

"EZEKIEL, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:3-5; 36:22-26; 37:1-6

Introduction.

Let me begin by stating the obvious. In preaching through a book of the Bible each week, I am *not doing justice to any of them*. At best I can give a summary overview with some background and highlights. Hopefully these appetizers will give you a taste for each book and create a desire to pursue a deeper knowledge by reading through each of the books.

Of all the books we are not doing justice to, that is especially true of Ezekiel and it will be true again when we get to last book of the Bible, Revelation. It is almost impossible to do justice to this book in this short of space. It is filled with obscure and strange visions. Like the apostle John exiled on the island of Patmos, so Ezekiel is exiled by the river Chebar in Babylon and is given extraordinary visions of God and the future. Ezekiel has been called the Revelation of the OT.

Where is your happy place? Where is your perfect place? A place you love to visit?

Where on earth would you describe as your paradise? You all know Phama and I are pretty partial to Catalina Island off the coast of LA. But if our son and family move off the island we might not go back. Paradise would change because of relationships.

Now there is a concept. Is paradise defined by geography or relationships?

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet, as were Jeremiah and Zechariah. Ezekiel's priestly background shines through in his prophetic ministry as

he focused on topics such as the temple, the priesthood, the glory of the Lord, and the sacrificial system.

He was 25 years old when he was carried into captivity and 30 when God called him to be a prophet. He was married but God took his wife in death during the time in exile.

Ezekiel lived among the Jewish exiles in Babylon at a settlement along the river Chebar called Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15). The invading Babylonians brought about ten thousand Jews to the village in 597 BC, including Ezekiel and the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8–14). He prophesied there for 22 years.

When the northern kingdom of Israel was carried off and scattered by Assyria, no prophet lived in midst of the exiles scattered out in the Assyrian empire. No prophet declared the Word of the Lord among them.

Ezekiel and Daniel were unique among the prophets in that they prophesied outside of Israel in the land of the exiles, in Babylon.

Another uniqueness appears regarding a nation's gods. When a nation was defeated and the people perished, so did their gods perish with them. When the Assyrians were defeated by the Babylonians the Assyrian gods disappeared. Later when the Persians conquered the Babylonians their gods vanished from history. There were no people to worship them.

Not so with Israel and Israel's God. The prophetic messages of the prophets kept the people worshipping their God. Despite the judgment of God in exile, Israel was still the elect people of God through whom God's purposes for mankind would be fulfilled. There was hope.

Ezekiel and Daniel have a unique role in keeping the hope of God's remnant people alive. God was still God, God was not defeated or dead.

Book

Ezekiel received from God fantastic visions of God's glory, which climaxed in a vision of God's glory returning to the temple in Jerusalem.

There are more visions in Ezekiel than in any other Old Testament prophet except Daniel. Ezekiel is filled with all kinds of strange, weird and fantastic images and experiences. At times we see him silent for long periods, or lying bound and naked, or digging holes in the walls of houses. When his wife died, God ordered him to not mourn or show any sign of emotion. There are images of strange creatures, of creeping things, and wheels with eyes. He had a wild literary imagination.

This has led some to say he was pathological, a true psychotic, given to delusions of grandeur. Jewish rabbis said no one should read Ezekiel before the age of 30.

We can divide the book into four main sections:

Chapters 1-24, prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem.

Chapters 25-33, prophecy against the surrounding Gentile nations.

Chapters 34-39, prophecy of God's grace, faithfulness and restoration, a new covenant and a new heart. God's discipline is always with a goal to restore.

Chapters 40-48, prophecy of a glorious Temple and how a restored Israel will bless the entire world.

Ezekiel 1:15-21, 26-28, vision of wheels and wheels within wheels.

Ezekiel 1:15-20, 26-28 Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. 16 As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl. And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were ***a wheel within a wheel***. 17 When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. 18 And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. 19 And when the

living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. 20 Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

26 And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of *a throne was a likeness with a human appearance*. 27 And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. 28 Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

No other vision of God recorded in the OT, not even Moses' vision on Mt. Sinai, comes close to comparing to God's self-revelation of His glory as gloriously and elaborately described to Ezekiel.

We should be glad the Bible is not a picture book, with photographs. They would be too limiting, they could never capture God. You can "see" what Ezekiel dramatically visualizes.

This is why we have images, parables, God is like this and not that. Word pictures. We are given images of what God is like, and representations of God in all His glory.

The mobility of the wheels suggests God's omnipresence, the eyes His omniscience, and the elevated position His omnipotence.

The imagery is meant to convey God and His temple and His presence are mobile, not confined to one place or time. God's glory cannot be limited or restricted. He is not a local or regional or national God, He can be anywhere. He is without limitation. He can even be in Babylon. He is

over all the earth. God is universal in His sovereignty and in His saving activity.

