

Ezekiel 1:4-28; 10:8

Sermon #0930

Study by W. D. Frazee -1965

Let us turn to the book of Ezekiel the first chapter. Paul tells us in the New Testament that:

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” Romans 15:4.

Everything that the Scriptures give us is to encourage us. It is true that God condemns sin, but that is to help us get rid of it so that we won't suffer the results of sin. Everything He says is to fit us to look heavenward with good cheer knowing that God is on His throne and working for our benefit.

Now we are going to read several verses here this morning and let the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts. You know, sometimes we tend to read in the Scriptures those things that are easiest to be understood, and I have no quarrel with that. But occasionally at least, it is a good thing to sink our teeth into something that needs some real chewing. Let's do this this morning with some of these verses in Ezekiel one, not with the thought that we are going to get out of this chapter all there is in it, but that we are going to get as much as we can.

For the Bible, having an infinite author, has in it enough to keep us studying forever. This is one of the reasons that God is going to let us live along time. It will require an eternity of time to explore an infinity of truth.

So let's get all we can here, then hereafter there will be more.

“And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire” Ezekiel 1:4.

What did the prophet see coming? A whirlwind. Where was it coming from? Out of the north. But you notice instead of it being a dark cloud there was a great deal of brightness. Also:

“Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings” Ezekiel 1:5-6.

It is hard for us to imagine a representation of this kind, and we do well to remember that in the prophetic visions things were often represented in symbolic ways. For instance, in the fifth chapter of Revelation, we have the Savior in heaven, in His work there in the sanctuary, represented under the symbol of a slain lamb with seven horns, and seven eyes. You remember that, don't you?

We are not from this representation to conclude that Jesus actually has that physical appearance in heaven this morning, but rather, as is explained there in Revelation, that symbolic representation pictures the fullness of His wisdom, and the fullness of His power. The seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

And so here we have some symbolic representations, which as we study the Lord will bring some precious thoughts to us I am sure.

“Every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings” Ezekiel 1:6-8.

In this first chapter of Ezekiel it is not clear whether the hand pictured here comes from the living creature, or whether it is another being. But turning over to the tenth chapter of Ezekiel, and the eighth verse, we see that it is another hand. Indeed, it is the hand of God that is pictured.

“And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings” Ezekiel 10:8.

God's hand is underneath the interesting movements that we are about to witness back in the first chapter.

“And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward” Ezekiel 1:8-9.

Picture if you can a being with four faces, one body, so that no matter which way it goes, it doesn't have to turn. That is the symbolic representation here. If it wants to go south, it just proceeds south. West. East. North. No turning to accomplish the purpose.

“As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle” Ezekiel 1:10.

In this symbolic representation we see various attributes represented under these figures.

“Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward...” Ezekiel 1:11-12.

Here is this thought again. Whatever direction they go, it is going straight, no turning.

“whither the spirit was to go, they went;...” Ezekiel 1:12

They are controlled by the Spirit of God.

“...and they turned not when they went” Ezekiel 1:12

Right to the point. Direct.

“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance [was] like burning coals of fire, [and] like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning” Ezekiel 1:13-14.

This is rapid movement, isn't it? God working through the ones He has created, is not limited by either distance or time as we are. That which He wishes to accomplish can be done instantly, whatever the distance. And so these living creatures, these angelic beings go and return like the appearance of a flash of lightning.

“Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four” Ezekiel 1:15-18.

Here is intelligence represented by these eyes. These are not mere mechanical contraptions. Living creatures, represented here symbolically, are so working together that, like a wheel within a wheel, as each one moves, he moves in concert, in perfect harmony.

“And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from

the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels” Ezekiel 1:19-20.

Perfect unity, you see. Whenever the living creature went, the wheels went, because the Spirit was in both. This is a picture friends, of God’s great, vast organization in heaven, and in earth moving in perfect concert because the one Spirit inspires all.

Now as we read on, we will get the climax of it all.

“And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise...” Ezekiel 1:23-24

Or, as it could be translated, “sound.”

“...of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings. And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings” Ezekiel 1:24

Now, let’s see where this voice is coming from.

“And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness...” Ezekiel 1:26

Was the likeness of what? A throne.

“... of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about” Ezekiel 1:26-27

What a glorious representation.

“As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about” Ezekiel 1:28.

What was over the throne? A rainbow.

John saw a similar vision, you remember, in the fourth and fifth chapters of his wonderful book, and he speaks of the rainbow round about the throne.

