

“THE EARTH SHONE WITH HIS GLORY”

I. Introduction

- A. The Hebrew term for “glory” means heaviness, splendor, and dignity.
1. At key points in Old Testament history, God assured his people that he was present in their midst by visibly manifesting his glory to them.
 2. The Sinai covenant was ratified by a manifestation of God’s glory to Moses and Israel’s leaders (see Ex. 24:9-11).
 3. When the temple was dedicated by King Solomon, the glory of the Lord filled it. (see 1 Kgs. 8:10-11)
 4. When Isaiah received his prophetic commission, he saw a vision of the glory of the Lord in his temple. (see Isa. 6:1-4)
- B. Earlier in our study of Ezekiel, we saw that the prophet was given a vision of the glory of the Lord departing from the Jerusalem temple just prior to its destruction.
1. Here in chapter 40-48, Ezekiel receives a vision of a new temple, the temple that is a figurative representation of the kingdom of God.
 2. In the first part of this vision, chapters 40-42, Ezekiel was taken on a visionary tour of this new temple while its dimensions were being measured by his angelic guide.
 3. As we noted last week, the dimensions emphasized both the perfection and the incorruptibility of this sanctuary.
 4. Yet as ideal as the temple was, there was still one thing missing from it.

5. It was just an empty shell until it was filled with the glory of the Lord.
6. Here in chapter 43, the prophet is brought back to the east gate of the temple to observe the climactic return of the glory of God, and Ezekiel is assured that the Lord will dwell here in this temple his people forever.
7. As we study this text tonight, we will consider it under three headings: the return of God's glory; the response to God's glory; and the context for God's glory.

II. The Return of God's Glory (1-7a)

- A. The chapter opens by telling us about the return of God's glory to his temple.
 1. The event that Ezekiel witnesses here is an obvious reversal of the vision of the Lord's abandonment of the temple in chapter 10.
 2. The glory that had exited the Jerusalem temple through its east gate now enters the eschatological temple through its east gate.
 3. This marks the fulfillment of what the Lord said in chapter 37:26-28: "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."
 4. The absence of God's presence in the temple indicated his absence from his people, which meant an absence of life.
 5. But God's return to his temple brings the promise of new life.
 6. In the words of one commentator, "Ezekiel's vision of the return of God's glory is the theological prerequisite for the restoration of the

people, just as surely as his vision of the departure of God's glory from the Jerusalem temple was a theological prerequisite for its destruction." [Duguid, 493]

- B. As in other biblical instances where people are confronted by the presence of God, this manifestation of God's glory is overwhelming to Ezekiel's senses.
1. He describes God's glory by saying that it was like the sound of rushing water, like the sound of something like Niagara Falls.
 2. He also says that the whole earth was lit up by the radiance of the divine glory.
 3. The scene before him brings to mind his earlier visions of God's glory.
 4. He thinks of the vision recorded in chapter 9, where Israelites guilty of idolatry were slaughtered at the command of the divine glory.
 5. He also thinks of the vision with which the book begins, where God was depicted on his majestic throne in a storm theophany.
 6. As in that earlier vision, this one strikes terror into the prophet's heart, causing him to fall on his face.
 7. Even though the Lord's return to the temple is an act of mercy, it in no way takes away from his resplendent greatness.
 8. This is an important point for us to ponder.
 9. It reminds us that while we enjoy sweet fellowship with God in Christ, this does not change the fact that our God is a consuming fire, a God towards whom we are always to show reverence and awe.
- C. After Ezekiel falls to the ground, he is lifted up by the Holy Spirit and brought into the inner court of the temple, where he beholds the glory of

God.

1. And from this point onward, it is the Lord himself, not an angelic guide, who completes Ezekiel's tour of the temple.
2. God declares to his prophet that this visionary temple is, "my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of my people forever."
3. One thing that stands out about that statement is that, previously in Israel's history, the ark of the covenant was known as God's footstool.
4. The ark was the embodiment of his presence, which is why it was housed in the Most Holy Place.
5. But the ark is not mentioned in Ezekiel's vision of the new temple.
6. This entire temple is the throne of the Lord.
7. This marks the fulfillment of the words that the Lord spoke to his people in Jeremiah 3: "And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart." (Jer 3:16-17 ESV)
8. This stands as further evidence that Ezekiel's vision is not about a literal temple in Israel's future but about the church as the true temple that God is building in Christ by causing the gospel to be proclaimed in all nations.

