

THE GOSPEL GLORY OF GOD

By Pastor Paul Penno

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“Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.” Eze. 10:1.

The prophet Ezekiel is given a glimpse of part of the vision that he had seen in chapter one. He sees the sapphire firmament upon which the throne of God rests supported on the head of the cherubim. This is a view of the central authority directing the play and interplay of human events. The cosmic purposes are surely moving to their consummation, but not without the superintendency of the throne; not without the guidance of the cherubim; not without focus upon the sapphire stone of the law of God.

Then Ezekiel’s divine, celestial, mentor said to “the man clothed with linen”: “And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court.” Eze. 10:2, 3.

These coals of fire play a role in other visions. In Isaiah 6, for example, the prophet saw the cherubim and seraphim. He saw the throne of God high and lifted up. He caught a view of the distant likeness of the being upon the throne. He heard the angelic choirs sing to the trinity: holy, holy, holy; to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He realized that the divine plan needed human helpers. He heard the heavenly voice saying, Who will be for us? And in his timidity, Isaiah said, I am ready to go. But I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. And the Lord said, I can cleanse. And so the coals of fire are applied to the lips of the young Isaiah purging them of earthliness; making them burn and glow with celestial glory.

The coals are taken from the altar representing Calvary. So these coals represent the gospel. The blood of Jesus Christ is the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing power of His blood.

Now these coals of fire are scattered over the city. Will they bring about a purification? Will they light upon the dross and burn it away?

Will they heat the fine metals of gold and silver and make them irradiated with the likeness of the divine countenance looking at them?

In the meantime, the cherubim stand at the right side of the house and the cloud fills the inner court. But we see from Israel's history that all the divine overtures are rejected. Heavenly cleansing is refused. The shrouding radiance of the Shekinah is despised. And the glory of the Lord leaves the cherubs.

"Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory." Eze. 10:4.

As if loth to depart; waiting to be recalled, the house is full of the cloud, indicating the presence of God. He has not left His people. He is not far away. He is there in their midst. The court is full of the brightness of the glory of God. What more can God do? As in ancient times He had come in and filled the curtain, courts and areas of the earthly tabernacle; as He had come centuries before and filled the temple of Solomon that the people had built for Him; so now in this heavenly vision He is seen as infusing and irradiating and illuminating the inner recesses of the temple. But meeting indifference He is ready to depart.

"And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh." Eze. 10:5. These heavenly representatives who are doing, in the meantime, the work that the redeemed will ultimately be doing, witnessing for God; speak with the voice of El Shaddai—the voice of the Almighty.

As we study the names of God we discover that this name brings to us a revelation of the motherhood of deity. *Shad* is the Hebrew word for the mother's breast. El Shaddai is the mighty breasted one upon whose bosom the lonely and the fatherless and the widow might find solace and comfort. From whose breasts the babes in faith might drink the milk of the word. El Shaddai is the revelation of God from whom we get comfort and sustenance. And the voice of God sounds through His representatives—through His minions—speaking.

"And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels." Eze. 10:6. Now the wheels, as we have noticed, as the play

and interplay of human events.¹ They are full of eyes. They are directed by the nail-pierced hands. They are under the guidance of heavenly leaders.

“And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out.” Eze. 10:7. Now this man who was clothed with linen according to Eze. 9:2, is connected with the altar. He has the writer’s inkhorn. He is the scribe. From the altar he sees the gift that Jesus has made on Calvary. With his writer’s inkhorn he records the detailed sins of rejection of those for whom Christ died. The coals of fire, representing the refining presence of God as a consuming fire that purify by burning out the dross and make incandescent those whom His power touches. These coals of fire, i.e., the gospel, are to be conveyed to the city to warm, and melt, and purge, and illuminate.

“And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man’s hand under their wings.” Eze. 10:8. Always the form of a man’s hand, the divine fingers guide and the divine fingers created. The divine fingers recreate. They mold as the potter. They heal as the benign physician laying his hands upon the sick. They point the way of life as the finger is stretched. Through the ministry of the Spirit, they bring heaven’s will within the understanding of man.

“And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the color of a beryl stone.” Eze. 10:9. This color is green. As we have seen pointing out the concept of faith that brings hope. These wheels, the inter mission of human events, green in color. Full of hope. The prophet might be tempted to think that the play and interplay of events between God’s people and Babylon will bring nothing but catastrophe. What he is bidden to consider is that they contain hope.

