

The Unseen Weight of Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Last week we had an overview of Ezekiel and this morning we're going to be getting into the detail of Ezekiel's message. Willie Philip, our senior minister, will be preaching to us this morning from Ezekiel chapter 1 and so we're going to read the whole of that chapter together.

If you don't have a Bible, there are red visitor's Bibles spread around the auditorium. Do grab one and follow along as we read. So Ezekiel chapter 1 beginning at verse 1.

In the 30th year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar Canal, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 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 Chebar Canal and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north and a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually and in the midst of the fire, as it were, gleaming metal. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures and this was their appearance. They had a human likeness, but each had four faces and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides, they had human hands and the four had their faces and their wings thus. Their wings touched one another.

Each one of them went straight forward without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward. Wherever the spirit would go, they went without turning as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures. And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning. 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. 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.

[3 : 3 0] When they went, they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them. And when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. 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. When those went, these went. And when those stood, these stood. And when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them. For the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. Over the heads of the living creatures, there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse, their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings, like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult, like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings.

And there came a voice from above the expanse, over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse, over their heads, 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. 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.

Like the appearance of the bow that is in the clouds 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.

Amen. This is God's Word.

[6 : 02] Amen. Well, do turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 1, and the passage that we read together there with Josh.

And if you need a Bible, there's some at the sides and at the front, and you're welcome to grab one and follow along. Now, 593 BC was a time of great uncertainty, globally and nationally, for Judah.

The people of God. His leading citizens had been exiled into Babylon. The remnant of those who were left behind in the land were under subjection. And as we read in Psalm 137, for example, the exiles wept by the rivers of Babylon.

Laments being far from home. And Ezekiel, by the Chebar Canal here, was a witness to that empire's great technology and its fertility and its power, which seemed to have rendered Israel's God, by contrast, quite impotent.

And it was, for God's people, a very painful time in history. For Ezekiel, it was a personal time of heartbreak. At the age of 30, he should have been just starting out in his temple service as a priest.

[7 : 23] But instead, here he was, far away in a strange land. And the darkness was very real. The pain and the fragility of God's people was real. And indeed, the judgment of God upon them was real.

It was visible. But what was also real was that all of this was enveloped by the far greater and yet unseen reality of the majestic goal and the glory of the true and living God.

And right here at the very beginning of Ezekiel's ministry, God lifts that veil to show that glorious bigger picture, an unseen but an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as Paul the Apostle later put it.

As he likewise reminds us, doesn't he, that amid our troubled world, amid our fragile lives, the things that are seen are transient. But it's the things that are unseen that are eternal.

That's so important for us to remember. Look around at our world in 2023. And what we see so often would make us despair. Certainly in our part of the world, increasing mess of corruption and politics and science and finance, society at large.

- [8 : 50] In our post-Christian Western world, so much seems to be crumbling. And perhaps indeed, God is giving us up to the lies that we've substituted for the truth.
- Perhaps that is indeed his judgment unfolding. And if so, we are fools, aren't we, to think that our leaders are the answer, that a new government or new leaders are solution, whether it's local or global.
- It's quite the opposite. Put not your trust in princes in whom there is no salvation, says the psalmist. But, blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth and everything in them, who keeps faith forever.
- And that is precisely what Ezekiel is reminded of here in Ezekiel chapter 1. That's why we have it in our Bibles. And that's why we have all our Bible, to give us that same revelation, to lift back the veil of the unseen glory and the unwavering goal of the God of heaven.
- Not just apocalyptic visions like Ezekiel's or like Daniel's or in the book of Revelation that give us that. No, it's the whole Bible that has a holy supernatural message.
- [10 : 07] Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, didn't he? Very prosaic, plain words. He said, our battle is not against just flesh and blood, but it's against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.
- And the weapons in that battle, he says, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That's what opens our eyes to see heavenly realities.
- That there is a world above, and that there is a world to come. And the life of faith, you see, is the life that is lived with our eyes open to the unseen glory.
- It's to live like Moses did, seeing Him who is invisible. And like Abraham did, seeing the coming glory of the eternal city of God with real foundations.
- Seeing the glory above and seeing the glory to come. And that's what this vision in Ezekiel chapter 1 opened up his eyes to see.
- [11 : 08] To see above and beyond this earthly veil to God's glorious throne and to God's gospel truth. And he has a vision here of an untold weight of glory that is above and that is surely to come.
- By the way, notice that this is not an unexplained vision. We need to be careful about unexplained visions. People can feel they have these things, and, you know, we can read into these things anything that we want to.
- And we can often get things quite wrong. But notice here in verse 3, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel in this vision. And at the end of verse 28, there's a voice speaking.
- And God says to him in chapter 2, verse 1, I will speak with you. And the purpose of that is chapter 2, verse 7, so that you will speak my words to them. So here is a revelation explained by God for God's people through Ezekiel.
- And it's been preserved by God in the Bible here for us to proclaim to us today this message of the unseen weight of the glory of God.
- [12 : 14] And all that means for world history. All it means for our personal lives. So what is this word that God gives Ezekiel to pass on? Well, it's summed up, isn't it, in verse 28 at the end.
- It's a revelation of the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Now, the details in some of the language isn't easy. It mustn't approach it too woodenly, though.
- It's not an allegory in every single detail. That's not how this kind of visionary material works. It's an impressionist painting. It gives us the appearance of the likeness of something.

