Verse 28, To begin, let's start with Ezekiel himself.

Who is he? He is a prophetic priest, or a priestly prophet, writing during the exile of the Israelites. They were taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 597.

[11 : 06] Ezekiel himself was exiled himself then. The nobility, the wealthy class, they were all taken into exile. So imagine being stripped out of your home for 70 years, right?

It's a whole generation. And King Jehoiakim, the new king, after three months of rain, was taken into exile. And in 596, we have the fall of Jerusalem.

And so with that setting the stage, the book of Ezekiel opens, with Ezekiel sitting by the Kabar Canal in the exile. And all of a sudden, everything changes. He encounters something that makes him enthralled, something great, something mighty, and that gives him fear.

He's encountering the glory of the Lord. He's seeing a cherubim. And this description is speechless in sight. There's a storm, there's a great cloud, and brightness all around.

He can't see. And the fire flashing forth continually. It's not stopping. Can you imagine taking that in? And in the midst of it, are four living creatures. The descriptions of Ezekiel's vision are great and powerful.

[12 : 12] It feels like it's too much to comprehend. It's too much to grasp. One commentator writes, First, the vision proclaims the transcendent of the glory of God.

He says, Everything about the vision cries glory. Like I said earlier, I remember my first time reading Ezekiel 1, and my head was spinning. I couldn't make sense of the description at hand.

I wanted to draw it out and understand how these things are connected. But I didn't realize, at some level, that is the point. We're not supposed to comprehend this at first glance.

The great wonders of the world, they're bigger than us. The prophet Ezekiel himself cannot comprehend it. And this is expected. We cannot comprehend God fully.

If we could understand all of God, he wouldn't be God. But yet, here in Ezekiel 1, God is revealing himself to us.

[13 : 11] He is showing his glory. This glory is so great, that it causes Ezekiel to bow down and worship him. In many ways, this is the correct response.

We see this earlier in the scriptures. In the book of Exodus, after God has given the Ten Commandments, the people of God, it reads, sit to Moses, you speak to us, and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us, lest we die. And in Deuteronomy, we see that that was the right response. Chapter 5, verse 28 reads, the Lord heard your words, and when he spoke to me, and the Lord said to me, I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right. And all they have spoken. They needed a mediator, Moses. The glory was too great. And we need a mediator too, and this is Jesus Christ.

This is why we can encounter the risen Lord. The glory of the Lord is fearful, in a reverent, holy sense. It's unlike anything we have seen.

[14 : 16] And just like the people of God in Ezekiel today, we too need a mediator. The glory is too great. On this side of the cross, we know that that is Jesus Christ. It's because of him we can stand before God.

When I was doing youth ministry, one of the questions we would always ask new members joining the church, we would say, if you stand before God, what will you tell him that lets you into heaven? And it was kind of a way to teach them the gospel, to say, if you say anything but Jesus Christ, you've missed the point. You've missed the point fully. It's because of Jesus that we can encounter the glory of God.

It's because of Jesus that we can move towards him. Because he is our mediator. He's both taken on the punishment and given us something. He's given us his righteousness. Today we walk by faith, right?

But one day we'll walk by faith and sight. We'll be able to see face to face with God the Father. This truth should lead us to fall down and worship him because of his great glory.

[15 : 21] In Isaiah 6, we see this throne room scene that's similar to Ezekiel 1. I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Then Isaiah responds, Woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. My eyes have seen the King. Isaiah has seen the glory of God. And he cannot help but say, Woe is me, and look to his uncleanness.

The correct response, as we see in Ezekiel, is to fall on our face in worship. So Christians, we must fall on our face in worship. We must give our lives to him.

[16 : 20] Because when we do, when we actually give our lives to God, we actually find life. Even in the midst of exile, being stripped out of their home for 70 years, when all seems hopeless, looks like Babylon has won.

