

Then They Will Know That I Am the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 November 2023

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] chapter 1 found on page 830 of the church bibles in my 30th year in the fourth month on the fifth day while i was among the exiles by the river kibar the heavens were opened and i saw visions of god on the fifth of the month it was the fifth year of the exile of king jehoiakim the word of the lord came to ezeziel the priest the son of busi by the river kibar in the land of the babylonians there the hand of the lord was on him i looked and i saw a violent storm coming out of the north an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light the center of the fire looked like glowing metal and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures in appearance their form was human but each of them had four faces and four wings their legs were straight their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze under their wings on their four sides they had human hands all four of them had faces and wings and the wings of one touched the wings of the other each one went straight ahead they did not turn as they moved their faces looked like this each of the four had the face of a human being and on the right side each had the face of a lion and on the left the face of an ox each also had the face of an eagle such were their faces they each had two wings spreading out upwards each wing touching that of the creature on either side and each had two other wings covering its body each one went straight ahead wherever the spirit would go they would go without turning as they went the appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches fire moved back and forth among the creatures it was bright and lightning flashed out of it the creature sped back and forth like flashes of lightning as I looked at the living creatures I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces this was the appearance and structure of the wheels they sparkled like topaz and all four looked alike each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel as they moved they would go in any one of the four directions the creature faced the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went their rims were high and awesome and all four rims were full of eyes all around when the living creatures moved the wheels beside them moved and when the living creatures rose from the ground the wheels also rose wherever the spirit would go they would go and the wheels would rise along with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels when the creatures moved they also moved when the creatures stood still they also stood still and when the creatures rose from the ground the wheels all rose along with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels spread out above their heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault sparkling like crystal and awesome under the vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other and each had two wings covering its body when the creatures moved i heard the sound of their wings like the roar of rushing waters like the voice of the almighty like the tumult of an army when they stood still they lowered their wings then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli and high above on the throne was a

figure like that of a man i saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal as if full of fire and up from there down he looked like fire and brilliant light surrounded him like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day so was the radiance around him this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the lord when i saw it i fell face down and i heard the voice of one speaking catherine thanks for reading good morning saint silas if we've not met before i'm martin i'm the lead pastor here it's great to see you and uh if you if you could keep your bibles open at page 830 that'd be a great help as we look together at ezekiel chapter one you can find an outline inside the notice sheet as you look at this together and we're in this new series as a church looking at ezekiel in the coming weeks so let's ask for god's help as we turn to his word let's pray almighty god and gracious father we ask that this morning you would give each of us a deeper sense of your glory an experience of your holiness that would change us appropriately help us to respond rightly to you for we ask in jesus name amen well lots of people can remember their first day of work in a new place especially if um it's starting work somewhere having trained and been prepared for some time to start um it's well known and often said by our medics at church that the key day to avoid getting sick in scotland is the first wednesday in august every year because that's the day that doctors after years of medical training are finally released upon actual real people who are really unwell and some of them feeling far too overconfident and others completely bewildered well for ezekiel his career was decided for him we find in verse 3 that he was a priest and that's an old testament priest so he was born in um 623 bc before christ who came to be the priest our high priest and all the kind of shadows of the priesthood in the old testament were fulfilled in what jesus came to do and to be but in ezekiel's time to be a priest was something you were born into it was your inheritance your privilege that in your working life you would serve at the magnificent temple in jerusalem solomon's temple um built uh glimmering with gold and um of the finest wood and the priests would be able to go in to the holy place and they represented the people before the living god bringing sacrifices and offerings to him and uh the the specialist um training that you had for that job um was uh became to maturity at the age of 30 when you had your first year working and serving as a priest so in verse 1 we meet ezekiel and it's his 30th year it's the big year the first day of the rest of his life but as we find him he's not going through security clearance at the temple to start work we find him in verse 1 by the rivers of babylon he says i was among the exiles by the river kebar and he tells us why in verse 2 on the fifth of the month it was the fifth year of the exile of king jehoiakim so it's 593 bc and something devastating