“And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel.”² Eze. 10:10. As if one wheel was turning and meshing and helping another.

¹ “The wheellike complications that appeared to the prophet to be involved in such confusion were under the guidance of an infinite hand. The Spirit of God, revealed to him as moving and directing these wheels, brought harmony out of confusion; so the whole world was under His control.” 5T 752.

² “The wheels within wheels represented in this symbol was confusion to the finite eye. But a hand of infinite wisdom was revealed amid the wheels. Perfect

“When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went.” Eze. 10:11. As the progress of events took place, they went on their four sides, they did not deviate from the hand guided pathway, but to the place wither the head looked. Where the head looked, they followed it.

Jesus is the head. Jesus is on the throne. Jesus’ hands guide the wheels. Jesus head looks at the direction. The wheels follow the direction as He looks. They turned not as they went. They do not deviate. What a picture of divine control of human events.

As we realize this fact today, it should bring hope to our hearts too. We look at the fast moving events in the Middle East, in Africa, Latin America, in Europe. We see some nations rising into superiority. We watch others grinding to a dismal, slow fate. The wheels of progress screech in the machinery of life, but as we look at this play and interplay of human events through the eyes of Ezekiel, we see that above it all is a firmament—a sapphire firmament—indicating the unchanging will and character of God. Above that firmament is a rainbow, arched throne. On that throne sits a man—a man’s body, human characteristics, a man’s voice—the voice of El Shaddai, speaking. Speaking, ordering His minions to cleanse mankind by casting celestial coals on them. Turning the mind of the prophet to the fact that the affairs of life are under the master guidance of the hands that once were nailed on Calvary. These events go where the head wants them to go.

And as he looked, “And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had.” Eze. 10:12. Nothing is blind. Everywhere he looks there are eyes, discerning, perceiving, foreseeing, understanding, explaining.

“As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel.” Eze. 10:13. They are invested with vision; with the ability to listen and they listen; and they move; and they progress; and they reach the goal toward which the head looked.

“And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the

order is brought out of the confusion. Every wheel works in its right place, in perfect harmony with every other part of the machinery.” *Christian Leadership*, p. 26.

face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.” Eze. 10:14. Here again Ezekiel is receiving and emphasis of the vision he had seen in chapter 1, but with a difference. The cherub takes the place of the ox. The face of a cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle.

“And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar.” Eze. 10:15. They are beyond the quicksands and the morasses of life. They move in a plane above the celestial, above the corrosive, sordid, evil conditions.

“And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them.” Eze. 10:17. These celestial representatives of God who messengers and representatives of what Satan should have done and what the redeemed will one day do. The cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth.

“When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’S house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.” Eze. 10:17-22.

What a contrast the prophet saw between this vision and what he had seen Israel in chapters 2-9. Among those who should have been God’s people there was so much indifference; so much jealousy; so much evil and imaginings; so much absorption with sex; so much filling up with the things of sense. They turned their back on the temple of God. So much studying to like the things of the world and deliberately to put out of the life those things that would please God; so much rejection; this is the picture of Israel. God looks down and sees in His people what they might be. He sees what He has done for them. For centuries He has worked for Jerusalem, now Jerusalem is besieged.

And Ezekiel has portrayed it upon a clay tablet with all the battlements of Babylon around it. He sees famine coming. Men eating under the most difficult circumstances. He sees the scattering: a third slaughtered by the sword; a third scattered by the east wind; a small remnant surviving; a byword, a taunt, a division among mankind. He sees disobedience. The leaders of God's people; the priests, the ancients; in the very temple in the very city; disobedient, rebellious, self-centered. God sees it all and He sees the end coming. Watching! Watching like a beast of prey. Watching like a hovering hawk. The unwary, the unmindful, the uncaring. He sees business ruined. No buyers buying, no sellers selling. Peace disappearing. Violence flooding the land. He sees it all.

And he sends an urgent prophet having given him this picture of mourning, lamentation, and woe. He sends Ezekiel to them. Ezekiel, You go. You speak for me. You tell them my words. You give to them a picture of my heart. You show to them the way of salvation. You convey to them my appeal. Remember, they are stiff-necked. They are unfeeling. Stiff-hearted. Vain. Speak to them. Whether they will hear, whether they will forbear. They have no doctrinal problem. It's all relational. Their relationships to God has been ruined. Their relationships to their fellow men are characterized by violence and jealousy. They have ignored the word. They have despised the warnings.