In the sorrow of life, we are called to remember God. When I think of wonder and glory in the midst of sorrow, I think of my friends Mikey and Emily, who went through tremendous sorrow in their lives. Their daughter Blakely was born with holoproxencephaly. I won't repeat that because I had to write it out. The doctor told him that her condition is when the brain fails to divide into two hemispheres, resulting in the death of the baby.

Their daughter Blakely was born and did not live very long. And much of her short life was spent in the hospital. They were angry and they were grieved. My friend Mikey wrote after her death, here's a little snippet of what he wrote.

He says, It is fascinating to think how a short life and such a small human being has made such a big impact. Death's attempt to make life seem meaningless actually was the tool that love used to make Blakely's life meaningful.

[17 : 44] The death of Jesus was the way God used to redeem mankind. God loved enough to give away his son so that you, Blakely, and I can be saved from sin and death.

End quote. I read this and I say, Wow, the glory of God is a powerful thing. It not only makes us say, Wow, in the face of beauty, but also in the face of sorrow.

Ezekiel later on in the book has to privately mourn the death of his wife. The call for the believer is worship in the exile. Worship in the sorrow.

To worship in response to difficulty as well as the good. It makes us fall down and worship him because he is the God who is full of glory in the face of beauty of the world and the sin of the world. The God we can even see wonder in the midst of exile. But what it looks like could be different for all of us. In one sense, it's praising him for who he is.

[18 : 45] Praising him for all he has done for you in Jesus Christ. If you are his, he has given you life. He has given you abundance in him. It may look like finding areas of your life to sacrifice and give to him.

We fall and worship by trusting and obeying. We fall and worship by submitting. Bowing down is calling him Lord and Master. And this is hard. We don't want to obey him with our time, our talent, our treasure.

Yet he calls us to make him Lord. He says, Come to me all you who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest. That my yoke upon you and learn from me.

For I am gentle and humble in heart. And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. To say you are my Lord, I will trust you when I have to defend my faith at work or

in public.

One of the great church fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, says in his book, *The Life of Moses*, he's writing back to someone who's asking him, What is the perfect life? What is the perfect life?

[19 : 51] And he says at the end of the book, The perfect life is both friendship with God, so knowing God as a friend, and also servanthood to God, so knowing God as Lord.

You need both in your life. You need to know Jesus as your friend, but you also need to know him as Lord, as Master. And our Lord, our Master Jesus, invites us to friendship with him.

So the glory is fearsome, and so we must fall down and worship him, but the glory is also omnipresent. Would you look back with me at the text, verses 3, 10, and 17.

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, but the Kabar Canal, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. And for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face.

The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four a face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. 17. When they went, they went in all four directions, without turning as they went.

[20 : 52] Now as we say to Ezekiel, and God's rebellious people are in exile. They're being punished. They're in Babylon, under the siege of Nebuchadnezzar II.

And this is very important, because Ezekiel is using the culture around him, to share what is going on. And the ancient Near East deities, are connected to their temples. The presence of their gods, would be in icons, worshipped in different temples.

They would move them on carts. They cannot move themselves. The prophet Isaiah, would make fun of this in some way. He says, Fear not, nor be afraid. Have I not told you of old, and declared it? Are you my witnesses? Is there a God beside me? There is no rock. I know not any. All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit.

Their witnesses neither see, nor know, that they may be put to shame. Who fashions a god, or casts an idol, that is profitable for nothing? The prophet Isaiah, is saying, if you can make an idol, they're not really a god.

[22 : 01] I'm not like these other gods. And we do the same thing. It's easy to look at a culture, and say, oh yeah, they're worshipping, a rock that is carved. But we do the same thing, with things that give us life.

We might look to our neighbors, and see that they are wealthy, they're rich, they have a bigger home, and say, if I had that, my life would have meaning.

Or if I had the job I wanted, my life would have meaning. Those things are idols that say, you're finding life in something other than God. So, we have to look at ourselves, too, as we read about the ancient world.

