

The Vindication of Holy Glory: Introduction

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 01] We're going to turn now to our Bibles, and we're beginning a new series in the book of Ezekiel. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor Bibles, so do please, they're just at the sides here at the back, do please grab a Bible if you need that.

And we have two readings this morning, one is from Ezekiel, so if you find that, put your finger there, because we'll be coming back to that in a wee moment.

So do find Ezekiel, comes just before Daniel, you'll find it roughly in the middle of your Bible. And once you've found Ezekiel, turn back and find your way to 2 Kings.

So it's about a third of the way through your Bibles, you'll find books of Samuel, and then Kings, and then Chronicles. So find 2 Kings. I'm going to read a few verses there before we turn to Ezekiel.

So 2 Kings, chapter 23, and reading from verse 36. And this will help us give us a bit of the context, the historical context, for where Ezekiel is.

[1 : 17] Ezekiel is a prophet living in Jerusalem. And he's living in the times of real chaos as the Babylonians come to invade, and we're reading about these days.

So 2 Kings, chapter 23 and verse 36. Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Zebedah, the daughter of Podiah of Ruma. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.

In his days, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him.

And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken by his servants, the prophets.

[2 : 38] Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed.

For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not pardon. Now the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?

So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates.

Well, let's turn now to Ezekiel, and we'll read the first three verses of chapter 1. Ezekiel 1, verse 1.

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Kebar Canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

[4 : 0 6] On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Kebar Canal, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

Amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. Well, perhaps you'd turn with me to the beginning of the book of Ezekiel, and we're introducing this new series today.

You should all have on your seats a little handout, which gives you an introduction and a bit of an overview. You can tuck that in your Bible and refer to it over the coming weeks as we study it together.

Ezekiel is one of the major prophetic books of the Bible, but perhaps it's rather neglected due to its length, its mystifying visions, its rather lurid language, and, well, the relentless doom and gloom for about two-thirds of its length.

People don't want doom and gloom preaching, do they? Well, don't blame the preachers, blame the author. A lot of the Bible has these things. It certainly didn't stop Ezekiel, much as his hearers did not like at all what he was saying, because his message was about the most important thing in this whole world, and that is the glory of the living God and the vindication of God's glory in the eyes of the whole world, because God's glory, God's name, has been besmirched and blasphemed in this world by the relentless rebelliousness of the sinful hearts of human beings, and above all, of course, by the terrible sin of God's own people, the people called to bear his holy name, to show his holy glory to the world.

[6 : 0 9] And so, as a result, the world thinks that God has no power, or that God is not good, that he's neither glorious nor holy. But the God who made the world and rules the world and loves the world says, I will set my glory among the nations.

I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations, and then they will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 38 and 39, and all through, in fact. That is the great refrain of this book. God's glory will be revealed to all nations. But there's both horror and hope in that promise.

Because God's glory, his holy glory, can be revealed and totally vindicated in the eyes of the world only through both the reality of his people's judgment and in the restoration of their hope.

So it's a long book, perhaps a very unfamiliar book. And before we start digging into the detail next week, today I want to take a bird's eye view, really, to look at the big picture of Ezekiel's world, Ezekiel's work, and a little bit about Ezekiel's words.

[7 : 3 0] First of all, then, Ezekiel's words, the time, world, the times for God's people that we're dealing with. First verse of chapter 1 sees us on the 31st of July, 593 BC.

It's about 2,600 years ago. And yet, actually, how little the world has changed. Then, as now, it was a world of small nations caught up in the power struggles of great empires and their wars of conquest, their thirst for commodities.

I suppose in our more recent history, it's been countries like Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, and others, where eastern powers and western empires have clashed.

Today, of course, Ukraine is the hapless pawn in the middle of a struggle, a struggle of fading empires, east and west, trying to retrain their grip on power.

In the 6th century BC, it was the Assyrian Empire that had been the once mighty power, and its power was waning. And Egypt, on the one hand, and Babylon, on the other, were trying to carve up the territory and get the gains and the impetus.

[8 : 4 0] So there were fateful days in geopolitics, like the days, I suppose, after World War II, when at Yalta, the Allied powers, carved up most of Europe.

