

"When God moves out"

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[0 : 0 0] our reading this morning is from ezekeil chapter 8 to the end of chapter 9 and that's on page 836 of the bibles in front of you ezekeil chapter 8 starting at the first verse in the sixth year in the six months on the fifth day while i was sitting in my house and the elders of judah were sitting before me the hand of the sovereign lord came on me there i looked and i saw a figure like that of a man from what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire and from there up his appearance was as bright as glowing metal he stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of god he took me to jerusalem to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood and there before me was the glory of the god of israel as in the vision i had seen in the plain then he said to me son of man look towards the north so i looked and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar i saw this idol of jealousy and he said to me son of man do you see what they are doing the utterly detestable things the israelites are doing here things that would drive me far from my sanctuary but you will see things that are even more detestable then he brought me to the entrance to the court i looked and i saw a hole in the wall he said to me son of man now dig into the wall so i dug into the wall and i saw a doorway there and he said to me go in and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here so i went in and looked and i saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and unclean animals and all the idols of israel in front of them stood 70 elders of israel and jazaniah son of shaphan was standing among them each had a censer in his hand and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising he said to me son of man have you seen what the elders are doing in the darkness each at the shrine of his own idol they say the lord does not see us the lord has forsaken the land again he said you will see them doing things that are even more detestable then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the lord and i saw women sitting there mourning the god of tammuz he said to me do you see this son of man you will see things that are even more detestable than this then he brought me into the inner court of the house of the lord and there at the entrance to the temple between the portico and the altar were about 25 men with their backs towards the temple of the lord and their faces towards the east they were bowing down to the sun in the east he said to me have you seen this son of man is it a trivial matter for the people of judah to do the detestable things they are doing here must they also fill the land with violence and continually arouse my anger look at them putting the branch to their nose therefore i will deal with them in anger i will not look on them with pity or spare them although they shout in my ears i will not listen to them then i heard him call out in a loud voice bring near those who are appointed to execute judgment on the city each with a weapon in his hand and i saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate which faces north each with a deadly weapon in his hand with them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side they came in and stood beside the bronze altar now the glory of the god of israel went above up from above the cherubim where it had been and moved the threshold of the temple then the lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him go throughout the city jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it as i listened he said to the others follow him through the city and kill without showing pity or compassion slaughter the old men the young men and women the mothers and children but do not touch anyone who has the mark begin at my sanctuary so they began with the old men who were in front of the temple then he said to them defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain go so they went out and began killing throughout the city while they were killing and i was left alone i fell face down crying out alas sovereign lord are you going to destroy the entire remnant of israel and this outpouring of your wrath on jerusalem he answered me the sin of the people of israel and judah is exceedingly great the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice they say the

lord has forsaken the land the lord does not see so i will not look on them with pity or spare them but i will bring down on their own heads what they have done then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back words saying i have done as you commanded this is the word of the lord thanks so much for reading that katrina if you could keep your bibles open at ezekiel eight and nine we're looking at eight nine ten and eleven this morning and you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful and you might be wondering what on earth uh we're going to do with a reading like that so let's ask for god's help as we turn to his word let's pray we praise you heavenly father that you have not left us in the dark but have made yourself known to us and we ask that by your spirit you will speak to us now that you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word for we ask in jesus name amen well we can all relate to having a bad day and this morning we're joining ezekiel on a very bad day it might even be the worst day of his life which is saying something in ezekiel's case because he's already had some very bad days in chapter one last week we found him by the rivers of babylon he's 30 years old and we found him in the wrong place far from home and feeling far from god we've just got a map to show you um the significance of where he is on that map you can see down to the south on the east side of the mediterranean sea is judah by jerusalem that's where the people of god lived that had been the promised land that god had promised them and he promised that if they were faithful to him they could stay in that land with his presence with them but if they were faithless they wouldn't be able to stay in the land and the babylonian empire is up to the north now in ezekiel's time the temple is still in jerusalem where god's presence is but ezekiel is right round to the east by this place the kibar canal in babylon he's one of a number of people who were taken by the babylonian empire and scattered they're in exile so it was a terrible time for him and last week we heard as well that in ezekiel chapter one he had a bad day where he was totally overwhelmed by a vision of the glory of god that left him literally flawed a week later in chapter two ezekiel had another bad day where god called him to be a watchman for israel with a message that no one wants to hear and no one is going to listen to him