III. The Response to God's Glory (7b-11)

- A. We turn now to the second point on our outline: the response to God's glory.
1. The Lord tells Ezekiel that in this idealized temple, his people will no longer defile his name, as they had in the past.
 2. God says that the Israelites defiled his name in three ways: by their whoring, by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places, and by setting their thresholds by his threshold.
 3. The reference to whoring is probably a metaphor for idolatry, which is often described as spiritual adultery in the Old Testament.
 4. The reference to the dead bodies of their kings is not easy to translate, as you can see by the footnotes in the ESV.
 5. It could be that this is referring to some kind of ancestor cult in which monuments to Israel's kings were set up in the temple courts.
 6. This is reflected in the NIV, where the phrase is translated as "the lifeless idols of their kings."
 7. And the reference to placing their thresholds next to that of God may be an expression of God's displeasure that Solomon's palace was located just adjacent to the temple, and was much bigger than the temple.
 8. In committing these and other abominations, the Israelites were defiling God's name.
 9. This is what we do whenever we sin.
 10. This is why our Lord calls us, as his redeemed people, to put away sin by dying to it daily and by putting on the works that flow from our new nature.

- B. The next thing that the Lord tells Ezekiel to do is to describe the temple to the people of Israel so that they may be ashamed of their iniquities.
 - 1. The dimensions of this temple testified to God's holiness by depicting the absolute necessity of keeping anything unclean from coming into God's presence.
 - 2. This is why the physical temple was set up in the way that it was.
 - 3. It is the reason for the entire sacrificial system, and for all of Israel's ceremonial and civil laws.
 - 4. These things had a pedagogical purpose for God's people.
 - 5. They were meant to show them how their sin prevented them from coming into God's holy presence, and how the Lord made it possible for them to be restored to his presence.

- C. In our text, Ezekiel is being told that the idealized end times temple serves the same purpose.
 - 1. The very design of this temple stresses the need for sin to be dealt with and turned away from if God's people are going to live in communion with him.
 - 2. When Ezekiel conveys the temple designs to his fellow Israelites, they should respond by being ashamed of their iniquities.
 - 3. In the same way, we should respond to all that God has revealed about himself in his Word by being humbled by our sin.
 - 4. We must never forget that we have not done anything to earn the right to enjoy God's favor.
 - 5. God restores us to himself and bestows his favor upon us by grace alone.

IV. The Context for God's Glory (12-27)

- A. This brings us to the third point on our outline: the context for God's glory.
1. This idea is set forth in verse 12, where it says, "This is the law of the temple: the whole territory on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy."
 2. In order for God's glory to dwell in the midst of his people, his dwelling place must be kept holy.
 3. This means the church needs to maintain its sense of God's holiness, along with its commitment to its own holiness.
 4. One of the themes that R.C. Sproul repeatedly stressed in his writings and teachings was that a biblical understanding of the holiness of God is an absolute necessity if we are going to have a true understanding of the gospel.
 5. Yet there are many in the church today who are so focused on being relevant and on meeting people's felt needs that they are losing sight of God's holiness.
 6. Listen to the way this was described by theologian David Wells twenty-five years ago: "The loss of the traditional vision of God as holy is now manifested everywhere in the evangelical world. It is the key to understanding why sin and grace have become such empty terms. What depth or meaning...can these terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette... Divorced from the holiness of God, our Gospel becomes indistinguishable from any of a host of alternative self-help doctrines... Divorced from the holiness of God, our worship becomes mere entertainment... It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical mind." [*No Place for Truth*, 300]
 7. Those words were true of much of the church when they were first written in the early 1990's, and I think they are true of even more of

the church today.

8. The thing that makes this so sobering is that our text in Ezekiel makes it clear that the true church is identified by its holiness.
 9. When a church ceases to be holy, it ceases to be a true church.
- B. Of course, the only way the church can be a holy temple in the Lord is if God makes provision for the atonement of sins.
1. In Ezekiel's temple vision, we see how the Lord does this through the symbolism of the new temple's altar.
 2. While the altar in Solomon's temple was located in the outer court of the temple, this altar is located at the geometric center of Ezekiel's idealized temple.
 3. This places an emphasis upon the centrality of atonement in the arrangement that the Lord is setting up.
 4. It points to the central role of the cross of Christ in establishing peace between God and his people.
- C. The altar in Ezekiel's temple had to be purified for seven days before it could be fit for sacred use.
1. This is reflective of the rites of purification that were performed on the vessels used in the old temple.
 2. Those vessels did not have any spiritual significance in themselves.
 3. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, they were copies of heavenly realities in the true spiritual temple. (see Heb. 9:23)
 4. And while those copies had to be purified with the blood of animals that served as types, the heavenly things that the copies represent had to be purified by a better sacrifice, by the blood of Christ.

5. This is what this part of Ezekiel's vision is pointing to.
6. It points forward to the fact that Christ "has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Heb 9:26 ESV)

V. Conclusion

- A. The most remarkable thing about the gospel is that it makes a way for us to have the glory of the Lord in our midst as a source of blessing, rather than as a source of sheer terror that would bring about our undoing.
- B. Because of what Christ has accomplished on our behalf, we are able to behold God's glory in Jesus Christ.
- C. And as we do this, the Spirit transforms us so that we begin to reflect God's glory.
- D. As the apostle Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 3, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18)