And as a result, I suppose, plunged the world out of a hot war into a cold war for about another 50 years. And here, you have little Israel and Judah caught in the midst, right in the middle of what we call the Fertile Crescent.

That is the habitable land around the Arabian Desert. I think we'll put a little map up if we can in a second. What you have there in the northeast is the fertile rivers of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and that watered the lands of Babylonia and Assyria.

And then right down in the southwest, you have the river Nile, which gave fertility to Egypt and gave life and power there. That's the land of civilization. And Israel, of course, sits right in the middle between all of these.

So Ezekiel's world is the real world. Make no mistake, this is about real earthly history. But this history, and indeed all earthly reality, is just part of a much bigger story.

[9 : 58] And that's the story of heavenly rule. The story of God's kingdom and God's people unfolding inexorably towards its consummation.

Verses 1 and 2 here of Ezekiel chapter 1 is where the story of the book of Kings comes to its end. The fading glory that Phil was speaking about last week is now utterly finished.

And the promised exile has begun. And it's Ezekiel's 30th year of life, verse 1. And it's the 5th year of exile of King Jehoiachin that we read about in 2 Kings chapter 24.

And so Ezekiel, a man of God, a man of faith, finds himself away from Jerusalem and God's temple and by the Babylonian Chibar Canal. Now, a hundred years before this, the northern kingdom of Israel had been utterly overwhelmed by the Assyrian Empire.

It ceased to exist. But in the south, Judah stumbled on. And there were some signs of hope, some good kings, like Hezekiah and like Josiah.

[11 : 02] But after Josiah was killed in battle by the Egyptians in 608 BC, a puppet king was set up under Egypt's control. He was called Jehoiakim.

But just a few years later, the rising power of Babylon crushed Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar hauled off some of the nobility of the Israelites at that time to Babylon.

That's what you read of in Daniel chapter 1. And a few years later, Jehoiakim and Israel in Judah rather rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar came against him to siege Jerusalem.

And he took away that time as captive the king and all the leading citizens of the nation in 597 BC. And that included Ezekiel, which is why he's now in Babylon.

By the time Nebuchadnezzar had arrived in Jerusalem, the king had died and it was his son Jehoiachin who was the one that was carried off to Babylon. And it's his exile mentioned here.

[12 : 05] And in his place, a puppet king was put in in Judah. It was his uncle who was called Zedekiah. So the book begins for us five years into this time of this first exile.

It was a terrible time. But there was still in Jerusalem a king on David's throne. There was still a temple there. There was still a rump of the people left in Judah.

And there was a hope that they would return. Soon the exile would end. Things can only get better was the message of the leaders both in Jerusalem and indeed among the exiles in Babylon.

But I'm afraid that song rang as hollow in 593 B.C. as it did in 1997 A.D. for those who can remember. Back in Jerusalem under Zedekiah there was a growing anti-Babylonian independence party itching to rebel.

And God's prophet Jeremiah said to them, no, you're wrong. God has done this to you to chastise you. You're going to have to serve the king of Babylon if you want to live. And my goodness they hated him for saying that.

[13 : 16] And in Babylon God's message through Ezekiel was going to be the same for the people already in exile. Things can get worse and things will get worse.

Don't listen to the establishment prophets. It's all propaganda. It's all lies as establishment messages always are. Jerusalem and the temple are going to be destroyed utterly and unthinkable as it is to you it is God himself who is doing this to you.

And it happened. In 587 B.C. when Zedekiah did rebel this time Nebuchadnezzar showed no mercy at all. He besieged the city. He destroyed everything including the temple and he massacred the whole army which ultimately fled utterly in starvation after months of years of siege.

And the hinge point of this whole book comes in chapter 33 verse 21 when the news of that appalling reality reaches the exiles in Babylon. Five years after the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry here in chapter 1.

And his ministry as Chris Wright says was five agonizingly tough years among people who could not believe that this unthinkable event would ever happen. And very likely at one time Ezekiel himself would never have believed such a thing could happen.

[14 : 39] He was born 30 years earlier 622 B.C. the very year that King Josiah discovered the book of the law in the temple and began a great reform of Israel's faith a great awakening.

