**Glory**

Ezekiel 1,10

Here is the pattern of history [Slide 2]: God’s glory was revealed in creation. His glory was removed from our presence after the fall. But one day we will again fully experience the glorious presence of God ***when He restores all things in the new heaven and earth***.

God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But you can ***picture His glory going up and away*** from the first couple and the whole earth as their sin drove Him from their presence. One day that relationship will be fully restored as God brings His glorious presence back to earth.

You can also picture this the other way, **from our perspective** [Slide 3]. When God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden ***they were cast DOWN from His presence*** and away from His holiness and peace into this dark and fallen world. We are lifted back up to heaven and relationship with God in all of His glory through Jesus. So this is a more complete picture [Slide 4]:



The restoration process started with Jesus through His work of redemption. His kingdom was **inaugurated** when he rose from the dead but it won’t be **consummated** until he returns in power and glory. We already experience the blessings of life in Christ but we do not yet have the fullness of joy that will be ours when Jesus comes back to restore all things.

***Your story follows this same pattern***, as does mine. We were all **created** with the glory of God imprinted on us - all people were formed in the image of God. But all of us are sinners by nature and by choice - so we have all **fallen** into sin and therefore the image of God has been spoiled in us. Thankfully Jesus came into this broken, fallen world - and in Him we have **redemption**, the forgiveness of sins and the beginning of our **restoration**, which will be complete when we die or he comes back.

We also see this pattern in **the story of Israel**. [Slide 5] When Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of the Lord filled **the temple** and Jerusalem - ever so briefly - stood as a glorious ***visual demonstration of the majestic splendor of their God***. Soon that glory was tarnished and before long it was removed altogether, with Ezekiel as a tragic witness. The temple was later rebuilt but the sad part about that dedication is that the glory of the Lord never returned. So while there was great rejoicing at the dedication of Solomon’s temple, there was weeping when the temple was rebuilt.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Vision of God’s Glory | Departure of God’s Glory from the Temple  | Gift of New Hearts | Return of God’s Glory to a New Temple |
| **Ch. 1** | **Ch. 10** | **Ch. 36** | **Ch. 37** |
| Creation - Glory Revealed | Fall - Glory Removed | Redemption - Glory Restored Initially | Restoration - Glory Restored Completely |

As we touch on each of these four chapters in Ezekiel’s prophecy we will see this progression.

First, God’s glory was revealed to the prophet.

1. **God’s Glory Revealed**

“In the thirtieth year… as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.” Ezekiel 1:1

This was ***Ezekiel’s thirtieth year.*** Since he was from the line of priests, it would have been the year he started his duties as a priest. But since he was not in Jerusalem but was instead in Babylon with the exiles, his 30th must have been a disappointing one - as mine was for me since I ruptured my Achilles tendon playing indoor soccer (pretending I was younger and more in shape than I actually was).

Imagine finding yourself in a foreign land in your 30th year - far from home, separated from family and friends, in a refugee camp huddled up by a canal and wondering what your captors might do to you next. ***This was the time of Daniel and the lion’s den*** with King Nebuchadnezzar - the time of the fiery furnace with Rack, Shack and Benny (though their moms probably called them by different names).

 **1A. God’s Glorious Presence Revealed**

“As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashed forth continually.” Ezekiel 1:4

All of these images convey ***the breaktaking glory of God in the manifestation of His presence***. When God led the nation in the wilderness it was in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When the glory of God filled the temple it was in the form of a cloud. When God appeared on Mount Sinai it looked like a terrible storm with dark thunder clouds, loud claps of thunder and ferocious winds. 

 **1A. God’s Glorious Presence Revealed**

“And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.” Ezekiel 1:5-6

This picture is the best I could find to show everything that is happening in Ezekiel 1. At first you just see four creatures, then you see wheels and then an expanse or platform above the creatures and wheels. Most preachers and commentators agree that **what Ezekiel saw was a heavenly CHARIOT**. In ancient times kings were often portrayed on thrones that rested on the backs of an animal or two. Here we see God’s throne resting on the most glorious and unusual chariot. It sat on the backs of not one or two but four creatures representing ***the most honored of every species***.

* The wisdom and dignity of man
* The nobility and ferocity of a lion
* The power and service of an ox
* The swiftness and perception of an eagle

The first part of the vision, in the cherubim, represents the PRESENCE of God.

 **1A. God’s Glorious Presence Revealed**

“Each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight… Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went… Wherever the spirit would go, they went.” Ezekiel 1:6-7,9,12

Their wings convey ***rapid movement***. Straight legs represent readiness to move - not sitting but standing. The four creatures are unified and singular, moving together with fixed determination - not turning as they went.

