

The day God came to town!

Ezekiel 1v1-4, 24-28 to 2v2

Introduction

I wonder if there anybody here that is 25 years old? Anybody turning 25 this year? How about those who wished they were turning 25 this year?

Imagine you are a 25 year old and being trained for the family business. Then suddenly your enemies invade your city and take you away to a foreign land. That's what happened to Ezekiel 5 years before this passage of Scripture, when the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar in 597BC took 3000 Jews back to Babylon. This was the first deportation.

Ezekiel – who was he and how did he get there?

- His name means "God is strong"
- He was training to be a priest
- Now 30 years of age, if he had been in Jerusalem, he would have been ministering in the Temple.
- He was married to the woman who is described as the "delight of his eyes".

The reason that God had allowed His people to be taken into exile was because of their wickedness, utter disobedience and the dishonouring of His holy name. We know from other Old Testament passages that the people of Israel at the time, reacted in four different ways:

- There were those blaming the sins of their parents for their predicament and were totally pessimistic about life and everything.
- Others had abandoned their God, and given over to worshipping the Babylonian gods
- Some were false optimists saying, be happy it will be fine. We will soon be back in Jerusalem and God will be nice to us again. So just continue living as you are!
- Finally some were truly repentant of their own sins and yet had abandoned hope that God would rescue them.

This is the first of five visions that Ezekiel has. This vision is similar to that found in Revelation 1 where John writes while in exile on Patmos. It is also similar to that portrayed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4v16 when God will return again, Jesus will come to judge the antichrist and his followers (Revelation 16v12-16, 19v11-16), bind Satan (Revelation 20v1-3) and judge the nations (Matthew 25v31-46; Joel 3v11-17).

When people find out that I am a Christian, some say "Oh I don't believe in a God or Gods". I generally ask them "What kind of God don't you believe in?" They then go on to describe what sort of God they don't believe in and they are generally surprised when I agree with them that I don't believe in the kind of God who they describe as being remote, impersonal, judgemental and delighting in the suffering He or she has probably caused.

And I think Ezekiel at this time was out having his picnic at the river and maybe starting to think through all the things that had occurred leaving him in exile. Possibly he was starting to question God and then he sees what appears to be a storm approaching at speed. He just stands there, looking at it approach him. I don't know about you, but if that had been me, I would have run in the opposite direction as fast as I could! But he just stands there and looks. Amazing. So what was this vision and what does it tell us today, some 2500 years later!

It is very easy with this passage to just concentrate on the cherubim angels, which is what the strange creatures are that Ezekiel describes in v4 to v24. You only have to go to your local bookstore and find a plethora of books on angels and so called angel worship. But that would be stop at verse 24 and not proceed further. We would then miss out on the God these angels are worshipping and obeying.

However in order to satisfy any curiosity you may have about these cherubim, for that is what these creatures are, let me explain what the faces mean: .

- They each have four faces and each face is symbolic of a characteristic of a cherubim..
- The human face is to the front. This is to show that mankind is the pinnacle of creation. This shows the cherubim as being intelligent.
- The lion face is to the right and this reflects that the lion is the king of the wild animals. This shows the cherubim as being they are very strong and powerful.
- The ox face is to the left and this shows that the ox is the best of the animals that farmers keep. This shows the cherubim as being strong and patient.
- The eagle face is at the back for the eagle is the leader among the birds of the air. This shows the cherubim as being extremely quick.

How does Ezekiel describe this vision of God?

Ezekiel's first impression is the hearing of a voice from above the expanse over their heads. This voice came from a figure on the throne (v26). This figure was like that of a man. This should come as no surprise because mankind is made in the image of God. In the Old Testament, whenever

God wanted to talk to man He took on the shape of a man such as when He appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3). This is what is called a theophany, which is an appearance of God in visible form, temporary and not necessarily material. Ezekiel describes what he saw as “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (v28). For he knew that nobody could actually see God and live, such is the nature of God’s holiness and glory.

Sometimes, even in the evangelical church, we like to put God in a box. God must act only in this way or in this manner. Perhaps Ezekiel was thinking like that. Thinking that God is far away in the Temple of Jerusalem and has abandoned his chosen people.

We can see from this passage that God is holy, universal, mission-minded and personal.

Holy God

Read verse 27

This is seen in the fire, light and radiance described in v27. Because God is Holy, He is full of glory and majesty.