has happened nebuchadnezzar who was the emperor of babylon to the north of israel went to jerusalem and besieged it and then took away back to babylon the king and a whole load of other people and for ezekiel and the other refugees with him the land they've been forced away from is the promised land it's the land god gave to them it was the place where they met with god god had come with them into the promised land and they encountered the presence of god through that temple in jerusalem and key to god keeping his promises of blessing for them and living in that land was the faithful king in david's royal line but now ezekiel is with the refugees in babylon carted off and the king has gone as well with them so we picture a grieving man a confused man ezekiel could have been asking questions like what is god doing is the god of the bible really there what power does my god the god of the bible have in this new place surrounded by people who are strangers to the bible and to the god of scripture with all this babylonian power and wealth and all their idolatry has god abandoned us here and we might well have times in our lives where we might ask similar questions of god when we look at the world news or at the persecuted church when we look at our own lives in sadness or in sickness when we look at the church in scotland and we see a generation who have forgotten god or when we think about the living church today in scotland where all around scotland today there'll be real communities of christian faith setting up for church in school halls or community centers they're having to rent while the mainline denominations have vast empty assets that they're selling off to become house building projects and we might ask what is god doing here does god still have any power in the world today in our city today where we're surrounded by alternative authority and power is he really there so we join ezekiel and we're not told but perhaps he was by the river himself this irrigation canal praying on the day when he knew more than ever before that he was far from home and far from where he belongs maybe he was lamenting as he found himself a priest without a temple and then he looks up and he sees a storm coming and then he realizes it's not a storm god's giving him a vision it's a vision that changes ezekiel's life that begins his call to be a prophet a messenger from god to the people and he shares it with us here this morning so we're going to focus on the storm and then the wheels and then the throne so our first point the storm and the sublime glory of god look at what ezekiel tells us in verse 4 i looked and i saw a violent storm coming out of the north an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light the center of the fire looked like glowing metal and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures so a terrifying violent storm you can imagine it being the kind if you've ever seen a kind of massive storm cloud coming or even just thinking about the images a few weeks ago of um the storms on the off the coast hitting scotland and the way that the waves were being forced up and you can have this sense sometimes of seeing a storm

and and knowing you should run and hide and take shelter but the storm being so kind of immense and glorious that you're transfixed by it you can't stop watching and uh this storm cloud is on fire so you know we're a people we're impressed by glasgow this is a storm cloud on fire in the middle it looks like the sun or like um i was thinking of when you see a blacksmith's forge and it's kind of molten metal inside this tremendous heat and that kind of fierce heat on a massive scale and you'd have thought that nothing could stand it like like going too near a star but then ezekiel sees four living creatures emerging from the cloud the furnace going on in verse 5 in appearance their form was human but each of them had four faces and four wings their legs were straight their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze so this great picture of strength and of splendor they've got these awesome wings but they've also got the dexterity and the ability of hands in verse 8 under their wings on their four sides they had human hands all four of them had faces and wings and the wings of one touched the wings of another it's a magnificent picture and then deliberateness or purposefulness each one went straight ahead they did not turn as they moved so as these creatures emerge from this blazing storm cloud they are kind of off the charts magnificent and they get closer because ezekiel can start to make out their faces in verse 10 each has four faces a human a lion an ox and an eagle and the sense here is that these are the four royal creatures the four creatures with dominion the lion is king of the wild the plains the ox is the king of the domestic of domestic animals with its unrivaled strength the eagle rules the skies and humanity has dominion over the animal kingdom and the creatures themselves are ablaze verse 13 the appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches fire moved back and forth among the creatures it was bright and lightning flashed out of it and then previously we heard them moving inexorably in one direction nothing can stop it but then by verse 14 we hear another picture of the movement that they're like a thunderstorm like lightning bolts verse 14 the creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning now to just stop and think about one of those pictures would be a bit like sitting on the front row at the cinema you know no one likes to sit on the front row because you kind of get too focused on one bit of the screen and what we're meant to do is kind of take a step back and let each of these images give us a deep impression of ezekiel's vision of reality but what we can't do as well is piece them all together and come up with something coherent a friend once heard a sermon on this chapter on ezekiel and he said to me why didn't the guy just put a picture up so that we could see it but of course a picture wouldn't help us because ezekiel is describing the indescribable so he's just trying to like an impressionist artist he's just throwing up image after image for us to kind of be impressed by and the extraordinary thing is that all that we've seen so far are the guards we know from chapter 10 when these creatures appear again that they are cherubim which is a bible word