It's not a stark photograph. And it's full of imagery from the world and from the culture of Babylon because it's giving a message of a God who is universally sovereign over all nations and empires.

Not just a little tribal God of Israel is the Lord. And so that's why scholars, for example, make comparisons to pictures that we have in museums, pagan pictures and statues of various ancient divine chariots and thrones and that sort of thing.

[13 : 21] Because God is just speaking in the vernacular, as it were, to the world. But of course, there are crucial distinctions, as we'll see. So we'll look at the vision in three broad brushstrokes of what it reveals.

First, about God's power. Then about God's presence. And finally, about His person. And then we'll think very briefly about the appropriate response to God's revelation to us of Himself as mortal beings, as He shows us this unseen weight of eternal glory.

So first then, Ezekiel receives a revelation of the unstoppable power of God. Verses 4-14 display the glorious majesty of God's power and purpose revealed to mortal man.

Notice, by the way, in chapter 2, verse 1, Son of Man, the footnote says Son of Adam. That's how Ezekiel is addressed all through the book. O mortal, is how one translation puts it.

And flashing fire and lightning is what encloses this whole section of verses 4-14. The picture is the chariot of God amid the storm. It's like in Psalm 29 or Psalm 18 or many other places.

[14 : 40] And it's common Old Testament language for theophany. That is the appearance of God on earth. What the image here presents in these verses is a God who is utterly omnipotent.

However things may look to the untrained eye, it is His sovereign power and plan for the whole world that's being driven on inexorably by His Spirit, which controls everything in heaven and on earth.

Now there's lots of detail here, but there's three big pictures, I think, that dominate. The first is the burning fire and cloud and flashing blaze. And that is always a symbol of the presence and the glorious power of God.

Think back to Exodus chapter 3, where God appears to Moses in the burning bush. And we read God appeared as a flame of fire. Think all through the Exodus, how God went before His people in a pillar of cloud and fire, leading them but terrifying their enemies.

Ezekiel 14 verse 24 tells us how the Lord, in a pillar of cloud and fire, looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw them into a panic. And they said, let's flee for the Lord fights for them.

[15 : 56] Think of the great firestorm at Mount Sinai, when God ratified His covenant with all Israel. Think of the cloud and the fire that descended and remained on the tabernacle and was so glorious not even Moses could go in.

The message is unmistakable, isn't it? The God of Israel is not dead. He's not abandoned His covenant. He's powerful.

And He's here. Outside the promised land, He's here moving with His people, just as He moved with His people in the desert long ago.

Notice in verse 4 how this storm of fire and cloud comes out of the north, or out of Zaphon, as some versions transliterate the Hebrew. In ancient times, Zaphon, the far north, was the mountain of the assembly of the gods.

It's referred to in Isaiah 14, verse 13, for example. In Psalm 48, verse 2, which asserts emphatically that the utmost heights of Zaphon, the home of the gods, is in fact Mount Zion, the city of the great king, the God of Israel.

[17 : 08] And that's the message here, you see. Who is it who really rules? The so-called assembly of the gods in mighty Babylon. The answer is, well, the Lord, the covenant God of Israel.

He rules there and everywhere. His power and glory is universal. It's unchained by any so-called gods. The message is clear, you see.

He alone is sovereign over all creation. And that's the message of the second great impression in these verses, which is surely these four living creatures with their multiple faces and their forms.