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake” Ezekiel 1:28.

Now let's meditate a bit on what we have read.

At the time that Ezekiel had this vision, and shared it with the Jewish captives, Babylon was ruling the world. Babylon was the great enemy of God, and God's people, and had been since the days of the tower of Babel. And now it seemed to be treading down the whole earth and breaking it in pieces.

And God gave this vision to His prophet to share with His people that they might understand that although here was pictured a great whirlwind coming out of the north, this was the direction from which the Babylonians had come, yet however strong and terrible that whirlwind might seem to be, in this cloud was revealed. And that He was working above, and within, and through, and by, and in spite of all the agencies working here on earth.

You know, we are inclined to think, we may not word it in this way, but we are inclined to think that the only way anything good can happen is for everything to be good. If this is true, we are in a sad plight, my friends, for nearly everything we see going on in the world about us is evil. Isn't that true?

Look around us at the war, the riots, the strife, the crime, the sickness, the unrest, the selfishness, the greed, is any of that good? Not a bit.

But oh friends, thank God, the whirlwind that comes has within it the glory of God. God does not allow one thing to come to His people, or to one of His children unless through that something wonderful to the glory of God can be worked out, and something for the good of His creatures.

It is given to us in that beautifully clear statement in Romans 8:28.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” Romans 8:28.

All things do what? Work together for good. But notice, they work “together” for good. It takes working together to accomplish good.

Evil is chaotic. Its very spirit is anarchy, pulling apart. But God in His wonderful providence, His infinite wisdom, is able to take the events that seem to be evil, and that are evil, and yet out of it all work something orderly and good for His people.

And so we are told that God:

“...works through those who discern mercy in misery, gain in the loss of all things. When the Light of the world passes by, privileges appear in all hardships, order in confusion, the success and wisdom of God in that which has seemed to be failure” *Gospel Workers*, 1915 edition, page 37.

Tell me, as you read this first chapter of Ezekiel whether for the first time or for the hundredth time, do you understand it all? I don't. You may wonder why I read a chapter when I don't understand all of it. Well my dear friends, if I had to study only that which I fully understand, I would have to take a book more finite than the Bible is.

The thing that makes me glad is that I can recognize in this chapter wonderful evidence that God is taking these events that seem to be complicated, and out of it working His will.

Ezekiel, as I say, was living in the time when the Assyrian kingdom had done much against God's people, and now the Babylonian empire was making them captives, and he was seeking in this way to assure God's people that these events, which had come upon them with blinding force, were not taking God by surprise. God was in it all.

In fact, through Jeremiah, who lived at the same time, God was assuring the Jews that Nebuchadnezzar, that heathen tyrant, that dictator, was being used as His agent. He called him in the prophecy of Jeremiah, “Nebuchadnezzar, My servant.”

God's servant, a heathen king that was ready to roast in the fiery furnace the three Hebrews that wouldn't bow down to his golden image? Yes. He was God's servant in the sense that God was using him to carry out His will. And so it is my dear friends, in all the circumstances of life, whether they affect us as individuals or the people of God as a whole.

I want to read you a wonderful comment on this in volume five of the Testimonies. Speaking of the vision which we have just read:

“There were wheels within wheels in an arrangement so complicated that at first sight they appeared to Ezekiel to be all in confusion. But when they moved, it was with beautiful exactness and in perfect harmony” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 5, page 751, 752.

Do you get the picture? As he looked at it, it looked like a mass of confusion. His very endeavors to describe it give us a similar impression, don't they? You read it, and you say, well how does all that fit together? Indeed, it impressed it the man who saw it in a similar way, but when it worked, it worked. Everything moved in perfect harmony.

My dear friend, oh I pray for each of you personally just now, look at your life, and tell me, are there times when everything looks confused? And does your hope rest in getting it all arranged so simply that you have everything mapped out, and it works just like you planned. Put that away.

God's movements in your behalf will seem far more complicated than anything you can figure out. And unless you have a faith that discerns order in confusion, you will be baffled and disappointed. You will feel that everything is out of joint. But God was teaching Ezekiel, and through him, He is teaching us this morning that what we see as confusion may bring to us the results of most beautiful harmony.

"There were wheels within wheels in an arrangement so complicated that at first sight they appeared to Ezekiel to be all in confusion. But when they moved, it was with beautiful exactness and in perfect harmony. Heavenly beings were impelling these wheels,..." *Ibid.*

You notice the wheels? Every time they moved it was because theses living creatures moved.