then in between then and now ezekiel has had a whole series of bad days for over a year because god gave him sign acts to act out like street theater and he had to go out each day and lie on his side for over a year 390 days probably going out to do that a few hours each day and then he had to lie on his other side for another 40 days and he had to cook all of his meals on cow dung and then he had to shave off all of his hair so harry styles in the news this week for his buzz cut but ezekiel had to shave off his hair with a sharp sword so that was his bad hair day and then here in chapters 8 9 10 and 11 he has what must have been the worst day of his life and through all this what's happening is god is making himself known to his people in ezekiel again and again we get this phrase from god then they will know that i am the lord god is acting and explaining his actions so that people will know him so whether you're someone who today feels you're on the outside looking in at the christian faith you want to know about the god who is there or you're a christian and you already do know god through jesus but you want to know him better ezekiel is a great person to be spending time with essentially we've got two things this morning how god's people reject him and then how god responds so first of all ezekiel sees how god's people reject him have a look with me again at verse 1 of chapter 8 in the sixth year in the sixth month on the fifth day while i was sitting in my house and the elders of judah were sitting before me the hand of the sovereign lord came on me there well from that we know the exact date it's the fifth it's the 18th of september 592 bc and ezekiel meets again the man on fire last week in chapter one we heard about his vision and if you were here you remember there were these whirling gyroscopic wheels and then there were these warrior angels these fearsome cherubim and then above that this awesome vault and above the vault a throne and on the throne was this man on fire and ezekiel said this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of god and i fell face down the man is back verse 2 i looked and i saw a figure like that of a man from what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire and from there up his appearance as bright as glowing metal and he takes ezekiel by the hair and lifts him up and the spirit carries him to jerusalem so remember this is a vision it's not really happening to ezekiel but god is taking him on a guided tour a bit like if you if you're watching you know a bbc travel program and it was kind of greatest buildings on planet earth and someone like michael palin or michael portillo is kind of showing you around these buildings and you feel like you're you're there um or you know there's one um great hotels beyond the lobby or something um but imagine you were kind of um not just able to watch something like that but maybe this will happen in a few years time that you could have a virtual reality headset that meant that while you're being shown around this place it's

fully immersive and you can like look around and it's like you're there and imagine that it's alive so you're actually seeing what's going on in the moment that's a bit like what's happening to ezekiel so what does he see in this sensory experience well the first place he gets brought to is the temple and he's approaching it and there are outer courts of the temple inner courts outer courts a wall and he's approaching the north entrance and maybe his heart was starting to lift in anticipation and there's actually a wonderful moment in verse four where it says