 **1A. God’s Glorious Presence Revealed**

“Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro… And the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning.” Ezekiel. 1:13-14

Ezekiel is struggling for words to express his vision - but these four angelic creatures are **defined by fire, light and MOVEMENT** - ***like lightning***. What a powerful image of the OMNIPRESENCE of God. If His servants can move like lightning, carrying His throne-chariot - that just reminds us that God Himself is everywhere at all times. Just as lightning flashes in the sky and at the same moment it strikes its target.

***This is what Jesus’ return will be like: a lightning strike***. By the time you see Him coming it will be too late to do anything about it. His return will be visible everywhere on earth at the same time just as lightning can be seen from sky to sky. The cherubim remind us of God’s glorious presence. The rest of the chariot remind us of His glorious PURPOSE.

 **1B. God’s Glorious Purpose Revealed**

“As for the appearance of the wheels… their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl… as it were a wheel within a wheel… Their rims were tall and awesome… full of eyes all around.” Ezekiel 1:16-17

The Cherubim had human faces and hands to illustrate God’s omnipresence. The wheels are covered in eyes to demonstrate God’s omniscience - His all-seeing knowledge. God knows and sees all things that happen and rules over history according to His sovereign purpose. ***The wheels most likely represent the movement of time*** in line with God’s predetermined plan.

Be encouraged brother, sister - God not only SEES everything that happens to us, but all of it is part of His great master plan. Just as this complicated heavenly chariot has many intricate details yet it moves with a singular purpose - ***all in one direction according to the will of the One Spirit guiding it***.

 **1B. God’s Glorious Purpose Revealed**

“Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went… Above the expanse over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire.” Ezekiel 1:20,28

God’s sovereign purpose for His people and the world is represented in ***His glorious throne***. God is the King of history and the sovereign Lord of our lives. My life is not my own. Your life is not your own. We belong to the King. We are His subjects. Everything we have is His - entrusted to us to manage on His behalf, according to His purposes and plans.

And this is wonderfully God news because God sees everything and knows everything - we do not. He is in control; we are not. He is King; we are not. **The throne is HIS - not ours**. This leads into the third expression of God’s glory revealed:

 **1C. God’s Glorious Power Revealed**

“Seated above the... throne was a likeness with a human appearance… Upward [from] his waist I saw gleaming metal… downward [from] his waist I saw fire, and there was brightness around him.” Ezekiel 1:26-27

On this celestial chariot is seated One who looks like a man. Obviously Ezekiel did not see God. No human can see God and live. This was a theophany - **a vision of God**. And even before Jesus was born the way God made Himself known was primarily in the likeness of a man.

But this was a man unlike any other - a King radiant with blazing glory.

**1C. God’s Glorious Power Revealed**

“Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud… Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” Ezekiel 1:28

**The rainbow** reminds us of ***God’s merciful covenant with Noah*** - preserving him and his family, protecting them from the flood of His judgment on a sinful world. And Ezekiel responds the only way you can to the glory of God - he fell on his face in worship and submission.

That is chapter 1 - the glory of God revealed. That is how Ezekiel’s story begins, but sadly the glory does not remain for long.

 **2. God’s Glory Removed**

“And he said to the man clothed in linen, ‘Go in among the whirling wheels… Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city.’” Ezekiel 10:2

Here is a symbol of the judgment that was about to fall on God’s people and their city. For Isaiah the burning coals from God’s throne brought cleansing. But here they bring judgment.

What a powerful reminder that ***the same glorious God will be experienced by people in two absolutely opposite ways***. When Jesus returns some will welcome Him as their Merciful Savior. Others will fall before Him as their Conquering King. Those who believe in Jesus and belong to Him by faith will experience His return as the arrival of our long awaited bridegroom. It will be the beginning of a celebration so joyful we can only begin to imagine it.

But that same moment of Christ’s return will be for others the instant of eternal regret - of the beginning of an eternity of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Think of it as a ***CAT IN THE OCEAN.*** Everyone will step into the presence of God for judgment. Some of us will be prepared for that experience, like cats who have been transformed into dolphins or pick your favorite ocean creature - an Orca or Sailfish. Through faith in Jesus we are being transformed into His likeness so we will enjoy the presence of God forever - like those who were made for it.

But for those who are not transformed by Jesus, the presence and glory of God will be like a cat being thrown into the ocean - they will not be at all prepared for it and will experience His majesty and power as agony and judgment. It’s clear the reason that this judgment was coming:

 **2A. God’s Glory Removed** - because of sin

“Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.” Ezekiel 5:11

***Why did God abandon His people and His land and His city?*** Why did God withdraw His glory from Jerusalem and send His people into exile in Babylon? Because of their sin - their willful, ongoing, unrepentant rebellion and idolatry. Though God sent them prophet after prophet and once in a while a good king would lead in some reform, by and large the people got worse and worse, turning increasingly to idols and the horrific practices of the nations around them.

