

West Central Aberdeen Churches Joint Service

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[0 : 0 0] in these first few chapters of Ezekiel's book. He lived among the exiles. We learn that from the first few verses of chapter 2. The exiles who had been taken away from their homeland and taken to the land of Babylon. This was one of the lowest spiritual points as far as the nation of Israel was concerned. It was because of their abandonment of God, because of the rejection of His laws, that they were removed from their land, and it was there. The psalm was written, of course, that by the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept when they remembered Zion, remembered all the things that they had lost, remembered their waywardness, and how now they were far away from the place where God had set His name. And it's in this setting that God raises up Ezekiel, a man who lived among the exiles to bring His Word. And it's a book that has great lessons,

I feel, for us this evening. We don't live in entirely dissimilar circumstances to the ones that they lived in. We've not been evicted from our land, but the spiritual landscape that we have in front of us has altered dramatically, certainly over just the last couple of generations as far as our land is concerned. And it's almost unrecognizable to what many of our forefathers knew. And we have lost an awful lot nationally as far as a consciousness of God is concerned. And we're like exiles, in a sense, to righteousness and godliness in this land. And yet, God's message, it comes to us today as it came to Ezekiel. So it's not just for us to lament the past and where we are today. It's not just for us to wring our hands at how things are. It's for us to come to a passage like this that teaches us lessons and see what we can take from it. And there's just three brief things I'd like to leave with you as he sits among the exiles. And each of them kind of develops out of the other. From chapter one,

I'd like to say something, first of all, about how Ezekiel sees God's glory. And then from chapter two, secondly, I'd like to say something about how Ezekiel absorbs God's word.

And then finally, from chapter three, I'd like to say something about how he is to function as God's watchman. So, seeing God's glory. You know, it's no surprise, really, that this is where the book starts. Because this is what is actually going to define the entire ministry that Ezekiel has. This is the main theme in the entire book. If you were to read the whole of the book, time and again, this vision of this storm cloud and everything else that was part of that description, it comes up again and again as far as this book of Ezekiel is concerned. And everything that follows really comes out and develops from this seeing and experiencing of God's glory that Ezekiel had. Now, we might not understand all the details of this description that we have in chapter one. It's interesting that even some parts of common speech that are used today, they come out of this chapter. So, for instance, you go to verse 16, and there is this description of a wheel intersecting a wheel, and wheels within wheels.

Certainly, the complexity and the wonder of the vision of God is part of what is displayed here. Or the four faces that you see in verse number 10 that are part of the vision.

[4 : 33] Face on the one hand like a man, and yet on the other hand, a face like a lion, or like an ox, or like an eagle. Some people have suggested that that might even help us to understand the four different portrayals of the life of Christ that you have in the Gospels, each with their different emphasis. We're not going to get into all of that. But irrespective of all of these details, what is without any doubt at all is that this is a glorious vision of God that Ezekiel experiences.

And the effect that it has upon him is that he falls face down before God. Now, I think the application of this is very straightforward to all of us tonight, and it's this. If we are to bring God's Word ourselves to the exiles that we live our lives among, all of us, first of all, before anything else happens to us in life, all of us must have a personal and overwhelming experience of God's glory in our own lives. That is absolutely foundational. It's absolutely fundamental. Yes, there's a place for corporate worship like we're experiencing here tonight, and we thank God for that ability to do this together. But at its very essence, what we're being asked to respond to is something individually, from the heart, our own personal experience of coming to know God in the face of Jesus Christ. And all God's servants have always experienced this. The Apostle John starts his gospel like the eagle, you know, and he talks about how we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, the Father, full of grace and truth, as he looked again at the life and the work and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The great Apostle Paul writes and says, you know, the God who called light out of darkness has shone into our hearts to give us the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And it's for us to experience the magnificence and the wonder of God's glory in our lives before we can ever hope to affect or influence anybody else. All of us must come to that. Perhaps some have never even started on that, and that experience has never been yours. Perhaps for some of us that's grown a little bit dim, what we need to do again is recapture the wonder of what it means for the Son of

God to have loved us and to have come from heaven's glory, that we might be rescued from all our failures and folly and become a child of God. Because it's something so wonderful that it's almost too wonderful to be that God's own Son of God. And so this starts, it starts with a vision of the glory of God. And for us, that's where we have to start as well. You know, it's not just the first point that we come to, it's the foundation point that everything else is actually built on. In Hebron recently, we've been from time to time thinking about a phrase which is the explosive power of a new affection.