They represent all creation, all creatures great and small. And they're represented, aren't they, in their most noble and regal form. The lion, the king of the beasts, the eagle, the lord of the air, the ox, the might of the field, and man, the ruler over all.

Now, the creatures here aren't named, are they? But Ezekiel sees them again in chapter 10. And there, they're very clearly called cherubim. Now, we've got to be very careful here, because most of us totally misunderstand what a cherub is.

[18 : 19] It is emphatically not a cute sort of flying baby with wings and panpipes like you see on Christmas decorations. A cherub, a keruv, if anything, is a fierce, terrifying guardian of God's presence.

The keruvim first appear in Genesis 3, verse 24, with a flaming sword flashing to and fro, guarding the way to the tree of life for man. These keruvim are often assumed to be angelic beings, but I'm not sure that's right, actually.

Henri Blashe points out that there's no text in Scripture that identifies them or even links them with angels. And it's interesting that when they appear, as we saw a few weeks ago in Revelation 4 and 5 around the throne in John's vision, actually they form part of the earthly choir along with the elders, not part of the heavenly choir of the angels.

You can read that in Revelation chapter 5. Patrick Fairbairn, the 19th century Scottish theologian, I think is probably right to say that these appear here, quote, not of angelic, but of human mold.

Look at verse 5. They had a human likeness. Again, verse 10. They're representing, I think, the entire human creation, including man.

[19 : 40] To quote Blashe, the keruvim represent the total power of the world at the command of the Lord God. And that really is the picture here, isn't it? Look at verse 12.

Each went straight forward. Where the Spirit would go, they went without turning. Verse 9. Each of them went straight forward without turning, carrying forward the majestic march of the power and the purpose of God and the will of God from the throne of God, utterly unhindered and unfettered.

It's a magnificent picture, isn't it? To quote Blashe again, the universe itself summed up in its most glorious figures at the disposal of the Lord and as the instrument of His power.

As John Ellerton's hymn says, God, the omnipotent, King, who ordainest, great winds thy clarions, lightnings thy sword. And that sense of purpose, you see, is very evident in the third impression in these verses and that is of activity.

We've already noted this straightforward movement, the onward march, undeviated, of the chariot of God's command, as it were. But notice also the constant, the continual activity that's displayed.

[20 : 58] In other ancient depictions, these cherubim were stationary. They held up temples and thrones and things on their wings, but that's not the case here. Look at verse 14.

They darted to and fro at the speed of lightning. Verse 13, like torches moving to and fro. Just as in verse 4, the fire was flashing forth continually.

There's nothing static here, is there? And incidentally, that moving to and fro word in verse 13 sounds almost identical in the Hebrew to the flaming sword, which was moving to and fro, turning every way, guarding the way to the tree of life.

Mithalechit here, Mithapechit in Genesis 3. And the point, you see, is clear. This God is omnipotent. His sovereign power and His purpose go straight forward, driven by His Spirit.

But His sovereign power is active everywhere at the speed of light and with the force of lightning. World history, world empires, everything in all creation cannot possibly evade the fire of His personal control.

[22 : 09] Psalm 8, if you read it, paints likewise a picture of God's fire from on high, sent down like lightning. And it brings judgment to right His enemies, but also to rescue His beleaguered people.

And so, although so much of Ezekiel's message is going to be one of pain and judgment for God on His people, for their sin and for their rebellion, nevertheless, even in this terrifying vision of the fire of God and His majestic power, there is hope.

Because it's this God, He's saying, it's the God we know who is truly omnipotent, who is the true sovereign. So, however calamitous things may seem to us at first sight here on earth, everything in the entire universe does act as the instrument of His power.

His power. So, to quote the Bible notes you may have read this week on this chapter, the world was trembling under the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar.

But God was saying, there's a bigger sovereignty than that. The real sovereignty in this world is mine. Now, friends, there is no more important reminder, is there, for us and for our world today, when we tremble at the apparent growing unstoppable powers in our world, the powers of government, the powers of big tech, the power of the media, to control our minds and to drive society.

[23 : 43] But here's a question, how can it be that God's powerful activity can be in evidence like that there in Babylon, far, far away from Jerusalem, from the temple, because surely it was the temple that God made his habitation, his dwelling place on earth?

And that was, I'm sure, a mystery to Ezekiel. His whole focus as a priest in training was upon the utter centrality of the place of the temple in Jerusalem. Well, that brings us, you see, to the second focus of the vision here, which reveals to Ezekiel a powerful message, likewise, about the universal presence of God.