The presence of God is highly “mobile,” which means God cannot be kept in some temple-box.

This vision happens far away from the temple and the holy land in the pagan land of their conquerors. A clear manifestation God is still alive and well and in the presence of His people.

“What is the glory of God? It is the expression, or the outshining, of His person. It is the beauty, radiance, splendor, and magnificence of God's person. When we say that Ezekiel is a revelation of the glory of God, we mean that it is an unveiling of God Himself, in unusual clarity” (Thomas Constable).

God is not like us, He is different, an entirely different being, unusual, holy, fearfully majestic and glorious beyond description. Immeasurable, incomprehensible.

God is not just the man upstairs, a friendly grandfather. Ezekiel fell down in reverence.

Message and theme.

Fundamentally the message of Ezekiel is *bipolar*, judgment and restoration. His prophecy calls God's people to repentance and gives them a future hope.

The people to whom God sends Ezekiel are exceedingly sinful, idolatrous, disobedient and rebellious, and they are completely without hope. They are totally lost and deserve nothing but judgment. But that is not all they get.

The purpose of the exile not just punishment for punishment's sake. That is not God's way with sinners. His punishment was a means to an end, to turn God's people away from their sins and back to their God. The

discipline they experienced was an evidence of God's love for them. When it was over, a glorious future lay before them.

Ezekiel saw the dirt and splattered bugs on the windshield, and he saw through the windshield to a beautiful destination. Like driving across eastern Washington toward the cascades. Lots of bugs driving through the Palouse, but a beautiful destination ahead. It's best to stop in Ellensburg to clean the windshield before heading over Snoqualmie Pass.

It is interesting Ezekiel spent his entire ministry in exile, ministering in the midst of thoroughly discouraged exiles, and of all the prophets he had the most hopeful message. His perspective is the key to anyone remaining hopeful in the midst of very discouraging circumstances—even modern readers of this book.

Ezekiel 37, Valley of Dry Bones

We are given an especially vivid vision of Israel's restoration and return to the promised land.

Ezekiel 37:5-6 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

God is the God of the living and not the dead. God breathes life and gives life. God breathes out His Spirit. God renews His covenant.

The formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 is not a fulfilment of this prophecy. There was no opening of graves, no resurrection of the body, no pouring out of the Spirit of God, no affirmation of Jesus as the Christ of the new covenant.

The transformation in Israel's fortunes is described in great detail by the prophet Ezekiel. A living heart for a dead one. Life coming upon a valley

filled with dead Israelite bones (Eze. 37:4). Son of man, can these bones live? Ah, Lord God . . . you know.

Preaching the gospel is like holding an evangelistic crusade in a graveyard. If anything is to happen, someone besides the preacher will have to accomplish it. ***Preaching the gospel is not like going into a hospital ward with the idea of persuading patients to take some medicine.*** The dry bones are dead, and the solution, the only solution, is resurrection power.

Jesus

Ezekiel has the fewest obvious messianic passages anticipating Christ. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful story of God's grace to His undeserving people. It is a compelling Old Testament witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

New temple, new covenant.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the restoration of the temple. He said tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

A further fulfillment of Ezekiel's temple vision happens when individual believers are saved and become temples filled with the Spirit.

I Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

Great, good shepherd:

Ezekiel 34 is the chapter wherein God denounces the leaders of Israel as false shepherds for their poor care of His people. Instead of caring for the sheep of Israel, they cared for themselves. By contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep and who protects them from the wolves who would destroy the flock (John 10:11-12).

New King

Jehoiachin—the last of the Davidic line of kings—had been carried away into exile. The throne, therefore, was empty. God promises through Ezekiel, however, that it will not remain so forever. One day, God will

restore his people and a new ruler will sit on David's throne. This king will not only reign for eternity but will also make atonement for his people's sins and bring them back into God's presence.

Heaven, a new temple, a new city, a new earth, a new priesthood, a new King. All eternal, all forever. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the covenants. Jesus in His life, death and resurrection is the culmination of God's redemptive plan. The story of redemption is all about the work of God in Christ redeeming His people

Implications and application.

The climax of Ezekiel is a vision of the restored temple and the glory of God coming back. Ezekiel is about a restored relationship with God and a renewal of God's promise to be present with His people.

Ezekiel 43:1-6 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. 3 And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. 4 As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, 5 the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

The Jewish people thought their paradise was in the Promised Land with their temple and their priesthood and monarchy. God took all that away and then gave them a vision of all of that restored while in Babylon of all places. Paradise is not a place, but a relationship with God.

When our faith is externalized, or put in things, it turns to idolatry. God puts relationship over externals. We must look through the dirty windshield of our lives and whatever gives us hope, and look beyond to the *Morning Star rising in the east*, to the glory of God.