However, it is not without some difficulty that we try to define what holiness is. Here are some of the things holiness is:

- Holiness is what separates God from all His creation. For God alone is holy and full of glory. Exodus 15v2 “Who is like you, O God, glorious in holiness!” Or Isaiah 60v25 “To whom will you liken me, or shall I be equal?” says the Holy One.
- Holiness is also a moral attribute of God, of purity and freedom from the stain of sin. Habakkuk 1v13 “of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look upon sin.
- Holiness is still more than that! It is in fact the sum of all His attributes!
- Perfect holiness, while to us is inconceivable, has been revealed. Revealed in the sinless man, Jesus Christ.

Universal God

He is universal, not just in presence but in absolute sovereign power and knowledge. In this vision of Ezekiel’s, you can feel the power and presence of God. It must have been quite a sight! God’s presence and power are seen in the throne! This is the climax of the vision and it seems it is only now that Ezekiel realizes what he is looking at! He collapses face down!

Omnipresent - God is wholly present everywhere. God fills the universe in all its parts without division Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24. God was not only in the Temple in Jerusalem, but God was also in Babylon!

Omnipotent - God has power to do all things that are the object of power. With God all things are possible Luke 1:37. He is El Shaddai or God Almighty. Jeremiah 32:17-18 Nothing is too hard for you. Omnipotence is an essential to God. If God were not all-powerful then He would not be God and not be worthy of worship.

This is the God who created the universe with His eternal and infinite power! This God bids his angels to obey and they do! Just as he is fully present everywhere, He is also all powerful and unlimited in power. This is the God who parted the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape the Egyptians army. This is the God who stopped the sun during Joshua's time. This is the God who made iron to swim by Elisha's hands. His power is evident in that the visible works of creation are His handiwork. He made everything around us, out of nothing! That is power. He not only created it, but He sustains it and gives it life!

All things are possible with God and nothing impossible. But there are of course things God cannot do. He cannot do anything contrary to His own nature. He cannot for instance declare something infinite if it is finite.

Omniscient - God has perfect knowledge of all things - actual, past, present, future and possible.

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, You know when I sit and when I rise...You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways (Ps. 139:1-2a & 3).

He knows all things, past, present, and future, and therefore he knows all that we do (which includes the remembrance of all that we have done), all that we think (and the record of those thoughts), and all that we say.

The Baptist Confession of 1689, describes God as: "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection...", that God is in "every way infinite" and that His knowledge is "infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."

God knows all things, and is able to accomplish all of his most holy will.

Israel had forgotten these things about their God: He is not confined to just the Temple in Jerusalem. He is all-powerful and able to do all things according to His will. He is all knowing and can see even the hidden sins of His people. That is why they were in exile in Babylon, because they had not given God the honour due His name. They had sinned and actively disobeyed Him and the following chapters, God reveals through

the visions, words and actions of Ezekiel, just how wicked Israel had become!

Mission minded God

He is on a mission. He came to Ezekiel to call him and use him as His spokesperson or prophet to those who were in exile. Ever since Genesis 3 and the fall of man, God has been on a mission to bring and call people back to Himself. That was the purpose of the nation of Israel, to be a light to all nations of the goodness and glory of God! That was purpose when God, who is outside of time and space, entered human history taking on human flesh and restricted Himself in a human body as the man we know as Jesus Christ. Jesus whole mission was one of calling people back to life in God.

Personal God.

God is personal! He speaks and commands with authority (2v1)! So often in the church today, God is seen as a father figure or as wanting to be friends. These things are true, yet of themselves, they are not a full picture and sometimes the stress laid on this approach tends to bring God as a person down to the same level we are – weak, feeble and pitiable. As we have seen here, God is full of divine majesty and wonder. Yes God is personal, but He is also great. Remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!

Jimmy Bakker, the disgraced US televangelists was interviewed in jail, and was asked the question “When did you stop loving the Lord?” To which he replied, “I never stopped loving him. But I did stop fearing him!”

What does it mean?

We have seen through Ezekiel’s vision that God is holy, all-powerful, mission-minded and personal. Israel had forgotten these things and was now in exile because of it. What does this mean for us, as God’s people today, some 2,500 years after Ezekiel? When you go back to work or to college or where ever you interact with others, what does all this mean?