and there before me was the glory of the god of israel as in the vision i'd seen in the plane i think what he's probably seeing there is the glory cloud of god when solomon the king who had the temple built some four centuries earlier had commissioned the temple in prayer the presence of god had entered the temple and it was a glory cloud that so filled the holy place inside the temple that the priest had to come out because of the glory and it's as though ezekiel can see that glorious presence um through the through the entrance in the distance but then he sees something horrible verse five then he said to me son of man that just that's just meaning man if there's nothing special about that expression when it comes to ezekiel son of man look towards the north so i looked and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar i saw this idol of jealousy so where this is presumably an entrance through which you could see the altar in the courts and up to the side he sees a statue to a false god a god that a foreign nation would have worshipped and twice ezekiel calls it the idol that provokes to jealousy and the jealousy that it provokes is the lord's jealousy one of the ways god reveals his character to us is that he is a jealous god and we often think of the word jealous as negative because we think of kind of resenting someone because they have something that we want but when it comes to divine jealousy it's actually an aspect of god's good faithful holy character it's jealousy like the jealousy that a faithful husband might feel if he found that his wife was having an affair this sense of for the lord his people's affection and trust that should belong exclusively to him is being given to another and in verse six we get a phrase that we hear three times in the chapter son of man do you see what they are doing the utterly detestable things that israelites are doing here but you will see things that are even more detestable and you're thinking well what could be worse than this in the epicenter of bible religion in the world at that time well again on his way through the through the gate to the temple courts something strange catches ezekiel's eye he sees a hole in the wall and um we hear about it in verse seven then he brought me to the entrance to the court i looked and i saw a hole in the wall so ezekiel like starts digging he gets bricks out of the way and he sees a door there's a secret room in the walls and um who's in the secret room let's have a look verse 10 so i went in and looked and i saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and unclean animals and all the idols of israel so who's in there who's in this broom cupboard with these pictures of millipedes and centipedes it's the leaders of god's people verse 11 in front of them stood 70 elders of israel and jeazaniah was standing among them that name i think it means the lord hears so ironic god is hearing this and they're hiding away in the dark they're worshipping they're worshipping millipedes it's absolutely crazy and you think what do they think god's going to make of this but it turns out they don't think god can see it verse 12 they say the lord does not see us the lord has forsaken the land in other words the lord's hand of discipline has fallen on his people because because they have turned from him and instead of seeing that and recognizing that for what it is

and turning more back to god they have turned further from him thinking we god has abandoned us we must put our trust in anything else that we can find hence the the false worship the idolatry and they think they can get away with it because it's dark and we can kid ourselves about the dark today as well we might not stand with incense before centipedes but when we talk about idols really an idol is anything that you choose to love and serve and trust to give you what only god can give you john calvin famously said that our hearts are idol factories in other words we we take things in our lives and we we kind of in our hearts start to build our lives on them and look to them good often good things things things like um relationships or success or money but we take them and we start to look to those things for our joy and our fulfillment um and our bright future instead of trusting god and what he gives us and to think that god doesn't see that things get an especially lasting hold on us don't they when we can live for them in the dark as we're seeing what's happening in israel when you think about things like addictions to gambling or alcohol or pornography or drugs they're all the more enslaving when they're things that we can do in secret and other people don't know and often um we can find in the christian life that just telling a christian friend about a struggle we have just starts to break the power of it because there's something about the power of darkness and people not knowing that enslaves us well ezekiel is seeing that in israel but then his tour goes on into the

light he goes through to the temple to the very front doors the the magnificent front of the temple presence of god inside and he sees these 25 men in front of the door what are they doing verse 16 with their backs towards the temple of the lord and their faces towards the east they were bowing down to the sun in the east and as they do that of course they've turned their backs on god they're showing their backsides to god as they bow to the sun and the horror ezekiel is seeing and grasping here is that it is possible for the professing people of god to turn their backs on god and an example to think about today of that would be the institutional church in any time in any season in any place um when we think in our lands of the scottish episcopal church here in scotland or the church of scotland or the church of england south of the border these are ways that you have something that is the visible identifiable people of god in our time and and if somebody who's not a christian wants to know about the god of the christian faith they might go into one of those churches to find out from the people and week by week you would see in those institutions people gather in church buildings and songs are sung and bread and wine are used and don't mishear me in many of them around the country of course you will find genuine sincere faithful people of god but recent decisions by the governing bodies of all three of those institutions show us that there are people in them in the governing bodies who have stopped listening to god's word and ezekiel's tour at that time reminds us that what concerns god with his people is who are his people really worshipping today in their hearts