And to keep his soul from being overcome by discouragement, the Lord gives to Ezekiel a picture, again, of His throne. Many times we see the glory of God. The glory is His character seen on Calvary that takes broken, fallen, blighted, sinful, dying man and transforms it into the likeness of the divine. He restores it into a state higher than that of Adam and Eve; to a position as joint-heir with Christ upon His throne. And that God can take a broken, dying, sinful human being and do this for him in what will cause unfallen worlds, and angels, and the redeemed, in the ages that will never end, to join in rapturous praise for him that not only created, but redeemed. And this glory of God; this beneficent wonder of transforming salvation is seen by Ezekiel.

It's part of the divine revelation. Jesus is on the throne. The rainbow covenant of promise is there. The law of God supports it all. Underneath there is the four living beings stamped with the likeness of Christ; shining with the glory of His redemption. Helping the wheels within wheels, the interplay of human events, to evolve along divinely

designed pathways, Ezekiel sees it all. He sees the living beings the cherubim, expressing the genial, communicative, compassion of a man; the regal power and dignity of a lion; the patient suffering, toiling sacrifice of an ox; the soaring vision of the eagle eye. He sees it all. He sees these cherubim mindful of every changing nuance of the voice of El Shaddai. Where He bids, they go. And as they go the wheels of life go with them, everyone straightforward; none turning to the left or the right; none deviating from the divine pathways, fulfilling the grand design. Ezekiel sees it all.

And he sees these living beings. These ministers God sent forth to minister unto them who shall be called heirs of salvation. Pick up the lively coals from the altar and bring them down to the city. Who will allow the purging influence to work in their lives? Very few. Too few. Men reject. Meanwhile when the voice speaks the living creatures obey. When the voice bids them rise, the living creatures rise. And with them, the work they do succeeds too, follows them. The wheels rise, the wheels go forward. The wheels obey. His hand, his nail-pierced hand.

This is a vision of the glory I have seen. These, he says, are the cherubim. On the one hand, man forgets. Israel departs. On the other hand, God never forgets. The cherubim obey. What the voice says, they do and they do immediately.

What a lesson this should be to God's people today. God is working for us just as vigorously as He worked for Israel of old. We, too, can see the signs multiplying. The end is near. The end watcheth for us. The end is a day of violence and gloominess, of despair, wars and rumors of wars, of seeking for peace, men of blindness going from one area to another. No buying. No selling. Violence pervading every land.

God is working to seal His servants. The six angels of Revelation 14, the six visitants of Ezekiel 9, work to the same end. The sword of the Spirit is cleaving away to the throne of God for the believer. Its luminous flame is pointing the pathway and purging the dross from those who accept the message. Those who reject, those who turn away, put their feet in a pathway, the inevitable result of which, is loss and eternal death.

One day all opportunity will close. The glory of God, the plan of salvation, the work of Jesus Christ through the ages, is lost; leaving man to his fate. The throne, the sapphire pavement, the rainbow of promise, the cherubim of glory, the omniscient wheels that move to

their glorious climax, the guiding hand—nail-pierced; the voice of the Almighty; the character of Christ impressed upon His people; all this continues.

But those within the city, the doomed city of Jerusalem, the indifferent church are unaware. They do not know the salvation story is slowly moving to its conclusion. They do not know that the waves of mercy beaten back, may one day cease to flow. They don't sense that the coals of fire that are sent to illumine and to cleanse will one day be withdrawn. They don't realize that the throne, bow-arched, is supported by the sapphire stone of the divine will and that the law of God cannot change; that their lives should be brought into conformity. They don't know, or they won't know, that their probation is swiftly ending.

This is the picture of the first ten chapters of the book of Ezekiel. He sees a picture of salvation given to man. He sees the whole government of God interested in their salvation. We see heaven recruiting prophets to spread that message to the indifferent. We see celestial forces controlling the affairs of men moving to the glorious climax. We hear the voice of God appeal directly: commanding, sentencing. And we see among men indifference, sinfulness, rebellion, hatred, idolatry.

What more can God do? As a preacher I often ask myself, What more could I have done, as I have dealt with personalities? You know God asks that question in Isaiah, What more could I have done that I have not done?

The answer, of course, is nothing. We can always make suggestions to God as to what we think He could do. It's what we pray. Our prayers are many times suggestions to the Lord. When we think about our prayers, when we realize the end from the beginning, we discover that God has already set in motion ways that would far improve any results that our prayers might bring to pass. But when the glory departs Israel is left to its own resources.