You know, if we have affection for Christ, and if in our hearts there is that awareness and the realization and the wonder of who Christ is and what He has done, that is the single most important thing in life, everything else will fall into place if that is right. And so that's where Ezekiel starts, as he falls in his face after seeing the glory of God. But on to our second point.

From the vision, a hand appears. And in the hand, there is a scroll. And that scroll is offered to Ezekiel.

[9 : 28] And there are words, of course, of instruction that he is being sent to the Israelites to deliver the message of God. Now, this message was to be delivered and proclaimed unchanged and undiluted.

And what we learn from chapter number two is this, verses five and verses seven, that Ezekiel's ministry was to be gauged on whether he obeyed that instruction or not.

It wasn't to be gauged on how successful he appeared to be or what the response was from the population.

In fact, twice over in these two verses, it says, whether they listen or whether they fail to listen, you deliver this message nevertheless. And Ezekiel had to stay strong and committed to what he was told to do despite opposition. And he was told to be strong.

And he was told not to be afraid of any kind of intimidation that might come his way. In fact, what we learn is this from chapter three and verse nine, that God says, I'll make your forehead like the hardest stone harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. Can I just make this application from that point? God delivers his word to us.

[11 : 12] And irrespective of whether people like to hear that or the criticism or the scorn that is heaped upon you. We all have to be strong to deliver that. God will give us help. You'll make your head hard.

Maybe some of our heads are hard anyway, you know, but God will make your head hard, give you the strength to persevere like Ezekiel was told to do. Now, that's a challenge for us because people don't always want to hear the word of God. There's an interesting part of Ezekiel's prophecy. If you'd like to turn to chapter 33, which has some bearing on this point, chapter 33 and verse 30 reads like this.

As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.

My people come to you as they usually do, and they sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. One level that must have been demoralizing for Ezekiel. You know, that's how the people just looked at him. They liked the sound of his voice. They found it appealing the way that he phrased things, but that's where it all finished.

And yet, he had to remain strong and keep delivering the word of the Lord. Now, how is he to do that?

[13 : 23] Well, what he's told to do, chapter 3, verse 1, he's told that he has to eat this scroll that is given to him. So, it's not as if the scroll is to be separate from him. It's not to carry the scroll around with him and occasionally read from it. What he is to do is he's to ingest that. He's to digest it.

He's to absorb it. It has to be assimilated into his very being, and it's just to become part of him, absolutely part of him. It's what the famous Victorian preacher C.H. Spurgeon said, that we have to so absorb ourselves in the word of God till our blood runs biblin, you know? And that's what Ezekiel was told to do, and that is still the way it works, still the way it works as we live among the exiles today. And so, we all challenge ourselves, don't we? Have we really allowed the word of God to soak into the way that we think? Have we really fed our souls upon God's book? Do we devour it?

Have we really allowed its teachings to soak into our hearts and our souls? And how serious are we actually about that, to read the word of God and to listen to it being taught? If we do that, what does it say here in verse number three? When Ezekiel ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth.

You would have thought some pieces of paper would have tasted like that. But the idea is, to quote Psalm 19, that for those who love God's law, it's sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb.

There is some special sweetness about the message of this book, that if I take that into my life, and I make it part of me, so it's not just something I do, it's part of what I am, and I live that out and demonstrate that word to people. That's what Ezekiel is teaching us here tonight. That is how we become effective. Yes, by seeing the glory of God. And secondly, by absorbing the word of God. What a challenge that is for all of us to start today, tomorrow, to increasingly absorb this book so that it directs and guides our thinking and the way that we act. If we've seen visions of God's glory, the next step is to absorb the word that he speaks to us. Now, finally, there's a very specific title and position that Ezekiel is given. We read about that in chapter 3 and at verse number 17, where he is called and designated a watchman, a watchman for the house of Israel. You'll read this again in chapter 33, if you want to see that in a fuller way.