We have to look to ourselves, and say, how do we find life? Because we're just as tempted. It just looks different. The Babylonians would worship their god, Marduk. The people of God were tempted, before and during the exile, to worship the other gods, because they were winning. The Babylonians were the ones in charge. One of the main points of this vision, is that God, on one hand, is not like the other gods. He's not confined to a temple, or an icon, nor, no, he is omnipresent.

[23 : 05] He is with his people, even in the exile. Even when it looks like the people of God have no hope, the Lord continues, constantly to remind him of his presence. He gives Ezekiel, the words to say to his people, the Lord is using this imagery, from Babylonian culture, to share his point.

The eagle, the lion, the ox, and the human, are common in Babylonian figures. The Lord is using the language, of that culture, so that they would understand, and he's elevating it.

He's elevating it. He's going beyond it. He's using the language, so that they would understand, and goes beyond it. He says, I'm far greater than these things. Showing that this war chariot, is both glorious and better.

It does not need a cart to be moved. In fact, it can move in all directions. All of that language of to and fro, is showing that the cart, does not need to turn around. It can move in all directions.

He is omnipresent, and he's with his people, in the darkest moments of their life. They are not alone, and God does not forget his people. God does not forget his people.

[24 : 09] In the book of Exodus, Moses is asked by God, to go tell Pharaoh, the ruler of all of Egypt, really the ruler of the world at the time, to let his people go.

But Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past, or since you have spoken to your servant. But I am slow of speech and of tongue.

Then the Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall speak.

Even in the hard calling of Moses, God reminds Moses, he will be with him. Our God is omnipresent. He is with us. He does not forget his people.

And one way to fall in worship, is to first look to God, because he is there. To see that he is with us. He is there with his people, so we too must remember in our lives.

[25 : 10] And I want to offer a couple ways, we can see the glory of God, is with us in our lives. The first, and the main way we see God, is with us, is through his word.

His word is living, and active. And it changes us. It informs us. The apostle Paul says, All scripture is breathed out by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

All scripture, is God breathed. And that word all, in the Greek, is the same word for every good work. So Paul is saying, all of scripture, is used for every good work.

We need all of it. Further, by looking at his word, we remember who God is. We remember Jesus. The word incarnate himself. The word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

When we're discouraged, the word reminds us of Jesus. Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Looking to Jesus, because he is here, in his word. So go to him in your prayers.

[26 : 18] He is your mediator. He is the one by whom, we can approach the Father. And second, a way that we can look, to God's omnipresence, is through the church.

It's through the church. We look to his glory, by worshiping with his people. Sunday, worshiping, lifting our voices, praying together, partaking in the sacraments, hearing the word, and its exposition, is another way, of looking to him.

One of my good friends, would always tell me, he says, the bride of Christ, she's all we got. The bride of Christ, she's all we got. The church, the bride's, is amazingly beautiful.

And of course, on this side of heaven, we're sinful, and we will hurt each other. But the church, also blesses each other. Christ Jesus, is crazy for his church.

He loves his church, his people, his adopted heirs to the kingdom, and he invites us, to newness of life with him. I know in my life, I would not be standing here today, without the church.

[27 : 17] There's so many people, in my life, who remind me, of who God is. Especially in moments, of hopelessness, anxieties, and fear, God placed the church, to remind us, of who he is.

So look to the omnipresent Lord, his son, and his bride. The glory of the Lord, is fearsome. And lastly, the king of glory.

One last point. Would you look back, with me one last time, at the text, 26 through 28. And above the expanse, of their heads, there were the likeness, of a throne, and the appearance, like sapphire. And seated above, the likeness of the throne, was the likeness, of a human appearance. And upward, from what had, the appearance of his waist, I saw it, as were gleaming metal, like the appearance, of the fire, enclosed all around.

And downward, from what had, the appearance, of his waist, I saw, were the appearance, of fire. And there was, brightness around him, like the appearance, of the bow, that was in him, and the cloud, of the rain.