We are to actively worship our God. By worship I mean living a life worthy of God 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Worship is not just singing songs on a Sunday but is a whole life devoted in obedience to the God we serve.

Borne out of this worship and obedience, we also are on a mission. We are to honour the name of this all powerful God by living entirely for Him. That is what evangelism is, and we are all called to do the work of an evangelist, just as Ezekiel was called to speak God’s word to people.

What is evangelism? Evangelism is showing and telling others of God's message of reconciliation to all people of all time. It is not forcing people to adopt Church standards (1 Corinthians 5v12) and nor is it simply a message of join the church as a symbol of good works (Ephesians 2vv8-10). This gospel says that everybody has sinned against God (Isaiah 53v6; Romans 3vv10-11); nobody can earn their reconciliation with God (Ephesians 2v9); that God sent His Son Jesus to be born, crucified and resurrected so that salvation can be had for all people of all time (John 3v16; 1 Timothy 1v15); and that it is by acquiescing to God by faith in Jesus alone that people are saved (John 5v24; Acts 16v31).

Why evangelize? The prime motivation for evangelism is out of gratitude for what God has done, in that we love because He loved us first. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5v14, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." As His servants we are to tell and live of God's reconciling message

As I said before, we are all to do the work of an evangelist, following the example of Timothy (2 Timothy 4v5). Scripture dictates several reasons for members of His church to share their faith. Jesus commands us to tell others of God's reconciling message. In the last words of Jesus' earthly ministry, His church was commanded to be witnesses for Him (Acts 1v8). Evangelism is an expression of love for God, through obeying His commands (John 14v15).

So we worship with a life of obedience, which is an act of witness to the Great God we serve and live for, telling others about Him. We also teach and speak His word. The authority of the Bible is what we read and teach.

We speak God's word.

The Bible is the Word of God, and is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to bring people to faith (Ephesians 1v13) and ongoing sanctification (Ephesians 5v26). Paul writes that all of it is "God Breathed" (2 Timothy 3v16), in that it is inspired by God and has its origins in God. It is not just the ideas, but also the words that are inspired by God (1 Corinthians 2v13).

The Bible is capable of being understood by all God's people. God the Holy Spirit enlightens Christians minds, so that they can understand spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2vv10-16). Through interacting with the Bible, the church teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains people for the purpose of righteousness (2 Timothy 3v16). By interacting with the Bible, Christians keep from sinning (Psalm 119v11), are comforted (Psalm 119v52), have their minds focused on God (Psalm 43v3) and are

sustained in a daily spiritual life (Deuteronomy 8v3). The church also interacts with Bible, as the Bible is a link to the apostles and prophets, who are the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2v20).

There are five main ways in which members of the Church can interact with the Bible. Public reading of Scripture was regular in Israel and in the early church (Nehemiah 8v3). Presently due to high literacy, Scripture can easily be read in private as well as corporately. Memorization of the Bible was commended to "lay up His words in your heart" (Job 22v22). By reading and memorizing the Bible, meditating on it helps understand the implications of life's occurrences and God's blessings (Joshua 1v8). These three interactions lead to a fourth, obedience. By obeying the Bible, the Christian learns to obey God, because it is His authoritative word (Deuteronomy 31v12)

The teaching of the Bible receives the main emphasis in the New Testament, such as at the Church's birth and Peter's address to the crowd (Acts 2). After they were dispersed due to persecution, the Apostles continued preaching and teaching (Acts 8v4). Luke gives thirteen different words for preaching, and over thirty are used in the entire New Testament.

Conclusion

I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like I am in exile. I don't mean as an Australian living in England, the mother country! Although sometimes it does feel like it! We are living in a country, which despite its Christian heritage, evangelical non-compromising Christians are being increasingly marginalized by a society, which decrees that, all religions or none are equal, and that to declare otherwise is simply arrogance and divisive. How are we to react?

When you are faced with a crisis or some trouble, how do you react? Are you like the ancient Israelites that Ezekiel was sent to? Do you trust in the holy, all-powerful, all knowing, personal God or do you trust in other things?

- God is coming again!
- Be Holy and be obedient!
- Live a life worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Trust fully in the God of your salvation
- Go tell somebody!

Finally, if you need prayer for something related to what I have said today, then find somebody to pray for you. And if you cant find somebody to pray for you, then come and find me.