But then he lived through his early adult life seeing that all being exposed as actually being nothing more than sham. And no doubt he heard the prophet Jeremiah's dire warnings.

And he likely saw the terrible hatred and the vitriol towards Jeremiah and now he is being called to echo that same unpopular message and likely to reap very similar rewards.

Who would believe it? God himself was about to desecrate and destroy his own city and exile the faith and expunge from the land of the book all traces of the influence that had shaped the whole culture of that nation for centuries.

Who would believe it? I wonder who would believe Ezekiel today if he came to us. Christians already marginalized already being shut out of a culture that was once shaped by the scriptures.

[15 : 58] And people surrounded on all sides by rising empires vying for dominance whether on the one hand it's the rise of militant Islam in the world or on the other the onslaught of the warriors of the cultural Marxism that's sweeping the West.

If Ezekiel came with a message very different to that of mainstream preachers oh revival's coming God's about to do great and wonderful things in our land if he came and said no worse is coming terrible times are coming look around you can see the tide of history turning against the church in your land we don't want that to be true do we?

It's the last thing we want to be true but what if it is true? Didn't Jesus himself promise wars rumors of wars and kingdom rising against kingdom in the midst tribulation hatred for God's people so that even many will fall away said Jesus pray to the propaganda of the false prophets the people who say no no doom and gloom preaching everything will be well give us something positive but no said Jesus you will need endurance to endure in faith to the end because history is real and God's people cannot escape the reality of history either in those former days of Ezekiel or in the latter days as Jesus said but nor can God's people or any people for that matter escape the rule of heaven look at these first three verses here and just see how all these dates and place names and so on they're inextricably linked they're inseparable aren't they from a far greater reality revealed when verse one the heavens are opened the vision of God the word of God verse three and the hand of God you see if you want to understand earth's real history you can't do so without a revelation from heaven it's the rule of heaven alone that can explain this world and its story to the world and to the church well how does that happen well only through revelation from heaven into human history only if the heavens open and the word of God and the word of the

Lord of heaven is heard on earth mediated by his messengers by the man of God who speaks the word of God Moses remember was called the man of God he spoke God's words but he promised didn't he there would be many many successors and all the prophets of the Old Testament were called that the man of God and it meant they spoke not from themselves but as Peter says they were carried along by the spirit of God and that's why Paul calls Timothy in the New Testament and pastors like him man of God because all true teachers in the church today likewise they can't speak their own words they're just messengers if the hand of God is upon someone well they must speak only the true words of the true God otherwise they have no right to speak at all so secondly let's give some thought then to Ezekiel's work to the training and to the task he had as God's messenger who was he what kind of man was Ezekiel well his name

Hazekiel means may God strengthen him and indeed God did use his personality and his profession and God's providential ordering of history around him to perfectly fit him for this task and the ministry he was called to and actually that is always so no matter how different God's servants are I think about Peter the illiterate but the bold and manly fisherman very very different wasn't he from Saul of Tarsus the educated scholar who later became so crucial to systematically teaching the theology of the gospel to the church and writing it in his writings rather like how John Calvin followed the pioneering whirlwind of Martin Luther in the Reformation with his brilliant mind his forensic mind that so solidified the principles of the Reformation well so it is with all God's servants and God used Ezekiel's profession we're told he came from an important priestly family that's why he was included among the exiles of the elites that were taken to Babylon early on and his priestly training certainly fitted him for teaching the law of God as well as for knowing all about the temple sacrifices so he had a great understanding of Israel's history and I've had that related to the whole world around about him he was deeply steeped in the knowledge of God's outlook on sin and unholiness and on the need for repentance and atonement and all the symbolism of blood and of sacrifice that went with it and his priestly background actually comes out repeatedly in his language in particular in the vivid contrasts he gives between the filth and the horror of sin and the purity and the holiness of God so Ezekiel was an establishment man by his background but God called him right out of that establishment to become utterly anti-establishment speaking against all the state sanctioned prophets and all the priesthood of his day