Verses 15 to 21 display the glorious movement of God's presence as revealed to mortal man. And two images clearly dominate these verses, don't they?

The first is the wheels and the wheels within wheels connected to these living creatures. And the clear image being projected is one of unrestricted divine sovereignty.

Verse 17, when they went, they went in any of their four directions. directions. God's presence is unrestricted. There's no restraint. There's no control upon Him.

[24 : 59] The whole world, north and south and east and west, is equally open to Him. Verse 20, where the Spirit wanted to go, they went. And we're told repeatedly the Spirit of life, which I think is the right rendering as the footnote says, the Spirit of life itself was in the wheels.

God is omnipotent, but He's also omnipresent. His presence and therefore His power and His reign is everywhere throughout the entire created order.

And He is present and He is powerful over all nations and all kings and all earthly empires. And He still is. He still is today.

Even over the might of the American empire or the growing Chinese empire or Russia and certainly over our little island stuck up here in the North Sea.

He's omnipresent and He is omniscient. He's all-seeing. That second image in this section here is the eyes, isn't it? All around the wheels, verse 18, were eyes.

[26 : 08] And that just adds, doesn't it, to all the eyes and all the heads, the foreheads of each of those creatures. God's unrestricted sovereignty and God's unrestricted sight.

And again, that's a common image in the Scriptures. Zechariah 4, verse 10, represents the perfect number, the seven eyes of the Lord which range throughout the earth.

It comes up again in Revelation 4 and 5 where John sees the seven eyes of the Lamb, the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. It's all the same message, you see.

God is omniscient. He is all-seeing. He sees all things and therefore He knows all things. There's that wonderful verse way back in Exodus 2, verse 25, where we're told that the prayers of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt go up to God and we read, God saw the people of Israel and God knew.

And then in chapter 3, verse 7, the Lord says to Moses, I have surely seen and I have come down to deliver them. God sees and God knows and God acts in perfect knowledge and wisdom.

[27 : 29] There was not the least motion in the wheels unless arranged and governed with the utmost reason, says John Calvin. The motion that seems to us confused are yet connected because God does nothing either rashly or inconsiderately.

See, the presence of God who sees and knows everything is everywhere. So it follows, says Calvin again, that nothing happens by chance in this world, but that God by His own incomprehensible wisdom so directs all things that nothing happens except by that secret instinct which is imperceptible to us.

Again, there's such comfort in that, isn't there? In a God who sees and knows all things. Remember when we were studying Genesis, remember those words of Hagar when God found her out in the desert and she said, you are the God of seeing who sees me.

And God saw and came down to her, didn't He? The word of rebuke, yes, but also of restoration. And it's surely a great comfort to us, isn't it?

That even if no one else sees or knows, God sees, God knows what we're going through in our lives and in our struggles.

[28 : 55] Of course, it's also a challenge, isn't it? Because it means nothing can be hidden from God's sight or His knowledge. None of our actions none even of our thoughts.

That's quite sobering, isn't it? Maybe quite convicting, perhaps, to us. God is everywhere, seeing all things, knowing all things, but God is also here.

He's present in the midst. His sight and His sovereignty is unrestricted in the world and in His church. and His throne so clearly here is one of fire.

Don't forget Christ's apostle reminding us in the New Testament church, our God is a consuming fire. Come before Him with reverence and with awe. And especially so when the church is gathered.

Paul says that, doesn't he? When the power of the Lord Jesus is present, He sees our hearts. And Paul says there, if you come together with a divisive spirit, beware, because you drink judgment on yourself.

[30 : 01] The presence of God is not to be trifled with. That's a warning, isn't it, from Paul to arrogant Christians in Corinth, but it's an equal warning to all Christians today.

We need to be careful. God sees. God knows everything. And He's present everywhere and His fire is bright. And out of the fire, verse 14, went forth lightning.

There's a great paradox, though, in the apostles' words in Hebrews 12 about the consuming fire of God and about the vision that He presents there of the throne of God, the judge of all.

Because in His same letter to Hebrews, He's also talked about the throne of God and called it the throne of grace. He's called it the place where we can come with confidence to receive mercy, to receive help in our time of need.

And we might wonder how there can be any comfort in such a thing, in a throne of judgment. How can there be any comfort in the universal presence of the fire of God? How can there be comfort in this great vision that Ezekiel sees here and is made so conscious of?

