

Men Whose Eyes Have Seen the King - Part 7

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound connection between God's glory, holiness, and the life of believers as depicted in the visions of Ezekiel.

Duration: 45:42

Scripture: Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 6:3, Ezekiel 1:1, Matthew 6:33, John 20:31, Revelation 7:9, Revelation 21:11

Topics: "Seeing Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the visions of God that Ezekiel saw. The speaker highlights that whenever the Lord takes a new step or movement, He reveals His glory to someone or some instrument. The speaker then discusses the symbolism of the four living ones or cherubim and the wheels under the throne. The wheels represent a great multitude of redeemed individuals who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and are now worshiping and praising God. The sermon emphasizes that this vision of glory through holiness is not limited to Ezekiel's time but is a timeless message for all believers.

Transcript

It is not easy to resume our meditation in so large a matter without reviewing the way that we have already taken, and I shall limit myself in that matter to a very few words for the sake of those who are not with us this morning. You will have the first chapter of the prophecies of Ezekiel open before you. We will not read the chapter again, but with a glance you will see its main features.

Our general thought is this, that whenever the Lord has taken a further step or made a new movement in relation to the fullness of his purpose, he has almost invariably prefaced that movement or that step by bringing someone or some instrument to a fresh apprehension of his glory. He has brought forth his glory and shown it, by which he has indicated that in every movement of his, in every step that he takes, he is governed by the end, the one full end, that is, glory. God's end is glory, and in all things glory is the governing matter.

As the God of glory, he appeared to Abraham as one of the early further movements in his program. In glory, he appeared to Moses on the mount when he was about to take a further step in that plan. And so on and on, in the Old Testament, in the great movement at the beginning of the New Testament, the bringing in of his son, the governing word and idea feature is glory.

Glory to God. The new movement of Pentecost was a manifestation of the glory of Christ. Christ exalted.

Like that. And so, in order to be able to move with God toward his full end, it is very necessary that those concerned, an instrumental people and ministry, should ever have the glory of the Lord fully, clearly, mightily in view. Everything, everything that is under the government of God is related to his glory, his means and his methods.

His permissive and his executive will all has glory in view. Now in this first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies, we have very much that is instructive and helpful in this very connection as to the movements and ways of God in relation to the glory. As we pointed out this morning, the inclusive phrase, inclusive not only of the chapter, but of the whole book, is in verse 28 of the first chapter, the second half.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.

That refers, as I have said, to all that is in that chapter, but it especially refers and relates to the vision of the throne in heaven and the likeness as of a man upon it above. It is the glory of the throne of the exalted man, the God-man. And from that, from that, everything else proceeds.

All that is here and all that comes later, right to the end of this very full book, is the expression of that throne. Of that government. Of the meaning of that man being there and where he is.

That is the point at which we take things up this afternoon. In our summary of the visions which came to Ezekiel, he said I saw visions of God. We noted among the many visions, and we are of course not going to even attempt to touch upon all these visions, but in our summary, we said that under the throne, there was a two-fold symbolic medium of its expression, and that two-fold medium is the four living ones, or the cherubim and the wheels.

To both of these, quite a considerable section is given. You notice that they are not just mentioned and passed over, but they are very fully and minutely described. You've got to stop with this.

You've got to take time, give attention. The prophet is giving us every detail, very difficult to understand. I suppose any of you would claim to understand it.

I certainly don't. But I do see some things that I think are almost on the face of it. Nevertheless, these are things that are brought here in very clear definition, and in very full presentation.

Therefore, something that right at the beginning of all these prophecies and movements and visions must be taken account of. They must have a place, and a very serious place. So we come to look at this two-fold medium of the expression of that throne of glory.

Firstly, then, the cherubim. We need not describe them. Their description is here.

We need say very little about the details of their composition or construction, their features. All that will be familiar to you. We are not thinking of covering all that ground again.

We want, quite simply and directly, to get at their function. The real function of these living ones. Of course, I do underline that this is oriental symbolism.

It is a symbolic representation of something spiritual. People in the East who would read these things would have a more ready understanding and apprehension of this way of presenting truth than perhaps we have. But God has chosen to convey his great truths in this symbolic and illustrative way.

We get through the symbolism and the illustration to what it is that is being said to us. And we can, if you like, forget the forms, forget the characteristics described, and just get right at the heart of it. What is the message? What is it that they are intended to convey? And from a reflection upon the many appearances in the Bible of the cherubim, you can see that invariably, on every occasion, they stand related to one thing.

