

Daily devotions May 5th 2020

Ezekiel 1 vs 1-28

I've been thinking and praying about which book of the Bible to look at next. I've also been thinking of the significance of all the rainbow pictures we are surrounded by at the moment. I decided to look to see if rainbows are mentioned anywhere else in the Bible apart from when God set his rainbow in the sky for Noah as a sign that he would never again flood the Earth. I found two and they both appear in visions of God, first to Ezekiel (v28) and then to John (Rev 4v2 and 10v1).

John was isolated on the island of Patmos but Ezekiel was in lockdown in Babylonia, having been taken captive there by King Nebuchadnezzar 5 years earlier.

Ezekiel had been training to be a priest and would probably have had his mind set on his dream job of serving in the temple in Jerusalem. That now lay in ruins as did his dreams. God had other plans for Ezekiel. At the age of 30 he was due to take up office as priest. This was normal for priests (Num. 4 v 3). Instead God gave him a vision that would lead him to become a prophet!

Interestingly Joseph was 30 when he became second in command to Pharaoh. David became king at the age of 30 (2 Sam 5v4). And Jesus began his ministry at 30 (Luke 3v23). Watch out any readers who are 29!

God provides this vision to Ezekiel at a time when the Jews in exile were having a crisis of faith. They couldn't figure out where God was, why he didn't intervene and why he didn't seem to care! I think many might be thinking the same in our present situation.

As we start to look at this book (selected bits), re-read Ezekiel's attempt to record what he saw. Let's allow ourselves a fresh vision of God. Ezekiel can't describe it and has to resort to phrases like 'what looked like' and 'the appearance of'. The vision is full of symbolism but let's just allow it to fill our minds with the supernatural magnificence of God. He sits on the throne in the centre of the vision (v26).

The cherubim (vs 5-14) worship him. They have 4 faces. A human face (the highest of God's creation). A lion's face (the highest wild animal). The face of an Ox (the highest domestic animal). The face of an Eagle (the highest bird).

Not only do they worship him but cherubim guard the gates of Eden. A reminder that God will judge his people. But, as in Genesis, the rainbow signifies God's mercy.

The God that Ezekiel saw still sits on the same throne as he did in 593 B.C. He is still sovereign over the world's affairs and over the details of our lives.
'Be still and know that I am God'

Ezekiel fell face down. Let's humble ourselves before the same God!

Ezekiel 1 vs 1-28

Ezekiel was about to be given the formidable task of taking God's hard message to a rebellious people. God prepares him and motivates him with this vision of himself and his angelic attendants. Ezekiel was stunned by the vision. 'Overwhelmed for 7 days'. (3 v 15)

We don't need to look too deeply for meaning in the various elements of the vision. The overriding impression is one of power, majesty and brilliance. Fire, lightening, roaring waters, storms, glowing metal brilliant light and burning coals create a visual image of God's throne in all its splendour. In addition there are living creatures each with 4 faces, 4 wings, human hands and legs with calf's feet. Beside each of them are wheels within wheels whose rims are full of eyes. Some believe Ezekiel was seeing some kind of chariot. The creatures and wheels move in unison and could travel at the speed of light (v14). They could move in any direction, anywhere and in an instant but were guided by the spirit.

God is reminding Ezekiel and eventually the people Ezekiel spoke to, that God is not confined to Jerusalem (which was now ruined) but is everywhere and sees everything! He is just as much sovereign in Babylon as he was in Jerusalem.

This is the same God who said, 'I am with you always' (Mat 28 v 20).

Psalms 139 v 7 asks, 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?' The answer, which is both daunting and reassuring, is nowhere!

If God revealed himself to us in all his magnificence as he did to Ezekiel then whatever words he spoke next to us would surely have a huge impact on us! God has spoken to us. It's all recorded in the Bible.

Whether we are at home alone, at work, in hospital, school, shopping, gardening, resting or exercising we are reminded to day of God's presence with us everywhere.

"I am with you always".

I have just finished typing this and received an email from Ann Marshall with a link to the viral UK Blessing video. I'd not heard it before and the message of the song made my hairs stand on end when I listened to it having written this. Please listen to it. Is this another Godincidence?

Ezekiel 2 vs 1-11 (esp. vs 3-5)

In a museum in Deadwood, South Dakota, America, there is an old inscription written by a prospector. 'I lost my gun, I lost my horse. I am out of food. The Indians are after me. But I've got all the gold I can carry!'

Money has become an idol to many in our western culture and to a large extent is a reason why it has turned its back on God. Unlike people of the third world, we rely on money more than we do on God. We live amongst people who also actively attack Christianity. Are we living in a rebellious nation?

There is much repetition in God's words to Ezekiel. Usually a sign of emphasis. Five times the word rebellious is used about the people of Israel. He also calls them stubborn and obstinate. (v4) These are people for whom God has done much and has shown them great mercy and patience! The history of God's relationship with them will have been passed down from generation to generation but they had become hardened towards God. Ezekiel's task would have been easier if he'd been taking God's message to people who didn't know anything about God!