[20:18] and we need to feel how god is right to be enormously offended when his people called by him to himself and rescued have turned their backs on him so that brings us to our second point ezekiel sees how god will respond and we get that first in chapter 9 as god judges his rebellious people we meet six men in verse 2 who may well represent babylon as we'll see beside them is a man clothed in linen probably an angel the angel marks some people in judah in jerusalem in verse 4 we'll come back to that but look at verse 5 of chapter 9 as i listened he the man in linen said to the others follow him through the city and kill without showing pity or compassion slaughter the old men the young men and the women the mothers and children but do not touch anyone who has the mark begin at my sanctuary so they began with the old men they were in front of the temple they're the ones that ezekiel saw worshipping the sun and this helps us understand the spiritual reasons for a historical event that was future at this time for israel but is in the past for us that the babylonian empire came back in 587 bc and it was a disaster a devastating horrific invasion the city was destroyed the temple set on fire and plundered people died people were taken into exile now babylon was doing what it did in many places it was building an empire sacking cities capturing and killing people but why did god allow them to do it to his people the answer from ezekiel chapter 8 is because his people had decided they weren't his people anymore they had chosen not to worship him the lord reminds us in ezekiel in chapter 18 at the end that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather longs that they would turn back to him and live that is god's desire from his people and he's warned his people for generations he sent prophets and prophets as with messengers with warning to his people turn back to god but the message ezekiel has is now the time is up for jerusalem now if we'd been there we would have been appalled by the human injustice that we would have seen we care as a generation very strongly about human injustice and in verse 9 you hear the verdict of god chapter 9 verse 9 that the sin of the people of israel and judah is exceedingly great the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice but what god sees and invites us to see through spiritual eyes is that the human injustice that people are doing is just the bad fruit that shows us something deeply unhealthy going on in their hearts that they the the big problem the real problem is they don't trust god and they don't love god so they won't listen to god and this judgment on god's people then is a foretaste of the judgment that we'll all face one day the bible says one day we'll all stand before the lord jesus christ when he appears in glory and in hebrews chapter 10 which is a new testament letter written to people that were in danger of drifting from the christian faith there are warnings for them not to drift warnings to persevere urging them to persevere and in chapter 10 of hebrews it says it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living god and folks it's actually really good news that god is

like this i don't know what you think but in my experience one of the biggest barriers to people looking into the person of jesus and his claims today in scotland is that when people think of church they think of people with like a thin veneer of religious respectability who are no different from anyone else but they're self-righteous and judgmental even corrupt or for my kids in school i think it's like scottish curriculum they about glasgow they read this book divided city and the message

they hear um if it's not kind of carefully explained is that the kind of sectarian divide in a city like glasgow is like a christian thing there are these there's one type of christian the protestants and there's another type the catholics and they just go out and fight each other on the streets and people kind of think of that as as a kind of christian thing from the outside as though it's got anything at all to do with the god of the bible and the message that ezekiel is hearing that we're hearing through him today remind us that god is not fooled by people saying that they are christian by people using that as a kind of tribal badge just as jesus confronted the religious hypocrites in his time and condemned them while inviting anyone who's willing to admit that they need help that they need forgiveness to come to him and find life so god judges his rebellious people the second thing we see is god departs from his rebellious people he moves out so the glory cloud of god's presence starts in the holy place in the temple under statues of of just above statues of cherubim in that holy place but have a look at chapter 10 verse 4 then the glory of the lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple the cloud filled the temple and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of god and then ezekiel sees the war chariot again those massive wheels and the cherubim on the move um from he saw it in chapter 1 in verse 16 he says then the cherubim rose upward these were the living creatures i'd seen by the river kebar and in verse 18 it's like the war chariot has pulled up alongside the north gate and the glory cloud has moved out of the temple to the threshold of the temple and it's like god sees the chariot pull up and shouts taxi and he gets in god calls for an uber have a look at verse 18 then the glory of the lord departed from above the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim while i watched the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground and as they went the wheels went with them they stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the lord's house and the glory of the god of israel was above them there's another agonizing weight and then if you look at chapter 11 verse 23 chapter 11 verse 23 the glory of the lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it that's the mount of olives so the glory cloud has left the city and that's god moving out for a few more years jerusalem will still look as though it is the place for bible believing religion in the world but god has gone the whole place is under his judgment and just as in ezekiel's time the visible people of god in jerusalem came under god's judgment god's hand of judgment can fall on a church today that turns its back on him churches closed today all