Their function is ever and always to proclaim that the throne and the government of God is that of holiness. That his throne is a holy throne. His government is a government of holiness.

It will at once be seen how vital and appropriate that is, as standing right at the beginning of this history of judgment, contained in this book of prophecies. For everything that follows, for the large section of judgments, both in Israel and of Israel, and in the nations, under this supreme throne, is in relation to an unholy state and a demand that that shall be judged and put away. The glory waits for that, and waits upon that.

Glory ever and always waits upon holiness, because it is a throne of glory, which is the glory of holiness. The government of that holiness is represented here in this throne and in the man on it. But that is not all.

These cherubim are called living ones. Living ones. Living creatures, if you like.

Better living ones. The idea of life, of livingness, is always associated with them. They come up again and again in that connection.

You'll see this as we go on. The moment it's this, that holiness and life are combined in them. The life waits on the holiness.

The holiness gives rise to the life. The life. And you cannot separate these two things.

You cannot have the life without the holiness. You cannot have the holiness without it leading to life. Always walking like that, to and fro.

More holiness, more life. More life, more holiness. They, these living ones, are in representation the custodians of the divine holiness for and unto the divine life.

See, the thing that is in the balances all the way through is life and death. Life and death. Through this book.

That's where the battle is being fought out, in that realm of life and death. It's a question of life and death, or death for Israel. For the nations.

But the deciding thing is this matter of holiness. Holiness. Now if you briefly pass your eye over some of the instances where the cherubim are in view, you'll see that that is the connection every time.

When things went wrong in the garden. When sin entered. When disobedience through pride came in and operated.

When things went wrong, a man was expelled from the place of life, where the tree of life was, and at the gate, at the gate to God-ish, where the cherubim place was claiming Saul. Their presence there said, that's a holy life, and that which is corrupt, polluted, tainted, unholy, cannot have it, cannot touch it, cannot come near it, is expelled from it. Cherubim would say, we are the custodians, not only of that life, but of the

essential holiness unto it.

Then, figures of the cherubim were interwoven on the screen, the veil between the holy place and the most holy place, and man would pass that veil in peril of his life, it would be death. They were there inscribed again, in testimony to the fact that they were the guardians of what is holy, and as such, anything unholy would perish if it passed their way. They on the veil declared, things are wrong with man, things are wrong, they've gone wrong, they are a testimony against the wrong state of man, and because of that he cannot come in to the presence of the glory, and the presence of the life.

Here of course, it's quite obvious, in Ezekiel, isn't it, but then, we remember Isaiah, the features, connected features are impressive in this connection, when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, and seated upon a throne, and the cherubim, only another name for these, I think, were heard crying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty. Why was it? King Isaiah, King Isaiah had forced his way into the temple, to serve unlawfully at the altar, and took the censer in his hand, man pressing in to the presence of the holy God, and touching holy things, the priests besought him, besought him, pleaded with him, go out, pertain it not unto thee, King Isaiah, but Isaiah asserted himself there, and he was stricken with leprosy, went out as a leper to the day of his death, and he died, tainted, corrupted, and in the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord, and heard the cherubim saying, holy, holy, holy, the throne, you see, is the throne of holiness, and of life, but that means death, where there's not the holiness, death, where there's not the holiness.

Life is on the ground of holiness, Jerusalem has become grievously and terribly defiled with Jeremiah, terrible, terrible book as to a spiritual condition, terrible book, the corruption and defilement of Jerusalem, the resultant judgment, people carried away into captivity, and then we have Ezekiel there, with the captives of the southern kingdom of Judah, by the river Kibar, and this is a scene of desolation, a scene of death, a scene of judgment, they verily stand in the place of Isaiah, defiled, judgment has come upon them, death, and if you have any question about that, or if you want that particularly emphasized, come to the great chapter in these prophecies about the valley of dry bones, and that's God's conception of this people at that time, valley, dry bones, very, very

scattered, that's Israel's condition, as in Babylon, as in captivity, oh, are these people going to be saved from death, from judgment, how will it be, how will it be, the Lord will say that he'll have to take away their unclean, polluted, stony hearts, a new heart will I give thee, a new heart will I give thee, in other words, they'll have to be cleansed from their iniquity, washed from their sin, made again God's holy people, and they will live, and they will live, Cherubim are very active in relation to that matter, tremendously busy about it, see them on the wing, they are characterized by a deep concern over this matter, of this people being saved from death, by being delivered from the bondage of corruption, need I say any more about the occasions when they appear, perhaps one