The same can be true today. There are established churches, movements and religions who think they have it right but are hardened against the central theme of God's message. Salvation through faith in Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

Ezekiel humbled himself before God (1 v 28). Then God fills him with power from the Spirit and calls him to stand up (2v1). God also told the prophet Daniel to stand up after he'd received a similar vision in Dan. 10 v 11. It's a picture of getting ready to do a job. 'Stand up' God says. He has work for Ezekiel to do.

It is so often the case that when we humble ourselves before God in prayer, adoration and the acceptance that we are powerless without him, that, by His Spirit, he enables us to do his work.

Interestingly Ezekiel himself is warned not to rebel (v8). You'd think this highly unlikely given this extremely powerful and intimate vision of the God of the universe! But God knows he is human!

We are all capable of rebellion whether it is accidental sin or deliberate, no matter how close we have been to God in the past.

If we are not listening to him in his Word, his voice will grow faint.

Search me O God and know my heart..... see if there is any offensive way in me. (Psalm 139 v 23, 24)

Ezekiel 3 1-19 (esp vs 11,17)

We as Christians, find we have two things in common with Ezekiel in these verses. We, like Ezekiel, are God's chosen spokesmen and watchmen. (And women of course)

- Spokesmen.

Ezekiel didn't choose his own message to proclaim. He was given God's word. In his vision, he had to digest the words on the scroll that God gave him. Like Ezekiel, we too have God's word and we can't tell others what he says until we know it ourselves. The Word of God (the Bible) is our spiritual food. We absorb it like the pork ribs in a marinade I made for them yesterday. The word becomes part of us and we eventually end up 'tasting' of it.

Ezekiel described it as sweet as honey. Everyone who studies God's word will testify to its sweetness as it thrills our hearts and minds but it can also be a bitter and unpopular message that many will reject.

- Watchmen.

A lighthouse along a bleak coast was tended by a keeper who was given enough oil for one month and told to keep the light burning every night. One day a woman asked for some oil to keep her children warm. Then a farmer came to get some for a lamp so he could read. Another came for some for an engine. The keeper was kind to all and measured out just enough for each who came.

Near the end of the month, the tank in the lighthouse ran dry. That night 3 ships crashed on the rocks because there was no light. More than 100 people lost their lives.

When a government official investigated, the man explained what he'd done and why. 'You were given one task alone,' insisted the official. 'It was to keep the light burning. Everything else was secondary. There is no defence'.

The watchmen's job was a serious one. He would stand on the city walls and warn the occupants of approaching danger. As with the lighthouse keeper, failing to fulfil the role would have dire consequences! Ezekiel had been charged with warning Israel about God's coming judgement. It is common these days for Christians to sugar coat the gospel and only talk of God's love. There cannot be salvation for a person if they don't know what they are being saved from. How can we claim to love our neighbours if we don't warn them about the reality of hell for those outside of Christ.

Ezekiel's and our responsibility is to warn people. If he fails to do it, he is held accountable but if the hearer fails to repent after the warning then he is cleared.

People are dying all the time and not just from the virus. They all will appear before God and be judged. We have no idea how long we have left to warn those we love.

Our job is to soak up the word and pass it on. Fear of rejection shouldn't sway us and the response is out of our hands!

Ezekiel 3 1-4

When our son, Luke, was in his younger years, his brothers nicknamed him 'Binks'. They still call him this even now! He had become tall and lanky in comparison to his brothers and had grown his hair in such a way that made his ears look floppy. At the time there was a tall, floppy eared creature in Star Wars called Ja Ja Binks! His characteristics gave him his nickname.

Ezekiel is called 'Son of man' by God three times in this passage and a total of nine times in chapters 2 and 3. He is making sure Ezekiel knows his position! His name relates to his human characteristics. He is a mere mortal of human ancestry and God re-uses the phrase repeatedly to emphasise that compared to Ezekiel, he is an immortal God who has no origin!

Yet God chose to use this mere mortal to deliver his message to the exiles in Babylon. Why he chooses to use humans to pass on his message in this way is not a question we can ask because his ways are beyond and above our understanding.

God, however doesn't just put him in the boat without a paddle! He has the Spirit (2v2, 3v 12 & 24), he has God's word (3v3) and now God toughens him up ready to face the obstinate Jews. He'd have made a great centre-half with a forehead like that! (3v8,9).

Jesus himself chose the title 'Son of Man'. Although he was also the 'Son of God'. He uses the title 80 times in the gospels (e.g. Mat 26v24&26). His use of the term is two-fold. First, like Ezekiel, he wants to emphasise his humanity. His ancestry was that of the line of David even if he was fathered by the Spirit. He was physically human. Second, he fulfilled the prophecy given to Daniel in a vision of a Son of Man who was highly exalted coming to inherit a vast kingdom that would last forever. (Dan 7 v 13,14)

Both Jesus and Ezekiel were committed to delivering God's word and being totally obedient to him despite the suffering involved.

Are we like this? Humbled before God, fed by his Word, enabled by his Spirit and tough enough to face rejection and ridicule.

Christ has gone before us and is waiting for us on the finishing line. Let's follow in his footsteps, fix our eyes on him and be renewed daily by the Spirit to finish the race!