for god's warrior angels his royal guard and describing them so gloriously builds the anticipation for us back in august here a lot of you were here for this that we had um two sundays where it was the is the world cycling championships in the summer in glasgow and um the the road cycling event the finals on two sundays uh came past uh on the road outside so we had our service and then we went out and we um offered refreshments to the crowds who were gathering and the road was closed and and for quite a long period while the road was closed it was just empty there was this kind of waiting and then the motorcade started coming so there was cars turning down off university avenue round onto gibson street and coming past and into the park and these cars were coming and they were impressive because there were cars from the sponsors throwing out free gifts and there were cars from the teams with the back all these spare bikes on the roof and there were cars with from the media with commentary and yet each time it sort of built up this sense of there's something coming people in here were oh something's happening now and people were going out to and all of it built up this sense of anticipation and then at last the race leader came down on her bike and the the peloton behind her and you realize this is the fastest cyclist in the world and uh just as we had that build-up that gave us this sense of the greatness of something coming so with ezekiel we have these four blazing warrior guards with their faces and their movement like lightning and they're from another dimension of greatness and we want to know if they're the support act who is this that is coming and how could he be even greater than they are but of course he is off the scale greater than them because he created them so the creatures communicate to us god's holiness god's holiness is his infinite beyondness how different he is how set apart from us that's the storm next we're going to think about the wheels and the unexpected place of god we've already had a lot of movement but now the wheels in verse 15 if you have a look as i looked at the living creatures i saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces and then he tells us they're resplendent these wheels they're beautiful verse 16 this was the appearance and structure of the wheels they sparkled like topaz and all four looked alike and then the wheels can move in any direction they're like a gyroscope wheel so later on in the book he calls them the whirling wheels and he says here um that they for each one there's a wheel within the wheel and wherever they go they see everything so verse 18 their rims were high and awesome and all four rims were full of eyes all around and they go wherever the creatures go and at the end of verse 21 we hear the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels so the message here is god is on the move god is great but that doesn't make him slow to react you might remember in in march 2021 the um the ever given which was this massive container ship and it was going through the sues canal and it got sort of wedged in wind and it got stuck there for weeks those people at st silas in i'm like waiting for deliveries and they're stuck on a ship that's behind the ever given in the sues canal um well when we get a grip on the sheer greatness of god we might make the mistake of starting to think of him as being so great that he'd be slow to react slow to turn and see things like a naval aircraft carrier

[20:18] well the wheels here demonstrate that god is glorious but he is fleet-footed he goes wherever he chooses whenever he chooses and picture how significant that is for the exiles to hear far from home they thought they were far from god but now they see that god is not tied to the temple in jerusalem god goes everywhere just as for us today i wonder if we might think uh in the same way that they felt distance from god in miles is god really relevant here he's far away we might feel distant from god strangely in time we might think well the bible was written such a long time ago is god really relevant here and we need to hear that god is everywhere and he is on the move we sometimes use the language about coming to church that we go to meet with god and um there is something special about gathering with other believers we've all got the holy spirit and he draws us together to engage with him at the same time we shouldn't use the phrase of coming here to meet with god as though we're implying that he's not out there where we go out into the world he is with his people hiding from shelling today in the gaza strip or in ukraine just as he is with us in the day-to-day stress of normal life if you walk into a stressful work environment or you you're looking to live differently on a sports pitch or you hear the dressing room banter in the changing rooms he's with us when we're on a night out on great western road or down by his road with friends and when there is reassurance there if you depend on god that he is with you wherever you go ezekiel's first hearers needed to know god is with them if they depend on him where they are as refugees at the same time there is something very disconcerting about this picture because what we're seeing is god on the move to act in judgment the storm cloud approaching is unsettling it's a dangerous picture and as you picture the intersecting wheels at the bottom of the creatures what we're actually seeing here what ezekiel is seeing is a war chariot and not one that can only move forwards and backwards one that can move anywhere faster than lightning and ezekiel sees this war chariot coming from the north which was where israelites view enemies come from historically that's where their enemies would come and attack so who is this riding out in battle against the people of god how shocking how horrifying to contemplate that it could be the lord himself the divine warrior come to judge his people why because they have rejected him they've set themselves against him and if you're against god then he's against you and the same daunting message could apply to any of us today the eyes on the rims of those wheels remind us that just as god can go everywhere he sees everything he sees what's really going on as the writer of psalm 139 says there is nowhere that i can go to hide from god and the truth that god is there is a double-edged truth it's precious comfort for us when we depend on him and a wake-up call if we think that we can hide things from him you know and give a thin veneer of kind of religious respectability but be covering things up from his gaze and pretending there are