glance to the end will give us a much happier, more cheerful picture, we come over to the book of the Revelation, marvelous fourth and fifth chapter, here, the heavens are opened again, John says the heavens are opened, he saw visions of God, and what did he see, here's the great multitude, a great multitude which no man can number, there are tribes before the throne of God and of the land, here are those who have come up and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the land, here they are around the throne, singing their song of redemption and the poor living ones are there, but not feverishly, fretfully, hurrying hither and thither, concerned with this matter, of getting a people saved and right, their wings are let down, and they are joining in the worship, the work

is done, their work is finished, and now they can worship, join in praise with all the redeemed, that's how it ends, it's the picture of glory through holiness, glory and life through holiness, well, that's a message, not for the days of Ezekiel only, it's an abiding message, it's truth and the principle which runs from beginning to end of time, that throne dear friends, we want it on our side, demands that something is done to cleanse us from our sin, to deliver us from our way of wickedness, to bring us into the white raiment of his divine righteousness, sanctified, it is to those who are thus walking with him in fellowship and who as far as can be, should I say it like that, are eschewing every evil away, are repudiating all iniquity, are having no truck with iniquity, are not

dabbling, compromising in any way, condoning what is evil, what is right.

I know that the whole matter of holiness can become very oppressive and it can become very legal and bring us into bondage, but the fact remains dear friends, that God's throne, the Lord's throne is a throne of holiness, his government is a government of holiness, and life, his life is holy life, is holy life, we know quite well in practical experience, that if we do, we do voluntarily or even involuntarily touch something that's evil, touch something that is corrupt, touch this world in spirit, the glory fades, the glory fades. We know within ourselves, if we even say something that is wrong, the glory fades, we know it by the fading glory in our heart, a shadow comes over, cloud passes over our spirit, it stays there until we've gone and got that cleaned up in the presence of the Lord, it's like that. Now, we must pass immediately to the other side of this symbolic medium of the throne, to the wheels, because as you notice, they are quite definitely in union with the living ones or the cherubim, they move together, they are really only two aspects of one thing.

But, the wheels contain their own particular emphasis and message, what do they signify, well, just read again, what is the impression that is left with you after reading, verses 15 to 21, if you just sit back after reading, how do you feel, how do you feel, sometimes it's a good thing to put yourself into the word. And take it's temper, take it's atmosphere, I venture to suggest that if you read these verses in that way, stand back, you'll heave a sigh, my word, they're moving, something doing here, in any case, you'll not feel a quiet, passive feeling when you've read that. It's the impression, is it not, the impression of tremendous energy, of motion, with purpose, that's the atmosphere of the wheels, wheels symbolize movement, motion, going, and here, the spirit of the living ones is in the wheels, the energy, the energy of the spirit.

It's here, it's energy and movement, with purpose, isn't it, of which they speak, they say to us, fairly and simply, that this throne, this throne is a very energetic and active throne, in relation to the end which God is seeking. All the energies and activities contained in these prophecies are the expression of that throne, and are, as it were, the carrying out of the meaning of the wheels, throne is on the move, throne is not passive, throne is governed by a tremendous energy, God is deeply and greatly concerned about this great end of his, to have everything glorious, and for his glory, and filled with his glory, it is no light thing, easy-going thing, with the Lord, to have that end. If we did know it, friends, you and I knew it, we could only see it and understand it, we should be able to see that so many things in our lives, which the Lord permits to come in, and which the Lord sometimes sends into our lives, are the workings of his energy, to make a way for his glory.

John, John the Apostle, tells us that the whole of his gospel which he wrote, the 21 chapters as we have it, were written with one object, one object, and that object was the glory of the Lord Jesus, that governed all, the glory of the Lord Jesus. You now take it up and see all the way through, from beginning to end, it's that, and for one fragment only, Lazarus, this sickness, is not unto death, but for the glory of God. Strange,

strange event of providence, strange ways of God, painful, causing deep sorrow, distress, perplexity, all a strange thing for those concerned, but quite deliberate, there is the element of deliberateness about the Lord Jesus' attitude toward that matter, and his handling of it.