 **2B. God’s Glory Removed** - judgment entrusted to a man

“And a cherub stretched out his hand… to the fire... and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed in linen who took it and went out.” Ezekiel 10:7

The fire is coming from the throne of God - from His own righteous character and on the basis of His sovereign reign. Here is ***a man clothed in simple linen***, like the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, when he took off his fancy garments and dressed himself like a servant. In Ezekiel’s vision it isn’t stated who this man is. But the New Testament makes it clear the One to whom judgment has been entrusted:

**2B. God’s Glory Removed** - judgment entrusted to a Man

“He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:31

The proof that Jesus is the rightful judge of all peoples was his resurrection. **Everyone will answer to Jesus for their sin.** Everyone will give an account for what they have done and said and thought. “With the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

This is why God’s glory was removed from the temple in the time of Ezekiel - because of the sin of God’s people. The man in linen took fiery coals to throw on God’s people as a sign of their coming judgment. Soon after this vision Jerusalem would fall. Ezekiel was like Daniel - he was one of the Jewish captives taken away from Israel before the final siege and collapse of Jerusalem. That final devastation was still in the future - and it was predicted by this vision of a man casting flaming coals down from heaven.

When God destroyed ***Sodom and Gomorrah*** for their immorality it was with literal fire from heaven. When He destroyed Jerusalem it was with the armies of Babylon. Like the flood in the time of Noah, judgment came according to the sovereignly established decree of God.

**2C. God’s Glory Removed** - according to God’s established decree

“Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house… And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth… Each one of them went straight forward.” Ezekiel 10:18,22

Ezekiel emphasizes **how the chariot of God moves** - straight ahead without deviation. This is the truth of history, though we can’t fully understand it - everything is moving forward according to God’s predetermined plan. We often feel like life is a series of sudden twists and turns - but to the Lord all of history is laid out before Him like a book already written, and it was written by His hand.

***God’s glory was revealed*** in creation, in Israel and ultimately in Christ. ***God’s glory was removed*** because of the fall of Adam and Eve and because of the sin of Israel. But praise the Lord, God had a plan to bring the glory back!

 **3. God’s Glory Restored**

“Thus says the Lord God: it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned…” Ezekiel 36:22

Here God makes it clear the ultimate purpose behind His great plan of salvation - it was not about Israel. ***It was never about Israel.*** It was always about the holy name of God. Israel was one tool among many that God used to show the world what He is like. The purpose of the nation of Israel and of each individual Jew was to glorify God. Their whole reason for existence was to share the story of God’s power and faithfulness and mercy to them in the initial covenant with Abraham, the amazing rescue from slavery in Egypt, the dramatic conquest of the land and the building of the kingdom, the beauty of Jerusalem - all of this was for the single purpose to bring glory to the name of God.

Brothers and sisters, ***the exact same thing is true for this church and for each one of us.*** Hear this - “It is not for YOUR sake, Oakwood Community Church, that I have acted in your lives, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned.” **This story is not about us** - it is all about Him. When we fail to understand and apply this, we force God to remind us - to humble us and show us it’s all about HIS work, not ours; and all about HIS glory, not ours. Nowhere is this more clear than in the glorious work of Jesus, which is how God started the restoration process.

 **3A. God’s Glory Restored** - Initially thru Christ’s Redemption

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean… And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit… I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:25-26

Remember, this is 600 years before Jesus was born. Ezekiel is in Babylon. God gives him a vision of hope even as he witnesses the glory of the Lord leaving the temple. Here is the hope for God’s people and, indeed, **the hope of the world: a true cleansing**, an internal cleansing that is actually a complete spiritual transformation.

Around the same time, Jeremiah had a similar ***vision of the New Covenant.*** So God was reinforcing this promise in a time of great national distress - reassuring His people and making it very clear where their hope should lie.

Some in Jerusalem were arguing for **military resistance**. Jeremiah told them, “No. God has given us to Babylon. ***It is time to surrender and, like Yoda, to go into exile.***” The ones who rebelled against Babylon suffered for it. And everyone did end up in Babylon. But God was teaching them that their hope was not in a physical rebellion but in a spiritual transformation.

***God promised to bring the glory back*** to His nation and to His people by changing their HEARTS. God would place His own Spirit inside of His people. Instead of having hard hearts of stone, God would give them new hearts that were receptive to His word instead of resistant to it. God would give them a new Spirit that would WANT to follow Him instead of continually turning away from Him.

