

Men Whose Eyes Have Seen the King - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

The glory of the Lord is the governing principle in God's movements and the foundation of everything God does.

Duration: 59:10

Scripture: Ezekiel 1, John 20:22, Revelation 4:2, Revelation 21:23

Topics: "Seeing Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not giving up on God's purpose, even in difficult circumstances. He uses the example of Jeremiah, who initially resolved to stop speaking about God's message but couldn't hold it in because the fire burned within him. The speaker also refers to Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord, which gives hope and encouragement in times of despair. The sermon concludes with a prayer for a new revelation of God's throne and a plea for the message to become more than just words, but a source of life and strength.

Transcript

I'd like for the moment to focus upon the 28th verse of Ezekiel 1. As the appearance, the bow that is in the cloud the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Now this in particular, this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

That fragment seems to me to sum up all these prophecies. Not only does it in particular apply to the first chapter, but it can be taken all the way through, for everything in these prophecies is being governed by what is there, the glory of the Lord. There is a very practical and immediate relationship between ourselves here and this word, this word and ourselves.

I'm quite sure that in the case of most of you at any rate, there is a sense of deep and strong sense of the need that the Lord should do a new thing. I think that is very widespread. What that new thing is may be given different interpretations.

In the whole evangelical world there is much prayer and talk about revival. That perhaps is only another way of expressing this sense, the need for the Lord to move in in a new way and do a new thing. Others would put it in other ways.

Nevertheless, there it is, everywhere, and one finds it amongst Christians. Wherever we go, the Lord must do something. The Lord must move.

The Lord must do a new thing. The Lord must take a fresh step. And we here this morning are not less burdened with that concern than others.

It is our prayer and our sense of need. We need to be very intelligent and understanding about this matter. The Lord has his ways.

And his means. And we need to know something about them. If we're going to be in line with the Lord in any movement that he proposes.

Therefore, I say this word is very appropriate to this situation. For whenever God has moved in a new and a further step in his divine purpose, he has purposed that movement by bringing his people, bringing the instrument concerned in the first place, and then through such an instrument, his people, to a fresh apprehension of his glory. That is a statement which will bear investigation and confirmation.

God's one end in all things is glory. Make no mistake about that. You want to know what God is after moving toward? In all things.

That encompasses countless details. In every realm. Personal life and corporate life.

In the nations. In every direction and connection. The answer is that God's end is glory.

And if that is so, it is to be noted that he sets and establishes that principle always at the outset of every movement. He puts it there as the thing which is going to govern that movement, that step, or whatever it is he is about to undertake. It is going to be governed by that end which he brings to every new beginning.

That may sound a little difficult for the moment, but take some instances. We will all agree that when God called Abraham out of the Calvary, separated him, that was a new movement of God. There is no doubt about that.

Clearly cut and defined, breaking into human history on the part of God. With something new or a further stage in the divine program in view. Stephen tells us that the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in the Calvary.

Why? The God of glory, the end toward which God was moving, was glory in his own glory in a people to be manifested among the nations. And so as the God of glory, he appeared unto Abraham. He put the glory there as the principle, the law, the basis upon which he was taking that step and was going to follow it through.

Some centuries later, revealed to Abraham, even to the very period, the Lord had that people out of Egypt. Brought them to Sinai, and there the fresh tip of changing them from a rabble crowd, an unconstituted and unorganized mass, multitude, into a corporate nation. That was the new move at Sinai, by the law and the testimony and the revelation given in the mount.

The people were constituted a nation and it was done in glory. Moses went into the mount, saw the God of glory, came down with that glory on his face. Again God had put the principle of everything at the beginning of his new move.

He was moving on the pathway of glory. Further step in the divine plan was reached in the days of David and Solomon. The temple was indeed a development of the divine thought in representation and it is all in glory.

The issue there is glory. Glory of the Lord filled the place. It was a glorious time with the glory of the Lord.

It was a glorious place. It was all just enunciating and preserving this principle. God is moving all the time with this thought, governing glory.

But we are told that the day came when the glory departed from Jerusalem and went away. We know why. And that brings us to the prophet's recovery.