[17 : 00] So the description really is of a man who's placed as a guard, top of the city ramparts, who scans the horizon, looks out for danger, and when he sees that, he alerts the city and tells them of the impending danger that is about to come. And that idea and that concept is carried over to Ezekiel's spiritual function among the exiles. And again, we are applying these lessons to ourselves. Watchman. Spiritual watchman.

So the word that Ezekiel receives is not a word that he's just to keep to himself. He's not just to feed on the sweetness of the honey of the word of God and enjoy that and embrace that just for his own benefit. The word of God is not just to start and end with Ezekiel, the word that comes to him.

This is a word that when he sees that and hears that, he is to give that out for the benefit of the people as their watchman. He had to transmit it to others. Now what a challenge that is to us today as well, to be spiritual watchmen. You know, that's reminded me of what the Lord Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane actually. There were the disciples in the darkness. He said, I'm going to pray just over there, a stone's cast further on. And he said, watch, watch, watch what happens here.

Watch what I'm going through. Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Be alert.

Could you not watch with me for one hour, he said? One little hour for watching with the master. Eternal years to dwell with him in light. One hour to watch. And Peter, he must have taken that experience, I think, partly when he wrote his first letter, chapter 5. He said this, be self-controlled. Be vigilant. Because your adversary, the devil, he goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And it's a challenge to all of us, every single person without exception.

[19 : 50] This is not just a title for the professional. This is not just a title for a man like Ezekiel. Every single one of us tonight, you're called to be a watchman. You're called to be a watchman firstly for your own life. To be vigilant and to be alert. Because your adversary, the devil, he just wants to tear you apart. He just wants to tear you apart and to destroy your life for God.

To destroy your witness. When the great apostle Paul called the Ephesian elders, as he was leaving them in Acts chapter 20, one of the things that he said was this, keep watch for yourselves. Keep watch for yourselves and the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you a lot of us. We need to watch for our overseers. We need to watch out for ourselves lest we fall.

We need to watch out for our families. We can't just stick our heads in the sand and pretend that everything is going to be all right. There are destructive forces all around us and we need to be watching for all of these kind of things and to be alert to what goes on as far as the internet, as far as influences at school, as far as pornography is concerned. We need to be watchful for all of that. Let me take you to a chapter further on here that makes that point. Chapter 8 actually, just to make that point as an illustration. Ezekiel is given insight into something that he had no idea was taking place. Chapter 8 verse 7.

Then he brought me to the entrance to the temple court. I looked. I saw a hole in the wall. And he said to me, Son of man, dig into the wall. So I dug into the wall and I saw a doorway there.

And he said to me, Go in and see the wicked and detestable things that they are doing here. So I went in and I looked and I saw portrayed all over the walls, all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals, all the idols of the house of Israel. In front of them stood seventy elders of the house of Israel. And Jazaniah the son of Shaphan was standing among them. And each had a censer in his hand and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising. He said, Have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel Israel are doing in the darkness? Another vision is given to Ezekiel. And in chapter 9 and at verse number 3, the Lord calls to a man who is clothed in linen, who has a writing kit at his side. And he says to this man, go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it. What a challenge that message must have brought to the people in Ezekiel's day. As we can picture that scene tonight, the man with the writing implement as he walks through the city and he puts the mark on the head of people who lament and who grieve over the detestable things that were happening. I wonder how many people ended up having the mark upon their heads. So the Lord speaks to us to be watchmen, to be aware of what is going on as far as ourselves, as far as our families, as far as our churches are concerned, so that we might stand for the truth and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 21] There is a sense, of course, of accountability in all of this, because what Ezekiel is told is if he is told to say to a wicked man, you will surely die, and he doesn't do it, then he is going to be held responsible for failing to pass on that warning to people.