**The disciples of Jesus** had the same challenge - many wanted to conquer the Roman Empire by ***military force***. But Jesus said their hope was not in political or military conquest but in a spiritual transformation that would become possible through the blood of his sacrifice. He said the great battle would not be waged with metal swords but with drops of blood on a rough wooden cross. There the spiritual forces of heaven and earth collided and there the ultimate victory was won.

***The death and resurrection of Jesus was the beginning of the restoration of God’s glory.*** When Jesus ascended into heaven it was His installation at the Father’s right hand as the victorious King. Soon after that Jesus poured out His Spirit into the hearts of His followers, in fulfillment of this prophecy of Ezekiel.

Suddenly, in **Acts 2**, these ordinary, timid, impetuous even foolish young men were transformed into bold, assertive, dynamic leaders. How? They received the Spirit of the living God who filled their hearts and minds with the truth of God’s Word and the power of God Himself.

Those disciples continued the ministry of Jesus by preaching the Word of God, healing people and doing many miracles - all in the Name of Jesus, making it clear that the power was from Him and not from Peter of Paul.

 **3A. God’s Glory Restored** - Initially thru Christ’s Redemption

“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ… whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.” Acts 4:10

Peter had healed a man who was a cripple from birth and who was easily recognized in the temple area. Suddenly this well known cripple was running, jumping and dancing around the temple area telling everyone about the power of Jesus. The Jewish leaders arrested Peter and John, telling them to SHUSH and instead they taught all the more - “THIS IS THE POWER OF JESUS!”

The apostles declared - **Jesus is the Messiah** we have been waiting for! All of the prophecies were pointing to this Man! What more proof do you need than His resurrection from the dead!?!?

Here is how Peter explained it in Acts 2:

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” Acts 2:32-33

This is the moment that ***the glory came back to Israel***. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel in chapter 36. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit brought about the transformation foretold in the cleansing water, the new heart and new Spirit.

But we now understand what the early church had to figure out: that was only Phase 1 of the restoration process. Jesus’ death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit was the inauguration of the Kingdom, not yet its consummation.

**Phase 1 - The Kingdom Inaugurated**

* Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension & reign
* The Holy Spirit & the Church

**Phase 2 - The Kingdom Consummated**

* The Glorification of the Church
* The New Heaven & Earth

And so we live in the tension of **the ALREADY and the NOT YET.** The Kingdom has already broken into history because the King came down to earth 2,000 years ago. But the Kingdom is not yet fully realized here on earth and will not be until Jesus comes back. At that point God’s glory will once again dwell with His people - and will forevermore. Ezekiel foresaw this in chapter 43:

**3B. God’s Glory Restored** - Completely thru Christ’s Return

“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east… and the earth shone with his glory… ‘This is the place of my throne… where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.’” Ezekiel 43:2,7

Ezekiel described **a new temple** in great detail - a temple floorplan that was never built. After their 70 year time out in Babylon the Jewish people did return to Jerusalem and they did rebuild a temple - but the glory of the Lord never came to fill that new temple. It did not have the physical grandeur of Solomon’s temple nor did it have the spiritual glory of God’s presence.

Around the time of Jesus’ birth King Herod dressed up the temple, but around 70 years later it would all be torn down again. Because Jesus was not interested in a physical temple - He was gathering a PEOPLE who would become His New Temple - a LIVING TEMPLE.

Brothers and sisters, **we now house the Glory of God** in the person of His Holy Spirit. WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD. We have the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our full inheritance when Jesus comes back. THEN the Kingdom will be completely ours - then the glory of God will be completely restored. Then the prophecy of Ezekiel, and all the other prophecies of the Old Testament will finally and fully be fulfilled.

Let me close with these inspiring words from **John’s Revelation**, which is very much inspired by that of Ezekiel.

“‘Come, I will show you **the Bride, the wife of the Lamb**.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, **having the glory of God**, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” Revelation 21:9-11

Brothers and sisters, ***this is how the great story ends!*** This is the great conclusion, the ultimate consummation. John gives detailed measurements for the temple, just like Ezekiel did. And John makes it very clear that what he saw is a picture of the CHURCH - US, the bride of Christ. And we will HAVE THE GLORY OF GOD. Right now, since the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, we have access to the glory of God. But on that day when our Savior and King comes back our faith will turn to sight. And WE WILL BE GLORIFIED.

**Oh think of the joy** - when all sin is finally purged from us; when all sadness, pain and death are removed from our experience. Think of the great reunion with loved ones who have died in the Lord.

God’s glory has been revealed in many ways. His glory has been tarnished and concealed in many ways. But God’s glory stepped into history in the person of Jesus Christ - the apostles saw His glory, of the One and only, and that is why they wrote the New Testament. And God’s glory is coming in all of its fullness when Jesus comes back. Oh, Lord Jesus - come quickly! Let’s pray.