"Heavenly beings were impelling these wheels,..." *Ibid.*

What does "impelling" mean? Make it go.

Perhaps you have been in a workshop where power was being brought in, either through and electric motor, or in some other way. And there are wheels running, and by adjusting belts, or gears, the one in charge can transmit that power, now to this piece of machinery, now to that piece of machinery. This is the picture.

When wheels move on earth my friends, in the vision here, it is because angelic beings, heavenly messengers, are moving. We may not see all that God sees, in fact we don't, but we can see the results.

"Heavenly beings were impelling these wheels, and, above all, upon the glorious sapphire throne, was the Eternal One;..." *Ibid.*

Who is this upon the throne? The Eternal One.

"...while round about the throne was the encircling rainbow, emblem of grace and love" *Ibid.*

Why, I am so glad the rainbow is about the throne. Aren't you? You know, of course, what makes the rainbow? It takes sunbeams, and it takes water drops. And so in the plan of salvation, justice and mercy are blended together to give us the wonderful grace of God.

There is another thing that I would remind you about the rainbow, and that is, every individual sees a different rainbow. Did you know that? That's right. If you and your best friend are standing side by side and looking at a rainbow, the one he sees is a different rainbow from the one you see. In fact, if you move an inch you will see a different rainbow. That's right. Because that rainbow is made up of thousands upon thousands of actions of a certain ray of light upon a certain drop of water. The combination of that and the aggregate is what makes the rainbow. As I say it is different to each eye.

And so it is in the providences of God, my friends. That is what I want you to see. As you study life, as you study the character of God, as you study the outworking of the divine purpose, you see a different rainbow from any else. It was meant to be. But oh, thank God, we can all, if we will, we can see that beautiful bow of promise in which the love of God, the mercy of God, is revealed.

There is another statement here in volume five that I love.

"The bright light going among the living creatures with the swiftness of lightning represents the speed with which this work will finally go forward to completion" *Ibid*, page 754.

Our minds go to that wonderful statement of Paul in Romans 9.

"For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" Romans 9:28.

So these living creatures, going and returning with the speed of lightning represents the speed with which this work is to go forward to its completion.

Friends, we have a wonderful God who is in charge of everything.

"Above the distractions of the earth He sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best" *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 8, page 273.

You might be interested in a little background of this closing chapter in volume five from which I have read these few sentences. The Lord's messenger wrote this just after her visit to the Waldensian valleys in northern Italy. As you know, up there surrounded by those great mountains the true people of God kept aloft the torch of truth all through the darkness of the middle ages.

Those Waldenses were persecuted. The legions of their opponents, their enemies came into those valleys, laid waste their vineyards and fields, slaughtered their woman and children as well as the men, but again and again, from their ashes as it were, they arose to carry on the work of God.

And as the Lord's messenger went, in 1885 and 1886 to Europe, it was her privilege to visit those scenes. She went to the very cave where scores and hundreds of them had perished in the persecution. She climbed those steep trails that they traversed. And as in vision she had seen those experiences of persecution, along with these things that we have studied this morning, she was led to write this wonderful message which we have in this closing chapter of volume five, *God's Care for His Work*.

What a background for what a wonderful message. And so my dear friends this morning, as you and I face the greatest crisis of history, as events are pushing one upon another to bring about the closing scenes in the great controversy, as the troubles of this world increase, thank God, we can see in the whirlwind as it approaches from the north the glory of God revealed.

As the wheels on earth turn, we can know that with every wheel is the living creature in whose heart and mind is the Spirit of God directing every movement. And we can know that beneath all is the hand, the divine hand, which guarantees success, and above all, the throne on which is seated the Infinite One. It is so in this world. It is so in the universe. But most important of all perhaps to you and me, it is so in our individual lives.

Is there anything complicated in your life this morning? Are there things that seem to be working at cross purposes? It may appear so, but it is not so. If you will let God rule in your life as He is ruling in the universe, then to you, all things are indeed working together for good. Faith says it because God says it. Faith know it because the Word of God is the assurance. We know "that all things work together for good to them that love God." Romans 8:28.

What does your heart say in faith and hope? Do you know that God loves you? Do you know that Jesus died for you? Do you know He rose again, that He is standing as your representative at the Father's throne? Are you assured that these bright heavenly beings, the angels of God, are all of them ministering spirits sent forth to minister in your behalf?

Are you glad that, however things may look on earth, you know the divine hand is superintending, and that the throne of God is the guarantee that your life will come out a perfect success "being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ?"

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