Now, accountability is something that all of us, I guess, kind of shy away from to some extent. But here is the reality of what the Scriptures are saying to us tonight, that all of us will stand before God one day, and we will give account. Sometimes there will be a description of what is wood or hay or stubble, which will be burned up and will be of no consequence.

I pray that for all of us there will be something more valuable than that. The Lord expects us to be watchmen for this nation, for this city, for our neighborhood. I speak to my own heart that when he announces his word that we are expected to warn people and to express his message, just as Ezekiel was told to do in his day. You know, I often wondered whatever became of Neville Chamberlain. Churchill gets all the plaudits. Churchill was the man who alerted the nation to the danger that was coming from Germany and from German nationalism. And the other man who just has been consigned to the backdrop of history. We see him waving that little piece of paper at Munich, that piece of paper in his naivety that he thought would absolve everything. I wonder as the years passed by and everything unfolded as far as the horrors of Nazi Germany was concerned, exactly what Chamberlain felt.

He hadn't acted as a watchman. He hadn't done what he should have done. And without trying to be kind of overly dramatic, we're actually just trying to explain what this passage is saying today.

And we're all called to be watchmen. And we will be held accountable for how we carry out what we are designated to do. So, those are the lessons from these first few verses of Ezekiel. And I guess they can be summed up in this way. It's essential that I personally have an experience of the glory of God. And then I need to absorb His Word and realize that my role now for myself and my family, for the church and for my city, is that of being a watchman, and that God will hold me accountable for this.

[27 : 36] Now again, this is not a description for the few. This is not for people who are a bit unusual, who are slightly strange, who are just extremists as part of the Christian families concerned.

This is to be the normal Christian life for all of us, all of us who live our lives among the exiles today. Shall God bless His Word to us? And now, let's pray.

Lord, thank you for this evening that we've enjoyed together in each other's company, but more importantly, realizing that the living God is among us. Thank you for your Word which has been brought to our attention. And we pray that the Holy Spirit will be our teacher and take this Word and apply it to our hearts, perhaps to comfort some, perhaps to challenge some of us, and to instruct and guide us.

And we ask that our hearts will be open to receive the living Word of God. We ask a blessing upon us as we part. May we go in your fear and with a sense of your love and goodness upon us. Help us not just to be those who hear the Word, but do it and put it into practice as we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's take the time to sing our closing hymn, In Christ Alone My Hope is Found. And within these verses, we find the affirmation, the commitment, where we say at the end of verse 1, here in the love of Christ I stand, or at the end of verse 4, here in the power of Christ I'll stand. Again, let's stand together to sing this after the introduction.

[29 : 39] In Christ Alone My Hope is Found. He is my heart, my strength, my song, This far-er stone, this solid ground, Furned through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace, When fears are stilled and strivings ceased, By comfort, I turn, by all in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand.

The Lord, who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless pain, The spirit of love and righteousness, Scorned by the ones He came to save, Till on that cross has Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied, For every sin on Him was laid, Here in the death of Christ I lay.

There in the ground His body laid, Light of the world by darkness slain, Light of the world by darkness slain Whombers him forth in glorious fame Up from the grave he rose again And as he stands in victory Sin's curse has lost his grip on thee For I am his and he is mine Taught with the precious blood of Christ No will to life, no fear in death

This is the power of Christ From life's first time to final bread Jesus commands my destiny Your power of hell, no scheme of man Thou never come before his hand Till he returns or calls me home Here in the power of Christ the Son Now to him who is able to help you from stumbling You blame me for the presence of his glory To the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ Be glory, man, and authority before all time and now and forever Please be seated

[33 : 29] And if you'll bear with me for a few minutes Thank you, holer for the truth Now, one day now into the humble Detect deusailer Is more than unto youší In Bitcoin Athlete to the money In Bitcoin Pro■■ Ten In Bitcoin In Bitcoin In Bitcoin Arrogated