And to this prophet Ezekiel in particular, here at the opening of these prophecies. The day when the glory is eclipsed amongst the Lord's people has lifted up and departed from Jerusalem. The Lord of glory appeared to Ezekiel.

This is the likeness of the appearance of the glory of the Lord. It's impressive that that comes right at the beginning of the prophecies isn't it? Now everything that follows is going to be but the outworking of that Lord's glory. God is more concerned.

And in these various ways he is concerned and showing his concern for the end of glory to be reached. You have that in the Old Testament coming to the New. And everybody will agree that the incarnation is a new movement of God.

The birth of the Lord Jesus into this world, that is indeed a great step forward in the divine program. Therefore it is accompanied with glory, heavenly glory, glory to God in high heaven. We've sung it in our hymn.

Glory again the inception of this new mighty movement of God because the end of that thing is indeed going to be glory. He has come for the recovery of the glory of God in this earth. That is heaven's song.

And we move on still. And again we will all agree that the day of Pentecost is another great step forward in the plan of God. God is moving on.

This is a clear mark in that progress of God through the ages. The day of Pentecost was a step of God from heaven. And what glory! What glory! John tells us quite clearly that the coming of the Holy Spirit was upon the basis of Jesus being glorified.

He had said, or he said, Spirit was not given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Implying that when the Spirit was given Jesus was glorified. It was on that draft.

See God is moving on this all the way along. And so we could go on. We think of the individual instruments of God's new movement.

We will agree that a new movement was in hand through Peter. No doubt about it. It's a real new movement.

Although Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, we must remember that Peter opened the door both to Jew and Gentile for the new dispensation in Jerusalem and in Caesarea. It's a mighty new movement. But Peter had his ministry set in this glory.

He tells us, as we have been seeing these days, that he was with him in the Holy Mount. They held his glory. And that had been a tremendously dynamic thing in Peter's life.

There's no doubt about it. The Holy Spirit interpreted everything to him on the day of Pentecost. He got a new Bible because he got a new Lord.

And that opened heaven. And opened heaven. It was this great principle of glory which accounted for Peter's ministry and Peter's work and Peter's endurance to the end.

That is perfectly clear in the case of John who was with him for so long as his co-worker, fellow apostle in Jerusalem at least. Well, we will again recognize when we come to the beginning of the book of the Revelation, we're in the presence of a new movement. A new movement for a recovery of the glory which has become so limited and obscured in the churches.

The Lord comes to John in vision, in patience. But it is such a glorious thing. And the visions are so glorious that more than once John is down in utter prostration before the Lord.

And has to be lifted up. Helped to rise because of the overwhelming impact of the visions of the glory. And you're all anticipating that I'm going to bring Paul into it.

And just say this again. That this wonderful ministry, so full, so rich, so glorious, was all born in the day when he saw the glory on the Damascus road. It came out of there.

The Lord put the glory, that's the point, at every occasion when he was going to move again with some new step in his purpose. All these things that I have mentioned are steps onward of God in his age-long purpose. And every one of them is based upon an apprehension, a new apprehension of the glory of the Lord by those who were concerned.

So their ministry became that in the case of prophets and apostles. It's really a ministry of the greatness and the glory of the Lord. And as those to whom they ministered saw that, they became a people with a tremendous significance.

In this world it was this apprehension of the glory of Christ that gave character and meaning and power, value to their being here in this world. All this then has but one meaning. It is God's end and God's object is glory.

And everything that he does is governed by that. Now dear friends, this is something that must really take hold of us. And of which we must take hold.

Oh if there is to be real issue from our being together, one feels that it should be this. That the glory of the Lord should take hold of us. It should take hold of us.

Or that we should become mastered by this truth. That in all things, in all things, to the minutest thing in our life under the hand of God, he intends that to work out for glory. That God in everything is working with glory in you.

Do you believe that? Ah yes, you believe it as a statement and as a truth. Perhaps you believe it in your heart. But it's not always easy, you know, to believe that.

Not always easy to believe that because we just don't see how it can be. Indeed what we do see convinces us that anything but glory can come out of this. Oh that the Lord would just grip us with this, grip me, grip you with this.