[28 : 18] So was the appearance, of brightness all around. Such was the appearance, of the likeness, of the glory, of the Lord. And I saw it, and fell on my face. The king of glory.

There is a man, in the appearance, of a man, and this man, is seating, upon the throne. One commentator writes, but again, the throne itself, cannot hold, the gaze of Ezekiel.

For seated on it, was a dazzling, regal figure. Two features, of the image, are especially significant. First, Ezekiel recognizes, the form, that of a human man.

Second, this was no ordinary man. He, is described by, this word, meaning amber. And, his lower, like, fiery, glowing metal.

In the book, of Ezekiel, primarily in chapters, 25 through 38, you see, oracles against, the nations. The seven, major nations, include, Amman, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt.

[29 : 19] Why would Ezekiel, be writing, why would Ezekiel, share God's word, prophesy, oracles against the nation? Is not the book, of Ezekiel, for the people of God? Yes, and yes.

The book of Ezekiel, is for the people of God, but also mentions, God's sovereignty, his kingship. He's over all the nations. His reign, and rule, over all the nations.

The man, is described in language, of precious stone, lapis lazuli, one of the most precious stones, in the ancient Near East. A sign of royalty. Sapphire, and all other gems.

Again, this image, is overwhelming, because this is the king. We know from the New Testament, that the Almighty, is the triune God. This is the pre-incarnate, King Jesus.

A pre-incarnate, image of the Almighty. Christ is the king, and he holds the office, of prophet, priest, and king. So we need to trust, his sovereign rule.

[30 : 14] We must trust, his sovereign rule, over our lives. We must trust him, day by day. Trust him in the midst, of the hard times. Trust his sovereign reign, in our lives. In 1 Kings 19, we read of Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel.

He ran for his life, to Beersheba. And he continued, to flee into the wilderness. And the text reads, and he laid down, and slept under a tree. The angels came to me, and say, arise and eat.

The text follows, and he looked, and behold, there was at his head, a cake, baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. And he drank, he ate and drank, and laid down again.

And the angel of the Lord, came again a second time, and touched him, and said, arise and eat, for the journey, is too great for you. And he rose, and ate, and drank, and went in the strength, of the food, 40 days and 40 nights, to Horeb, the mount of God.

Elijah wanted to die, in the moment. He couldn't do it. And what did the angel say? Well, you can't do it. But arise, and eat, because the journey, is too great for you.

[31 : 22] It is bigger than you. But trust in the Lord, because he won't abandon you. He is with you. He will give you strength. There are times, in our lives, when God calls us, to something too big for us.

He asks us to trust his reign, to get up, and go. Jesus himself, asked for the cup to pass, and was willing, to sacrifice himself, on the cross. He took death itself.

The king became lowly, so that we may have life in him, and this life, which is freely offered, in the gospel. So the glory of the Lord, is fearsome, it is omnipresent, and it shows us, the king of glory, to which this king, has come off his throne, took the form of man, died for his people, to give them life, and abundance in him.

And it is through him, we encounter his glory, through union with him. Today, it is by faith, but one day, it will be by sight. And we look, and we await, with hope and rejoicing, that even in our exile, even in our waiting, even in this foreign land, as we journey, the Christian life, as a pilgrimage, we look to the one, who has given it all up, so that we might obtain it.

And because of it, we must fall on our face, and worship him. We must submit our lives, to him, both as servants, and friends, of Jesus our king. When my favorite hymn goes, no storm can shake, my inmost calm, while to that rock, I'm clinging, since love is Lord, of heaven and earth, how can I keep, from singing?

[32 : 59] How can we keep, from worshiping, this glorious God? Let us pray. Oh Lord, we thank you, for your grace. We thank you, for who you are.

We thank you, for all you've done, through your son, Jesus Christ. Will you be with us? Would you remind us, of who you are? Would you help us, not forget, that you are omnipresent. And Lord, that you are our king.

In Jesus name, Amen.