[21 : 33] Ezekiel's videos wouldn't have lasted very long on YouTube or his tweets on Twitter he'd be shadow banned then very quickly he'd be totally banned he'd be hated by the establishment politicians and preachers by all people who want to be just people pleasers but God used Ezekiel's profession but he would not allow his profession to use him secondly God used his personality his ministry was full of vivid drama and acting and street theater and poetry and allegory sometimes very bizarre I mean I know many Christians who would immediately decry him today as a charlatan if he turned up to confront them but God won't be squeezed into our tight little boxes and God used Ezekiel's makeup to the full I suppose today we would say he was a kind of right brain dominated person but at any rate God did not quash his creativity he commended it as God commended his language which is some of the most shocking and vulgar language you'll find anywhere in the Bible it's very striking indeed because in chapter 3 verse 26

God says that I will shut your mouth Ezekiel I make you mute you will not be able to speak unless I open your mouth and I give you the exact words that you should use and that tells us that the shocking language he uses for example in chapter 16 and chapter 23 is God's deliberate choice of words to excoriate his people to show his absolute disgust for them so remember that when you read verses like chapter 3 verse 20 and others but God also used his providence to shape Ezekiel growing up as he did under Josiah's revival of godliness and then its wane and then Jeremiah's powerful ministry which he almost certainly heard and almost certainly observed his ostracism and his suffering and that must have affected him I'm sure that explains Ezekiel's reaction to this vision and call that God gives him in chapter 1 to 3 because at the end in chapter 3 verse 15 we're told he sat overwhelmed for seven days after it because he realized he was being called to follow in

Jeremiah's path so I think we could add a fourth factor that God used also Ezekiel's pain he was exiled too he shared in the pain of his people in order to minister to them but far more than that look at verse 3 of chapter 1 the hand of the Lord was upon him God laid upon him this great burden of ministry to be God's man for this hour Chris Wright again puts it poignantly God broke into his life wrecked all such career prospects and constrained him to a role he himself may have viewed with considerable suspicion the lonely friendless unpopular role of being a prophet and mouthpiece of Yahweh God would use all that he built into Ezekiel's life during his years of preparation but he would use it in radically different ways from anything Ezekiel ever imagined and such is sometimes the way of God with those whom he calls to his service that may be a word to remember for some here especially if you entertain romantic notions about how God might want to use you and how you might be planning your life of service for the Lord sometimes he surprises so what was this task of ministry then that Ezekiel was called to well the rest of our time today let's try and get a handle on Ezekiel's words on the testimony of God's watchman the message that Ezekiel is to proclaim is of the certainty of the vindication of the glory of the God of heaven in the eyes of all the earth

I will set my glory among the nations and the nations shall see my justice chapter 39 verse 21 God is not unjust God is not powerless to judge evil and the world will see that his glory is a holy glory in the latter days when I vindicate my holiness before their eyes says the Lord so I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations and they will know that I am the Lord chapter 38 verse 33 and that's what God is doing all through history in the face of human sin and evil and especially in the face of his chosen people's rebellion as he displays to the world his impartial justice by chastising them in the view of everyone to show the world his true goodness and justice to show them his glory but also extraordinarily to display his profound mercy to his people the people of his own name but who have profaned his name among the nations yet he will bring them back and cleanse them and renew their hearts and vindicate his name showing not only judgment but great mercy

I have rebuilt the ruined places I have replanted what was desolate and then the notions left around you will know that I am the Lord I have spoken I will do it he says at the end of chapter 36 after such a calamity that they could not imagine has happened there is a message of hope and Israel's restoration to their land will bear testimony to the world that God is not defeated but Ezekiel's message especially in the later chapters they make clear that he foresees far more than just a historical vindication of the glory of God and the sight of the world his vision lays out the ultimate future the fulfillment of all God's promises right from the beginning of history for all the nations of the world that at last somehow through Israel's story coming to its climax in the latter days the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the whole earth and his temple will bring nourishment and joy to all the nations all who are gathered to share in an inheritance among the tribes of Israel his people and all will dwell in peace together with him the very last line of the book says it will be a place called the Lord is there you see