Individually and as companies of his people where we are. What he is doing, what he is allowing is under the control of this one law and principle. It's going to be for his glory.

Or he intends it so to be. That is what he has in mind and will do if he is not finally thwarted in his purpose. Well, everything may seem to contradict this.

We come to the prophecies of Ezekiel and there is plenty that seems to contradict this glory. You can't get away from it. You just cannot get away from the fact that this is in the first chapter.

It is not reserved to the end. And you wade through all that is in this book. A wearisome tale of judgments and woe and what not.

You are not left to wade through it all and then at last find that God comes out with things in his own hands and manages to survive. You are told right at the very beginning that everything is governed by God and glory. Everything is going to happen.

Everything is going to be said. Right on to the end. The governing thing is the glory of God.

It's there as the very foundation of everything. So we must take note of that. What is God's end? Well, Paul has seen it and has given it to us in a matchless fragment.

Unto him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus unto the ages of the ages. You can't get beyond that. That's finality.

That is the end. Unto the ages of the ages. Glory in the church by Christ Jesus.

There it is. Now coming then to Ezekiel. There is much here to help us as to God's own concern for his glory.

We may have a concern for the Lord's glory. The Lord has a far greater concern for his glory than we have. And this book is just a book full of God's own concern for his own glory.

So with a precision Ezekiel comes into view. Notice how precise it is. Even to the day of the month and the year the word of the Lord came unto Ezekiel son of Busi.

Where he was, when he was, how he was. It's like the Lord moving so exactly, so meticulously in this matter and laying hold of this man. Remember it had to be a laying hold of him because it resulted in a complete change in the whole vocation of this man.

Ezekiel was a trained priest. He belonged to the priesthood and he was a young man who was expecting that through his life he would fulfill the ministry of a priest. This broke in and upset his whole career and his whole vocation.

He had to change his whole manner and method of life from priesthood to a prophet. It was something very strong in this man's case. It's interesting to notice that his name Ezekiel means God will strengthen.

God will strengthen. For the glory of God that's very necessary. Especially in conditions such as those in which Ezekiel lived.

Ezekiel thus as a young man was carried away with the captives to Babylon and was with the captives by the river Kibar he tells us. And from what we know, what we read, it was a pretty hopeless situation. We know something of the conditions in Jerusalem from the prophecies and ministry of Jeremiah.

They were pretty bad there. Poor Jeremiah had his heart broken as he had ministered in Jerusalem. But there are reasons for saying that whatever it was like in Jerusalem it was more difficult in Babylon.

That is so far as the people were concerned to whom Ezekiel ministered. Their recalcitrant. They were difficult people.

Read these early chapters. See Ezekiel's encounter with them. Encounters with them.

Things to which he had to resort. See, I don't want to stay with too much detail but it's very necessary for us to get the setting of the glory of the Lord for our encouragement. Here he is with these captives and you know a man a man who has to bring home to a people the reasons for their condition and the judgments of God and has to speak faithfully in the name of the Lord without compromising on any principle at all who will put his own very life and future in the balances of his ministry and be thoroughly faithful.

Thoroughly faithful. He will not condone any wrong. He will not compromise on any principle in order to preserve their favor and his own position.

Man who really has the glory of God at heart at any cost. He's a very unpopular man. Make no mistake about it.

He's an unpopular man and Ezekiel was an unpopular man among the exiles. So unpopular that he had to resort to all sorts of seeming tricks to gain their attention. To get a hearing.

Look at the things to which he resorted and had to do. Spectacular things. Unusual things and unnatural things.

Sometimes seemed to act the fool to draw attention. People would look in his direction. No he was having a hard time to get a hearing.

Have any attention at all? The most unpopular man perhaps in the country. It was a desperately difficult situation that he was in amongst his own people there in the midst of such a situation which I don't think I exaggerate. Indeed I could add much more to it from these very chapters.

In the midst of such a difficult and seemingly hopeless for the time being Ezekiel says he was with the captives by the river Kibar and the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God. He saw visions of God. There is no situation so hopeless as to make it impossible for the glory of God to break in.

It says that surely. No situation that can shut God out and be too impossible for a fresh manifestation of his glory. Don't you take heart from that if it's true? Well here it is.