[31 : 19] Well, that brings us really to the climax of the vision from verse 22 to the end where the focus is indeed upon that throne and the occupant, the unseen person of God Himself.

See, in verses 22 to 28, we see the glorious mystery of God's person as revealed to mortal man. Look at verse 22. Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse or a firmament, some versions, shining like awe-inspiring crystals spread out above their heads.

That language of the expanse spread out is lifted right out of Genesis chapter 1 when God laid out the sky, the heavens above the earth, the heavens that are above all the realms of earthly life below.

And God said in Genesis 1, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from night and let them be for signs and seasons and years. So God set the sun and moon and the stars in the heavens to rule over the day and the night.

The time and the space of every creature and the calendar of man is ruled by the lights in the heavens, the sun and the moon and the stars.

[32 : 41] And that's just a fact, isn't it? Time and tide waits for no man. We are creatures of the earth. We are not controllers of the earth. No matter how much deluded politicians today think that they can control and change earth's biology or its climate.

But the point's very clear here, isn't it? There is a realm above even these heavens over the heads of all creation, verse 22. Under which, verse 23, do you see, under which all the created order exists.

And only above the whole cosmos, even the heavens, can we find the ultimate ruler of all things seen and unseen. Under the expanse, verse 23, look, that divine power is evident.

It's ceaselessly active. We've seen it portrayed in the wheels and the eyes and so on. But God, the ultimate ruler, is not seen. His presence is felt. Ezekiel hears, verse 24, the sound of many waters like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of a tumult like a mighty army.

Everything in the world below is constantly affected. In fact, it's controlled by the Almighty Creator above time and space, the Lord of time and space, but only from above that great expanse can be heard with clarity, a direct voice.

[34 : 04] Verse 25, look, a voice from above. The voice of God from, verse 26, the throne of God.

And notice that voice, the living creatures let down their wings and so all that tumultuous noise must cease. Let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand when speaks the voice from above the highest heaven.

By the way, notice here that the throne of God and the heavens of God are not being held up by the living creatures and their wings like they are in Babylonian representations of their gods and so on.

These living creatures let down their wings and when they do, heaven does not collapse and the throne of God does not fall down. That's what man-made human religion is.

Creating deities that need our propping up, dependent on our offerings, on our provision, on our service. That's human religion, isn't it? Whether it's false human idols or whether it's foolish human ideologies.

[35 : 12] But no, the true and living God is quite different. As our confession of faith says, he is in and of himself, unto himself, all sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures that he has made.

He is the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. And this vision of the throne that is above all created things speaks of the sheer transcendence of the true God.

He is wholly above, inaccessible by the will of mere creatures. That sapphire-like appearance of the throne, it recalls the sapphire-like pavement below God's feet when in Exodus, I think it's chapter 24, the elders of Israel beheld with Moses the glory of God at Sinai.

And in that extraordinary vision, even God's feet are separated from them by this impenetrable crystal barrier. He is the transcendent God. He sits enthroned high, high above all creation, seeing and knowing all things in creation, ruling and judging all creation, but above and apart.

And yet, this vision does also speak of the imminence of God, the nearness of God to his world, because he draws near to reveal himself to mortal man.

[36 : 40] verse 26, above the likeness of a throne, there was a likeness with a human appearance. Just as the living creatures which summed up the created order in their most glorious figures, just as they were described as having a human likeness, here, the most glorious figure who is above all creation, the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God, God is a likeness with a human appearance.

God appears like a man, but unlike any other man, he is utterly resplendent, gleaming with fire, dazzling brightness all around. Like Daniel, also so, one like a son of man, but the ruler of an eternal kingdom.

surely John Calvin is right to say that Ezekiel was granted a glimpse of the mystery which was at length manifested in the person of Christ.

But don't miss what this drawing near of the person of God means. It means the universal presence of the fire of God becomes unavoidably personal for everyone.

one scholar says it's unarguable that the throne and the storm theophany share the common theme of judgment. He says it's the universal God from whose judgment none can escape that appears to Ezekiel and summons him to deliver his message of judgment.

[38 : 20] This tiring figure with the appearance of a man draws near as the judge. of all. And yet it's not a judgment that is devoid of all hope is it?

Look at verse 28 the brightness around him that seems to enclose the fire is like the appearance of the bow in the clouds on the day of rain.

The rainbow. God's sign of covenant promise to the world remember beyond the great judgment of the flood way back in Genesis 9. whenever it appeared God himself said I will see it and remember my everlasting covenant.

