

The Powerful Presence of God

Ezekiel 1:1-3, 26-28

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¹ In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

² On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin— ³ the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.

²⁶ Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷ I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸ 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 facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

- a. Experiencing God in the taste of food
- b. The whole book of Ezekiel is about experiencing the powerful presence of God.
 - i. Lived a little bit after Jeremiah
 1. Experienced destruction of Jerusalem - End of known world as Israelites had known - 586 BC
 2. Kebar River - Jews are around this river in present-day Iraq.
 3. People are traumatized and dislocated
 - a. Some people have shallow optimism.
 - b. Others are in anger.
 - c. Others have quit the faith.
 - d. Others are in distress and pure despair.
 - i. Some Psalms are written during this time period - Psalm 137
 4. Ezekiel was on path to be priest of Lord. He's 30 years old.
 - a. His career gets wrecked by the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - b. God breaks into his life when he has lost everything.

II. God's Presence is in Babylon

- a. Previously, God's presence was strictly in the temple.
- b. Babylon is contaminated and is a wasteland, and yet God shows up.
- c. V. 3 - God is in the land of the Babylonians.

III. Two themes in the vision in chapter 1

- a. Wheels - God is active and alive. He's not stuck in a temple.
- b. Throne - God is in control.
 - i. "Glory" of the Lord - heaviness of the Lord. Jews wouldn't even use the name of God because of the heaviness of the name of God.

IV. God is there when it seems like he's absence

- a. We often say we believe this, but we rarely experience it.

V. God's powerful presence is there. Paying attention is what it's all about.

- a. We're often distracted
- b. No one else is encouraging us down this path
- c. We get busy or active
- d. We have compartmentalized ideas of when and where God moves
- e. Simone Weil - State of active receptivity
- f. The key is not to be simplistic about this idea.
 - i. What do you want me to do? OR
 - ii. What do you want to change in me?

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VI. *The powerful presence of God is the promised land*

- a. *Moses is 120 years old having wandered in the desert for 40 years. He will not experience the promised land, but he is so content with God.*

Small Group Questions

1. *What thoughts, questions, or feelings do you have after reading this passage or listening to this sermon?*

2. *How do you think Ezekiel felt when he experienced God's presence in Babylon after he had seen the temple destroyed and his own people devastated? Why do you think he felt this way?*

3. *What are some situations in which you've experienced the powerful presence of God? What was it like?*

3. *What are some areas in your life where you do not feel the powerful presence of God? Why do you think this is the case?*

4. *How do you normally respond or behave when you are not feeling the presence of God? How can paying attention to God's presence change the way you respond or behave?*

5. *What are some practical ways that you can pay better attention to God's powerful presence - especially where you might have a hard time discerning God's presence? (Feel free to be creative!)*

6. *The statement - The powerful presence of God is the promised land - what are your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to this statement?*

7. *Finish the small group by doing a group lectio divina. Select three people to read this passage slowly aloud, with 5 seconds of silence between each reading.*

As you listen to the passage, what words or phrases stand out to you? Why might God be causing you to notice these words right now?

"You hem me in behind and before. And you lay your hand upon me." - Psalm 139:5-6

Break up into groups of 2-3 and share how God came to you as you meditated on this passage. Close by praying with the others.