Here it is. Amazing thing when you take the whole setting and the whole circumstances and the whole position you could say well that's that's altogether beyond any hope. That's broken Jeremiah's heart.

That has broke the wrath of God in this way. Destroy Jerusalem and send the people far away. What can you hope for in such a situation? And right in that Ezekiel says I saw the heavens and visions of God and he sums it all up.

This is the likeness of the appearance. The appearance of the glory of the Lord. Oh dear friends, difficult as it is for us to take hold of that.

Really believe it. This may be a message to us. Sometimes we are very near to despair over the whole situation.

Let it come to us as a message from the Lord. In our own lives perhaps in the place where you are the company of the Lord's people. Things create such difficulty that you sometimes get near to giving it all up.

Ezekiel might well have done that and had far more occasion to do it than you are. But right in there, there, this was likeness of the appearance of the glory of the Lord. The heavens were open.

The heavens were open. We have thought and said much about open heaven. All we need say or we'll stay to say about that this moment that if there is any indication at all that the heavens are open, that is always the most hopeful thing in any situation.

You may be having some difficult times in your company of the Lord's people. You have some difficult people or Ezekiel had some difficult people. You may be having much discouragement.

There may be things that you feel to be very wrong and so on and so on. Yet when you come together and give yourself to the worship of the Lord, the wonderful sense of unction, you just become occupied with the Lord. For the time being at any rate you let the other go and the Lord becomes your center.

The heavens are open. The heavens are open. While that lasts, dear friends, there's every hope for your assembly.

There's every hope for the future. There is nothing more hopeless than a closed heaven. Look at Calvary.

There was darkness over the face of the earth and Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Heaven was closed because of what he was doing there, taking the sin of the whole world. Heaven closed down, was shut up. Heaven closed down, was shut up.

No way through. That is the most hopeless it could ever possibly be. Hopelessness of that situation killed him.

Killed him. That was the final stroke. Bring about his death.

It was not the nails. It was not the thorns. It was not the action of men.

It was the broken heart because he had lived his life all the way through with a clear way through to the Father. An open heaven. He had it.

You see, all his days he had an open heaven. He was in communication with heaven, with the Father. He had never known until then one moment when he couldn't get through in an instant.

Here that all ended. No way through. No response.

No answering voice. Closed heaven. That's hopeless.

If you and I have any answer to prayer, any little indication or token that the Lord has not forsaken, given up, shut down on us, we have anything. Heaven's still open and that's very hopeful for the future. Oh yes, let us cherish the open heaven.

Of our times of worship, many, many dark things may be about. Many difficult things. Situations like Ezekiel may be full of evil or perplexities, problems and difficulties and sufferings and whatnot and yet we come together and focus upon the Lord and sense his presence.

Sense his presence. That's our open heaven and an open heaven is always a sign that there's hope yet. There's hope yet.

There's still a future for glory. The Lord forbid that ever we should come to the time when we are closed down by heaven and can't get through. I saw the heavens open and that meant God hasn't finished with things.

God has not closed down. There may be judgments and the following chapters show the judgments. There may have to be judgments.

There may have to be disciplines. May have to be chastenings. There may yet be a lot to be done but whatever it is that's got to be cleared up perhaps by the jealous wrath of God for his glory.

Hard things to be gone through. Sufferings and afflictions because of the wrongs. Nevertheless, nevertheless it's all governed by this.

A hope of glory. A hope of glory. If the heavens still remain I saw visions of God.

That is visions given by God. What did Ezekiel see? What was it that comprised those visions of God? Well as we have seen in chapter one he saw a throne and then he saw the likeness of the appearance as of a man upon the throne about. And then he saw a two-fold symbolic medium of the administration of that throne.

The cherubim and the wheels. Just mention these things for the moment and pass on. Coming back for further considerations later.

Then as we know he saw a house. The house. He was commanded to show to the people of Israh.

He saw the house in later glory. He saw the river coming from under the threshold. Circling the altar.

Passing through the court. And a way down. Broadening and deepening and making everything live.

Whithersoever it came. Then he saw the land and the inheritance. Finally he saw the city and inscribed there.