things in our lives that he doesn't see and for ezekeiel and his first hearers if there was one place they thought that they would be secure as god's people it was in jerusalem they wanted to get back there but as we see god on the move here it's a it's like a prequel a prelude for what we're going to see later in the book that this same moving chariot with god on it is going to leave his people in jerusalem god is moving out from his home with them because in their hearts they left him so there's this deeply uncomfortable tension i find as i'm reading ezekeiel the book that we were made to be with god and when he saves us he brings us to be with himself that picture jesus told of us turning back to god like the son who's run off the prodigal son and we come back and the father lovingly embraces us and welcomes us home but what ezekeiel sees is that when you turn from god when you move away from him it's not just that you lose the blessing of his presence with you that our hearts were made for you also have to face him as your judge and that leads us to our third point this morning as ezekeiel lifts his eyes above the creatures so we've seen the storm clouds and the wheels thirdly the throne and the righteous reign of god let's look at verse 22 spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault sparkling like crystal and awesome i love that that ezekeiel describes this bit as awesome because it's the first bit in the chapter i didn't think was awesome a vault and ezekeiel says it was awesome it's sparkled like crystal and he's overwhelmed by the noise verse 24 when the creatures moved i heard the sound of their wings like the roar of rushing waters like the voice of the almighty like the tumult of an army so now it's like as though you imagine going on a guided tour of a massive waterfall like niagara falls or victoria falls and being brought behind the waterfall and all you can hear is this deafening overwhelming noise of the water cascading down and then the wings stop and then he does hear something he hears a voice verse 25 then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings and the voice is coming from this majestic throne verse 26 above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man and then notice how careful ezekeiel now is not to say that he sees god the figure was like that of a man then he says from the waist up he was like glowing metal it was like a whole body full of fire and from the waist down it's like fire and all around him is this brilliant light emanating so do we see what ezekeiel sees picture again these four magnificent whirling wheels above them four terrifying wonderful lightning bolt warriors above them a vault that sparkles like a million crystals and above it on the throne the man on fire he says in verse 28 the radiance emanating from him all around him is like the brilliance of a rainbow as though the light is refracting out from him into every color possible everything's exploding out from

him and we think he's going to say i've i've seen god but look at what he says in verse 28 this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the lord even after everything he sees with at least three steps from seeing god the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the lord he's on his throne because he is the god who reigns and that means he's absolutely in control whatever our situation ezekiel needs to hear that far from home and he's on the throne because he is of supreme importance and seeing him like that with his infinite otherness shows how foolish it is to try and put something else on the throne in your life we're going to see in the coming weeks that's what the people had done the living god reigns and he's on the throne because it's the place of judgment and all through ezekiel we learn that god has to judge sin in his world if he didn't judge sin he wouldn't be known as righteous and he is righteous he's not safe but he is perfectly fearfully wondrously good and one of the refrains in the book ezekiel is then they will know that i am the lord one of the ways that he will reveal who he is so that people will know who he is is he has to judge sin and this is the god revealed to us in the man jesus christ john who knew jesus says in chapter 1 verse 14 of his gospel the um the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us we have seen his glory the glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth and jesus says anyone who's seen me has seen the father well this morning we get a taste of the spiritual reality behind that truth claim of sublime glory so this is ezekiel's vision that commissions him to be a prophet and his response in verse 29 to what he sees models for us how we should respond let me read again the end of verse 29 when i saw it i fell face down and i heard the voice of one speaking so first he fell face down you know you've grasped something of the glory of the living god when you fall face down and while the old testament word for glory that we're seeing here is the word is a word that comes from the word for heaviness or weightiness like the the heaviness of precious gold the new testament word for glory the word doxa is about praise and wonder as we worship we fall face down before true beauty and fearsome splendor we want a god that we can figure out ezekiel's vision shows that god is holy holy holy we want a god that we can describe as a bit like us only a bit bigger ezekiel's vision wakes us up to the reality that when we meet god there won't be any of us saying i'm so glad i finally met you god i've got some issues with the way you've been running things to talk over with you there'll be no room for winston churchill's comment i don't know what you've heard before that he was asked are you ready to meet your maker and he said is he ready to meet me well when we see the appearance of the likeness of god there's no negotiating it's not safe it's not comfortable we fall to our knees in silence and the question it makes us ask ourselves is do i want entertainment

or do i want reality ezekiel and his exiles they're living in massive shocking upheaval they knew they didn't need a religion that entertains them they needed truth well what do we need in glasgow today or for our world today in uncertain times anxious times we don't need to be entertained we need reality about god and a god as great as this is a god worth putting your trust in if only you could find him on your side ezekiel's second response is to listen he says i heard the voice of one speaking and the question for russ is are you listening to him will you listen to him we don't set the agenda for a god like this you don't invite a god like this into your life to be your helper we listen what we'll hear in the coming weeks is the message that god's judgment had had to fall on his people in jerusalem because they turned from him but for anyone who will depend on god the message is also one of great hope of deliverance through judgment and for us hearing ezekiel this morning we see the glory of god in jesus who took peter james and john one day up a mountainside and there they saw him transfigured and his clothes became dazzling white and it's as though the man on fire on the throne in ezekiel's vision was suddenly seen to be the lion of judah jesus and he's holy and just so that he says in luke chapter 12 of his coming i i came to send fire on the earth and how i wish it were already kindled but what holds him back from that is that he came to go through his own baptism of fire to endure the cross the divine warrior the lord jesus christ came to bear the full weight of god's holy wrath in our place that war chariot came towards him on the cross so that we so fallen can one day experience the wonder of the full light of being in god's glorious presence without being consumed let's pray together let's pray together let's pray together let's pray together let's pray together let's pray together let's pray together