the time it happens in glasgow and all around the world today and it can be disconcerting for those who still trust god we can wonder has god lost control and there are different reasons why a church might close but sometimes the uncomfortable reality is there are churches where people have stopped listening to god so his judgment has fallen on them and one of the reasons we sometimes find that hard to get and hard to see is because those churches might still be approved by the world around them but here in ezekiel the people of god are under judgment because the standards of the world matter more to them than the word of god if we just look at that in chapter 11 verse 12 there's a bit of a dispute in chapter 11 chapter 10 and 11 about god's judgment and chapter 12 chapter 11 verse 12 god says this and you will know that i am the lord for you have not followed my decrees or kept my laws but have conformed to the standards of the nations around you so god calls us to be different to be distinctive we're meant to have different values to the world around us to the culture it won't matter to god that the world speaks well of us if the world applauds our concern for the poor for justice for climate change if alongside that we're actually not listening to him we're not putting him first and when god's people stop listening to him there can come a point when the life giver departs and he hands a church over to its own folly in revelation we hear jesus's seven letters to churches his letter to the church in ephesus he says that they've forsaken the love they first had for him he urges them to repent to turn back to god and he says he warns them if they won't do that he will close them down he says i will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place when god's people turn from god and they don't repent no matter how ancient their traditions how esteemed their reputations how glorious their buildings or how blessed their past history god's glorious presence will just depart from them that's the big idea for us this morning but just at the end of the vision ezekiel is given a glimmer of hope hope that's coming later in the book that's our third point ezekiel is given a glimmer of hope there are people who will be spared from the judgment just like at the passover when god's judgment fell on egypt in the exodus and there were people who trusted god and their doorposts were marked with the blood of the lamb and they were saved the man in linen is told this in chapter 9 verse 4 go throughout the city of jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it and then the those who come in judgment don't touch the ones with the mark it's important for those

people to understand they are still going to suffer in the judgment that's coming just as ezekiel is suffering in exile but they need to see that god is showing them mercy he sees their real faith their mourning over the way their generation has turned from god and they have to understand why god has to judge these faithless people then in chapter 11 verse 17 we get more of this hope god shows us what's coming later in the book and we're going to get there in a few weeks time we're going to see the good news that follows this bad news today have a look at verse 17 god says to ezekiel i will gather you from

the nations and bring you back from the countries where you've been scattered and i will give you back the land of israel again there's going to be a return a new exodus the people who trust god in exile are going to come back but a change of address isn't going to help them we've seen that people in their hearts are bent on rejecting god they'll forget him again so god has the solution and look how many times he says i will from verse 19 i will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them i will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws and because of that they will be my people and i will be their god the mark the man in linen was to place on the foreheads of the faithful was an x the shape of a cross and for us today it's when we repent and we turn to our savior jesus that any of us can inherit that hope and receive the fresh start with god and a secure future with him so this morning we see that for the people of god there should be no complacency from looking at the past past performance is no guarantee of future blessing each day is a new day when we're invited to turn to god to depend on him but as we see god bringing his judgment on his people who left him we can rejoice with trembling gratitude that we have a savior who went to the cross to fully exhaust and endure the judgment of god that we deserve let's pray together heavenly father these are very sobering words from ezekiel where we struggle would you help us where we have drifted or gone astray would you grant us true repentance and bring us back to you we thank you that the story of this generation ezekiel's time does not need to be our story because of your gracious gift that you offer to each of us in christ of new hearts and a new spirit so we ask would you forgive us and help us from now on to live lives renewed by your spirit confident in your faithful love for we ask in jesus name amen