The Lord is there. That's the end of it all. The Lord is there.

All these things are related to the glory. Are the result of the government of that one on the throne above. But I want to emphasize and stress particularly that all that is in this book is the result and the expression of that throne of the man upon it above.

It is the inclusive factor in the whole book. Because that's very simple to understand. Everything emanates and results from the fact that there is one in the place of supreme government and authority.

And for us and for them and for all time by the eternal appointment of God that one is the Lord Jesus. The son of God. Great fact.

Inclusive fact of his being exalted to the right hand of the majesty of the heavens. We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. God raised him.

Set him at his own right hand. Far above all rule and authority, principality and power and every name that is made. Everything comes out of that.

If that is true then everything is alright. It will be alright in the end. Everything that is here is but the expression of that throne and the man upon it above.

Now dear friends this is very up to date isn't it? Very up to date. I have spent time in speaking of the conditions in which Ezekiel fulfilled his ministry and spent his life. The time and the place.

The state of things. Well yes he had a very difficult situation but the church has got a pretty difficult situation now. And things are far from easy today.

As then very much that is wrong and very much that is evil. And who will say today that the glory of God pervades his people. Ezekiel's was a difficult time but it was at that time and in those circumstances that this expression of the throne came in for a new movement of God.

Or shall I say this apprehension on the part of an instrument of the supremacy of that throne and the man upon it had this wonderful result that in time the whole situation was changed and God had something for his glory. It had a tremendous effect upon Ezekiel. So it saved him.

That vision, the open heaven, the throne and the man upon it above. It saved him in his day from despair. Saved his ministry.

Saved his testament. Saved his life. Only that will save us.

Only that can save us dear friends. I perhaps sound a bit pessimistic. I don't want to be a pessimist.

But you cannot, you cannot today be acquainted with the state of things on this earth. Even amongst what is called Christianity, Christians. Without sometimes feeling fairly hopeless about it.

It may be all wrong and I don't want to speak about myself. It may be partly due to me. But I confess to you that in recent months I've almost despaired of the Christian situation as I have seen it.

I wonder is it, is it possible that the great revelation given to us the church as we have it here in the New Testament can in any way be realized in our time? Look at the divisions. Look at the quarrels. Feel this awful atmosphere that has spread.

That has spread and grown. When I first went to United States in 1925 there seemed to be such an open clear way everywhere for something new of the Lord. The atmosphere seemed so clear.

Hearts seemed so open. Go back there today and this is not personal. Everybody is suspecting everybody else.

The spirit of criticism has got into the most devoted Christians. About both Christians and Christian things. But there are people who are really most devoted to the Lord.

You can't have a half an hour's conversation with them but what somebody gets it. Somebody is left. Somebody is mentioned for a warning.

Somebody is suspect. It's like an awful miasma fog that has crept over the whole world and you cannot go anywhere but what you find. You find it amongst Christians.

You cannot go into religious bookshops without seeing line upon line of pamphlets and books which are occupied with denouncing something. Denouncing something. Men giving their whole lives to this kind of horrible work.

Trying to expose what they think to be error because they don't agree with it. Now that's strong language but it's not too strong. It's a state of things and you might despair of having something that you have seen to be God's purpose.

You can't. The Lord won't let you if you have seen the Lord. If you really have seen the Lord you just can't give it up.

You may say like Jeremiah that you won't speak in this way anymore. He did. He resolved and determined that he would never speak again on this matter but he said while I kept silent, while I mused, the fire burned.

Then spake I with my lips. It's out again. Can't keep it in.

And you and I have often resolved we just have to stop talking about it and give it up because it doesn't seem to work. Things seem to go from bad to worse and worse to awful and yet and yet here we are again. Here we are again.

We're here. I've been calculating very much in recent weeks as to how much I would say. Calculating to keep back a lot.

Can't help myself. We're back here again in full view of God's declared purpose. The Spirit won't give it up and won't let us give it up.

However bad the situation is, the heaven is not closed yet. The man on the throne has not evacuated the throne yet. There's hope.