His tallying, when he has received the news, he's got this thing in hand, he's for the glory of God, the Son of God should be glorified thereby, the end of this strange thing in human life, this painful thing in human life is the glory of God, oh that you and I could always look at our sufferings and our sorrows like that, every time when some perplexing, bewildering, heart-breaking thing comes into our lives, if only we could say and believe and stand to it, God is going to get some glory out of us, there's some glory somewhere, bound up with this, he's working to his end in all things, in all things. And Paul says, God works in all things good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose, he means by that word good, glory, glory to God, now I can say these things from a platform, and I have a very real battle I know, over them when they arise, but they're the truth, which we have to face, but they're the truth, which we have to face. And so the point is that there's an energy of God at the throne in things, all sorts of things, all sorts of things, an energy of God toward glory, and to glory through holiness, through holiness.

Another feature of the wheels, as you notice, says they were full of eyes, round about, full of eyes, round about, another symbolic representation, just surely meaning that this throne is operating with perfect intelligence, with complete knowledge of everything, an utter apprehension and grasp of all the elements, all the features, everything that has got to be dealt with, perfect vision, perfect knowledge. So the throne of holiness works, that's a solemn message as well, perhaps, as an encouraging one, the fact is, dear friends, that that one on the throne, whose eyes are as of a flame of fire, sees right through, and knows all the hidden motives, and acts accordingly, not what we see, and not what we are willing to see, but what he sees, he sees, he knows, he knows, the eyes of his glory look us right through, and they know all our self-deceptions, all our deceivings of one another, they know us so perfectly, and are acting according to their knowledge. The Lord is acting with us according to his knowledge, and we are not going to get away with it.

If the Lord takes in hand to deal with us in a form of judgment, if he really does act where we are concerned, it is because he's seen something, he is seeing something, that something is injurious to us, that something is limiting or hindering the glory in us, personally, individually, or in our companies, he's seen something that is against the glory, and so with energy he takes in hand, and he will judge it, he will go to great lengths in order to get that eliminated and put right. That the glory may come in, a new life may come in, and that we may go on a new and fresh step and phase with him in his puddle. We, perhaps, would not have it otherwise, we don't want to be deceived, we don't want to lose something by some unrecognized wrong, we want to have everything open.

The end, the end of the Bible sees a city which is absolutely transparent, absolutely transparent, God is really seeking transparency in his people, no duplicity, no deception, no questionableness, Oh, how we must judge our motives, how we must keep in the presence of the everlasting burnings, how necessary it is to keep in the light of his countenance, so that nothing is allowed to go on unconsciously with us that is limiting his glory in our life. See, it's a message, a very great concern, oh pray if you will for a new thing, pray for revival, pray for God to move in some great way of power, but remember, all his movements are based upon this, a holiness that corresponds to his throne. And he cannot, he just cannot do anything, he cannot do anything until that holiness has been vindicated in his people, just cannot.

Unanswered prayer, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, it's a very big principle that's covering so much, isn't it, oh may the Lord give us understanding, the presence of what could be a very terrible word, and yet it's glory in view, give us understanding, that his energies, the energies of his throne are holy energies, his goings, his goings, continuous goings, are in this very connection, that what is consistent with the man in the glory shall be found in us and amongst the Lord. One further glance, these wheels, these wheels occupy a place between heaven and earth, they are not wholly of the earth, they don't remain earthbound, held by an earth touch, there's a kind of suspendedness, they touch the earth but they're not of it. They bound along in their energy in relation to heaven, but also in relation to earth, as the embodiment of the divine energies, now what that says amongst other things, is this, that God's interests and God's activities and God's throne are not remote, remote from things here, from this earth.

He is not just reigning on his throne in remote isolation, away there somewhere in the undefined heavens, his energies relate to things here, his mighty interests are imminent, are near, they're concerned with this world, with this earth and with what is on it. He wants this world, this earth and all that is here, to be holy, to be holy, Isaiah's vision says that phrase, the whole earth is full of his glory, that's the concept, that is what the Lord desires, working to that and we know from the end, the description of the end, that is how it will be when righteousness covers the earth. And the waters cover the sea, holiness everywhere, God is working down here, now for the moment we cannot say more about that, perhaps we say a little further this evening on that very matter, of how it is happening, the operation of this throne in relation to holiness, what we are stating here is the fact, the fact, God is intimately, close, intelligently associated with this throne.

He is intimately associated with the state of things here, in the church and in the churches, he is cognizant of everything that we don't see, we don't realize, his eyes see it and he is active, concerning this state to have it holy and to be able to bring in or bring back the glory. Have you got the message? Throne is not far away after all, it is here, in representation, it is here. First chapters of the book of the revelation mean anything at all, it means that this very God-man, this man of the glory is moving amongst the churches where the lamp stands, moving amongst them, he is here, he is imminent, throne is not far away after all, it is here, in representation, he is here.

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