[28 : 34] Ezekiel's message is not just past history it's about future glory and that means it's as relevant for the church today and the world today as it was for Israel and the world in Ezekiel's day we can maybe summarize the message about the glory of God under three headings and that's on the bottom half of your handout there first of all and this is what dominates the first three chapters of the book is God's glory revealed the reality of God's glory is proclaimed to Ezekiel so that he can bear witness to others now we'll come back to that next time but the heart of the great vision that constitutes Ezekiel's call reveals staggering truths to him about the real nature of God's sovereign greatness God's glory is unrestricted he sees that it can't be controlled by any nation or any single people chapter 1 as we'll see next time it has a great vision of God's throne and the throne has wheels wheels within wheels in other words it can move anywhere unrestricted uncontrolled by anyone else and the most staggering thing really about these early chapters is that what we have here is the most glorious vision of the glory of God in the whole Old Testament and where does it happen?

Outside outside the Holy Land yes God had chosen Israel to be his people of witness to the world to be his lights to the world but he is not dependent on man he's not restricted by human failure far less is he controlled by human pride and possessiveness he will move where he wills he will make his glory known and actually that should be a great comfort to us shouldn't it as a church that God is not restricted by his church's failures and of course there's a real warning as well isn't it because no one is indispensable to God's cause either he will move on with or without his church and that's the second thing you see his glory Ezekiel sees is universal it can't be contained in any one place verse 3 God is there in the heart of Babylon towering above even the earthly power and empire of the day God is truly transcendent he is sovereign over all the earth and it took the exile actually to really drive that reality home to Israel that their land was not the only place the only sphere of God's interest and his care

I sometimes wonder whether for us western Christians today so shaped by our centuries and centuries of Christian culture I sometimes wonder if it will take a catastrophic calamity for us to realize that God is not dependent on our western culture our western world that he can easily abandon it without any loss to his kingdom plans and his purposes without any loss to his mission to the world but third notice that for Ezekiel he also finds that God's glory is very personal verse 3 the Lord the hand of the Lord was upon him God's glory can't be controlled it can't be contained but it must be confronted by every single human being and God reveals his glory to Ezekiel personally so that he can witness to others and his testimony is to be that of a watchman who sees what's coming and who wakes up everyone else with words of rousing warning

Ezekiel's called to be a watchman who warns about the coming judgment of God but also who woos God's people with words of saving hope in chapter 3 as we'll see before all these oracles of judgment God says in verse 16 I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel to give warning from me but then again in chapter 33 after all that judgment and before the comforting words of hope and of restoration again he reminds Ezekiel you're my watchman to say to the people why will you die turn and you will surely live God's glory is revealed to his watchman but the watchman's first word is a grim one because the whole of verses of chapter 4 to chapter 24 the message is all about God's glory being removed the removal of God's glory is pronounced by Ezekiel to warn God's people to take him seriously to respect him and to repent deeply what's his message well it's very simple total destruction is coming complete exile is coming chapter 7 verse 5 disaster after disaster behold it's coming the end has come

I will pour out my wrath on you your doom has come and on and on he proclaims the exact certainty of it and also the necessity of it because God's glory is holy and his people have so profaned it and from the very beginning of time the story of the human heart of sin has been to exchange the glory of God for idolatry worship of the creator for worship of the creation as Paul says in Romans chapter 1 and here what Ezekiel sees you see is that that is rampant right at the very heart of God's church we'll see later in chapter 8 how God shows him abomination after abomination right in the heart of God's temple with the priests and the leaders bowing down to the sun god and turning their backs on the temple of God well we might not be that far away from that today might we because very often what we find in professing

[34 : 47] Christian churches today is far more concerned with the earth goddess being at the heart of worship than with the God of heaven who created the earth but defiling sin against God always always issues in defiling sin against man defiance of God remember in Genesis chapter 3 laid straight on doesn't it to destruction of man in Genesis 4 with Abel's murder and so it was in Ezekiel's day he exposes terrible moral filth in the nation the nadir of which was Israel's wholehearted embrace of pagan child sacrifices you read of that in chapter 20 and again that should surely be a troubling thing shouldn't it for our abortion filled culture and increasingly a euthanasia culture especially when the Christian church so often doesn't seem that concerned about these things God's covenant people were set apart to be a light to the nations to be a city on a hill showing forth the righteousness of God in a sense