Some are reluctant I think to see the connection of the rainbow here with the covenant promise of God and I guess we have to be careful. John Calvin I think is at least partly right where he says that to see in the rainbow here a symbol of reconciliation is altogether out of place.

There's certainly nothing trite about it is there as if some easy reconciliation with God was on the cards it's not at all that is it Ezekiel's message will be one of awful judgment but nevertheless surely the rainbow does remind us that there is hope with this God of covenant covenant hope in his righteousness beyond necessary judgment and through necessary judgment that's what the rainbow is first of all isn't it it is a reminder of God's judgment that's the extraordinary irony today that it's become the symbol of pride friends you need to read Genesis chapter 6 and see what it was that precipitated the judgment of God on the world in those ancient times precisely that kind of pride so the rainbow reminds us of God's judgment but also it reminds us and even more importantly God himself it reminds says it reminds him of covenant hope and covenant promise that

[40 : 30] God's purpose will not cease for this world even though the whole world must again be flooded with a judgment of fire as Peter says it must be there is hope beyond says Peter for an ultimate home of righteousness and so it is here in God's message to Ezekiel judgment is real judgment is coming but there is hope in the everlasting covenant of the God who towers above the earth on the throne that is above all creation of his holy fire some of the most sobering words in the whole

Bible are words you know that you read in the gospels particularly in Matthew's gospel about our Lord Jesus reaction to those who willfully rejected him again and again you read so he left them and departed perhaps the only more terrifying words are those in Matthew 25 from Jesus' own lips foreshadowing the last judgment where he says you depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels you see Ezekiel's gospel like Jesus' own gospel is one of warning but it does also carry this rainbow flag of eternal hope because surely in seeing the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God as one with a human appearance upon the throne of heaven surely Calvin is right that Ezekiel saw the prelude to that mystery which was afterward displayed to the world and which

Paul magnificently extols when he acclaims great is the mystery God manifest in the flesh as the creed says for our salvation when in the fullness of time the voice from above the eternal word himself made himself known forever in the person of the son John the apostle says he saw the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God but he himself appeared not just in the likeness of man but he became man the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory the glory as of the only one of the father full of grace and truth a word of powerful certain warning but a word of promising covenant hope this is the gospel of God this is Ezekiel's gospel this is the gospel of Jesus this is

God's revelation from above the highest heaven to our world the world of mortal man the sons of Adam so how did Ezekiel respond to this true gospel of God how should we respond verse 28 tells us he fell on his face a son of Adam a creature of dust he humbled himself in the dust and that was Ezekiel's habitual reaction actually when God spoke to him you'll see it again in chapter 3 verse 23 and many other places as well and it's very interesting and I think very significant that every time you read about him falling on his face it's then that God speaks to him directly verse 28 I fell on my face I heard the voice of one speaking and he said son of man I will speak to you God speaks you see to those who humble themselves who bow to his majesty who bow to his authority if you want to hear God's voice clearly speaking to you and to your life you have to humble yourself the one who sits on the throne of heaven is not going to speak to you as an equal face to face there's some

Christians who think you know that they know an awful lot about God's word very proud of that knowledge well Paul tells the Corinthians doesn't he that kind of knowledge just puffs up James the apostle says that what God what man puffs up God knocks down God opposes the proud he gives grace to the humble he does speak he will speak to those who bow low in humility before God and before others to those James says who are quick to hear but slow to speak slow to anger the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God angry speakers pushing a line they don't build a home of right righteousness do they the home of right relationships and harmony James says no the bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and falsehood that that engenders is not the revealed wisdom of

[47:11] God from above for the glory of God it's earthly he says it's unspiritual indeed he says it's demonic that's funny to remember isn't it when we consider who will listen to and who will take heed of when they think they're talking about God and the Bible and theology so humble yourselves as the apostle like Ezekiel humble yourselves if you want God to exalt you and teach you bow low before the Lord like Ezekiel then as James says you will be able to receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls so may God help us all to be falling on our faces before the Lord of glory so that we can hear his voice and speaking to us and so we also can speak it to others let's pray our God and our

Father we marvel at the mystery of your great revelation of yourself to us the God of heaven from the throne of heaven but you reach out and you speak your words of life and of love to us mere creatures of the dust how we praise you and how we honor you and so we ask Lord that you would help us to be those who can receive such glorious truths and in doing so speak by our lips and also our lives of these great things to others Amen