But we've got to have the mastery of that great reality that he is still there where God put him. And if this is true, this is true. Difficult as sometimes it is to believe it, to see it at any rate, he is far above all rule and authority and principality and power and every name, be it Stalin, Khrushchev or anybody else, far above every name in this age and in that which is to come.

Only as that gets hold of us and in return we take hold of it, will there be any prospect at all. But that is the problem. I think perhaps I'd better stay there.

You see there's so much and we can overload loads of the real value by getting too much. My point at the moment is that to see the glory is always a strategic movement of God in a difficult and unpromising day and situation. That was the meaning of the transfiguration.

It was a difficult day. Things were closing in on the Lord and his little band men. Atmosphere was impregnated with hatred.

A difficult day and the cross, the cross was there immediately before. How shall they meet it? How will they survive it all? Strategy was the transfiguration. They saw his glory and although for a time afterwards it seemed to be eclipsed, as we have said, when he was risen from the dead, they understood all things.

And quite sure the transfiguration took on its full meaning in the light of the resurrection. Stephen was having a pretty hard time, wasn't he? Things were going very hardly for the church in Jerusalem on the day that that wonderful young man, Stephen, was dragged outside and gunned to death with that so vicious hatred of the Lord Jesus. It was a difficult time for Stephen and for the others.

And Stephen saw the heavenly Son of Man standing at the right hand, saved the situation for him and I think it had a much farther reach than just himself. I think it handed on something, handed on something. At any rate, one man there who became a very potent factor in the church for all time was tremendously affected by what he saw in the face of Stephen and heard through the lips of Stephen.

He never got over it. He never got over it and he never forgave himself. He quite clearly says, and I was standing by him and giving my vote, my consent.

Seeing the glory was a saving thing in a darkened city. Paul is in prison. Paul is in prison.

The end of his long full life ministry with all those many churches, far more than we have tabulated by letters addressed from many churches, he had been used to bring into being many converts and many who owed everything spiritually to him and his ministry. Now he's in prison, shut up, he can't go to them and churches are in state of decline. Many are turning against him and away from him as he says.

A lonely man, a lonely man, only Luke is with me. A man in difficulty, if ever a man was in naturally. Circumstances in every way, oh what a situation for a man like that, hence it coming to an end like that.

What saves him? It is, my dear friends, it is astoundingly impressive that right in that knowing it all, knowing his own position, knowing his own prospects, his own prospects which were pretty poor for this life, knowing the state of things far away in the churches, getting news of these secessions and these disaffections, seeming breakdown of his work, disappointment with believers and with churches and all that enough to crush a man in despair. I say it's an amazing thing that out of that, in the midst of that, he has an open heaven and says now, now unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages forever and ever. He's saved by the glory.

He is delivered by the glory for a different end it might have been but for this apprehension of the glory. Here he writes that this one, this man is in the glory on the throne above, far above all. And authority.

Caesar may be there next door governing the whole world and bringing it under his mighty and evil heel, seeming to be able to carry out his fell designs against the church of Jesus Christ to Paul right alongside of Caesar and Caesar's city and strongholds and have set him far above all rule and authority and every name Caesar or any other in this age or in any other put in all things in subjection under his feet. That's a vision, a saving vision of the glory and I think with just a reminder that it was that that saved John in his difficult and desperate situation in Patmos. For it was indeed something to break a man's heart and to send him deep down and dark the position of John the one lonely survivor of the whole apostolic band of all gods cut off from his beloved church alone isolated exiled with all the conditions which must have

accompanied that exile.

Well that's enough to make a man despair and feel that he's lived his life in vain and that there really is no hope at all but he had an open heaven saw a vision and what visions he saw. It was the open heaven that saved him. The Lord give us that and a new apprehension of the throne and the man upon it.

If anything has been said that would have been better left unsaid we beseech thee to cover and nullify that O Lord. Whatever has been right according to thee do make it more than words and ideas and statements make it life make it our salvation make it our strength in this difficult day O Lord in this day this very day in which we gather together may there lay hold of us and we be able to lay hold in a new way of the throne of all thrones the man above all we ask this that glory may come back into our hearts and into our assemblies and amongst thy people in the name of the Lord Jesus

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