Israel's story is just mankind's story in microcosm but it's worse you see because they were granted the direct revelation of God that others didn't have they were given the oracles of God and yet Ezekiel has to say to them from God you have become worse than all the other nations around you you've become worse than the worst of the nations worse than Sodom and so proclaims Ezekiel God will depart from the people of his name and the land of the book though you presume that that will never happen and you know if we doubt that something like that could ever happen to us today well we have to just go back and read the New Testament don't we read Revelation 2 and 3 as we've been doing Paul says to us that these scriptures of the Old Testament were written as warnings for the Christian church in these last days so that we will not fall in the same way as they did and by extension

I think also surely it must be a warning to the so-called Christian West which far from being a city on a hill as some like to claim is far often is so often far far worse than all the other nations in corruption and in violence and in warmongering and in greed and in the exploitation of life Ezekiel's message wasn't wanted then but it was needed judgment is real he said it's coming God's glory will be removed from where it is being profaned and polluted it must be because God is just and that's the message of these early chapters and it will begin says the Lord in chapter 9 verse 6 at my sanctuary Peter quotes that verse doesn't he in 1 Peter 4 judgment begins at the house of

God a very chilling thought isn't it God is saying that he will judge the whole nation by first dismantling and eviscerating the church it will bring a famine of the word of truth and the result will be that the whole culture will sink into falsehood and lies and into the immorality and into the corruption that always follows the death of truth and the death of righteousness that's a very chilling thought and yes says God's watchman judgment is real it's necessary it's essential and it is coming worse than you can ever imagine and it does come and as I said chapter 33 verse 32 comes with the news Jerusalem has been struck down and God says I have made the land a desolation because of their abominations I've done it because of your abominable wickedness but and only after that reality of God's judgment has sunk in can God give this message to a humble people but he says judgment is real but it is restrained it's not forever and the prophet had hinted about this in words of hope amidst his oracle of judgment you see it in chapter 11 when

God says he himself has nevertheless been a sanctuary for them in their exile and he would gather them again after judgment but after chapter 36 onwards his message is one of growing hope of a new exodus a new beginning ultimately and something that he describes in terms of the recreation of the whole earth the land that was desolate will become like the garden of Eden he says and his gathered people will have their stony hearts utterly changed and cleansed and renewed by the spirit of God himself and so from chapter 33 to the end of the book Ezekiel's third great movement shows us God's glory restored the return of God's glory is promised by Ezekiel to give God's people hope real hope that God will be vindicated as both the righteous judge and as a merciful savior why will God do this for such a sinful people well he says in chapter 36 verse 22 not for your sake the house of Israel but for the sake of my holy name and the nations will know that I am the

[40 : 44] Lord when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes you see the apostle Paul confirms doesn't he in Romans chapter 3 that God's ultimate concern is to show forth his righteousness that he is fully just in judging sin which in the death of his own son on the cross he did once and forever to propitiate his own role in his own person in our place and he did it so that he may be seen to be just but also the justifier of the one who trusts in Jesus he does what he does for the sake of his great name and for his great mercy I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked why will you die turn back and live he says again and again through Ezekiel and so God's glory will be displayed in the world in redeeming righteousness making all things right but not without righteous retribution on all things that are wrong chapters 33 to 48 paint a wonderful picture of the restoration of his true people through repentance and renewal of heart but chapters 25 to 32 which are delivered to all of the nations during the siege of

Jerusalem remind them that they must also take note if Peter says if judgment begins at the household of God what will become to the rest of mankind who do not obey the gospel of God all will surely perish who don't turn and live is the message but I have no pleasure in the death of anyone says the Lord turn and live Ezekiel's words you see about the restoration of God's glory worldwide through his ultimate judgment and salvation that's what the whole climax of the book is about and that will come he says when well when God's ultimate ruler replaces all the corrupt shepherds the kings of his people I myself will shepherd my people as a king declares the Lord and he will usher in ultimate rest and righteousness I'll put my spirit in you and you'll be my people and I will be your God well how can that be and when can that be well in chapter 37 he says when I raise you up from my graves oh my people and put my spirit in you and you shall live and then you will know that I am the

Lord and then he will regather his people he says from all over the world under one king in a holy recreated world and that's the picture that's brought into elaborate focus in the final chapters of the book God at last permanently present among his people in his perfect temple and God's provision for his whole land and the dimensions of that land now vastly exceed the earthly Jerusalem then will the nations know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel when my sanctuary is in the midst forevermore and that place will be called the Lord is there last words of the book you see Ezekiel's words are gospel words aren't they he's speaking of the ultimate vindication of the glory of God revealed through both his judgment on sin but also in his glorious mercy to sinners who turn to him and find that life that's why the very end of the Bible the book of

Revelation that we've been looking at with Paul is full of the same imagery as Ezekiel much of it's lifted from there because it's the same message it's the same climax a glorious renewed city filled with a glorious renewed humanity and in both of those visions Ezekiel and Revelations the scope is vast the city dimensions vastly exceed any resemblance to physical Jerusalem or earthly Israel he's speaking here about the true Jerusalem the real eternal city the one that Abraham longed for from the beginning whose architect and builder is God so friends why is studying this ancient prophecy of any relevance to us today in the 21st century well because there's only ever been one gospel the gospel of the glory of God being made known to all the rebellious sinful world that we live in a gospel that promises God's just judgment on sin and on evil but also promises his saving mercy for those who'll heed his warning who'll turn and live and God called

Ezekiel a priest to be a prophet to be a watchman to whom he revealed his glory and how that glory would be vindicated and how his holy name would be restored and brought to honor in this world and that privileged revelation to Ezekiel laid a great burden on him that he couldn't avoid he had to be the mouthpiece of God to a presumptuous church to an ignorant world you might say well what's that got to do with me I'm not a priest I'm not a prophet I've never had a vision like he had or a commissioning like he had but friends if you're a Christian believer today that's not really so is it because every one of us today has had a greater vision of the glory of God than Ezekiel ever had because we live in these last days where not only was heaven open to give us a glimpse of the glory of God but the glory of heaven himself came down to this earth in the person of God the Son we says John have known his glory full of grace and truth he has made the father fully known and we've also all received a great commission haven't we we're all now priests and prophets of God we're all called to make him known we're all called to be watchmen for the world to wake people up to a reality which is now utterly clear utterly certain but as Paul says God has now fixed a day on which he will judge the whole world in righteousness to vindicate his holy name and he will judge it says

[47 : 18] Paul by the man Christ Jesus whom he has raised from the dead that is the apostolic gospel of the New Testament it's Ezekiel's gospel it's our gospel Jesus the judge shall come and Peter says he commanded us apostles and also all of us who hold to the apostolic faith once delivered to the saints he called us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead the Christian gospel is a real word of warning to the world to every human being but like Ezekiel's message it's also a word of hope Peter goes on doesn't he to Jesus all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name the name that's been profaned among the nations but restored to the highest honor in earth and heaven as he through his own death and resurrection brought restoration to his people and is bringing renewal to all things but you see to really understand the wonder of that hope to really understand that gospel that causes us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God we need to understand don't we what the removal of God's glory for our lives really means we need to come to terms with just how terrible in God's sight how human sin really is that causes

God to so turn his back upon it and such drastic judgment is required and that's what so many of these harrowing chapters in Ezekiel do for us and do to us because they hold up God's mirror to us and they force us to deal with the real truth about ourselves and about our world and about the church and it's very uncomfortable it's very painful but they also teach us don't they to know deeply about the sheer grace of God the sheer mercy of God who despite all the relentless darkness all the relentless deviance of our hearts a God who still says again and again with unfailing monotony despite it all you shall be my people and I will be your God I have spoken and I will do it so friends let's pray that as we as we study these words through Ezekiel he'll grant us as Paul says all scripture is given for grant us wisdom to salvation through faith in Christ

Jesus and also to equip us as messengers of God for all the work that he's given us in our day for the vindication of the glory of God and the vindication of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world well let's pray together as we close blessed Lord who has caused all scripture to be written for our learning grant that we may in such wise hear them read mark learn and inwardly digest them that by patience and comfort of thy holy word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which thou has given us in our savior Jesus Christ Amen