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Forging of a Servant of God, Part 11

Scared Straight was a television program aired in the late 1970's. It was three hours of at-risk children/delinquents with inmates from Rahway State Prison in New Jersey. The inmates were allowed to berate, belittle, and endeavor to terrify the delinquents in an attempt to "scare them to a straight path" away from their drugs, violence, and lawlessness.

It is tempting to think of Ezekiel 1 in this manner. Recall, this is the chapter in which Ezekiel detailed the glory and majesty of God- a majesty which would scare anyone to a straight path if they truly beheld it! YET this was NOT God's intention in giving us this chapter, for the God of chapter 1 is a God with whom you and I (and Ezekiel) are at peace!

Truly, the Theophany of chapter 1 was given NOT to scare us BUT to encourage us and so impel us in ministry that we might NOT be moved by the threat of man, natural disaster, or any other created thing on earth!

If there were any question, the year is 593 BC and Ezekiel has been in exile now for four years. He no doubt would have been beside himself in this, his 30th year, for that was when he would have been ordained to the priesthood! Yet in an incredible twist, at this time Ezekiel did NOT receive the call of a Priest, BUT that of a Prophet, which is detailed in the first four chapters of this book.

We pick it up the story with Ezekiel's passion in chapter 3.

Ezekiel 3:12-14a, "Then the Spirit lifted me up [the imagery is of a piece of paper driven by wind- so strong an invincible is the working of the Spirit of God], and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place.' And I *heard* the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound. So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away..."

Once again, we are dealing with the Angels and Wheels of Ezekiel 1. Accordingly, to appreciate what is going on here, it is important that we keep in mind the Theophany of chapter 1, for Ezekiel hasn't moved very far away from it!

Ezekiel 1:4a, "And as I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it..."

The language here is that of judgment!... a judgment that would come from the north and devastate God's people! Now this judgment did NOT arise on account of the *ABSENCE* of God's grace, BUT *BECAUSE* of the preserving grace of God!

Ezekiel 1:4b, "...and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire."

This is the description of our Pre-Incarnate Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ! In other words, Christ was behind the coming judgment; this judgment was at the hands of a loving Lord! And yet He was not alone...

Ezekiel 1:5, "And within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form."

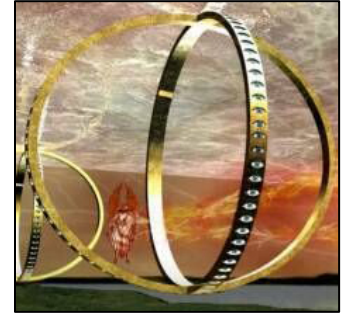


These are the "living beings" which we just read about in our passage, Ezekiel 3:12-14. Recall, they had a unique anatomy, all of which communicated very important truths about God. They had four faces — a man, lion, eagle, and ox — which together proclaimed the

Omnipotence of God- the fact that He rules over all the *realms* of creation. Their faces gazing in all directions proclaimed the Omnipresence of God. There is not a thing God does not see! They covered their bodies with their wings; this proclaimed the Holiness of God.

It was these beings which Ezekiel referenced and heard. Yet our text also mentions “the sound of the wheels beside them.”

Ezekiel 1:15, “Now as I looked at the living beings, behold, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living beings, for *each* of the four of them.”



Recall, the wheels actually were a wheel within a wheel, with gold-colored rims and eyes before whom nothing was hidden. Accordingly, in addition to glorious truths derived from the Cherubim, the four wheels bore witness to the Omniscience of God, the fact that God sees all things, that nothing is hidden from Him.

It was these angels and wheels which made “the great rumbling sound” of our text! The awesome noise of their movement stuck out to Ezekiel! Yet the throne of God did NOT move *away from* Ezekiel, for the text tells us:

Ezekiel 3:14a, “So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away...”

Truly, Ezekiel never left this vision... it remained with him, not only here, but throughout the course of his life! With that, notice the expression in verse 12.

Ezekiel 3:12b, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place.”

There is debate as to whether or not this is the best reading of the Hebrew text. Many argue that the word for “blessed” (ברך [bārûk]) was an early copy error originally reading as ברם (bērûm) which means “to rise” or “raise.” This would change the nuance of this verse from a declaration, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord in His place!” to a statement, “The glory of the Lord in His place rose...”

So, which is it? It doesn’t matter! Whether this was a statement made by the Cherubim or a declaration of what happened next (“the glory of the Lord rose”), the emphasis/focus of this verse is on “the glory of the Lord in His place”! Whether the Angels proclaimed it or Ezekiel just observed it, The Point is that the vision before Ezekiel was “heavy,” “glorious,” “quite impactful”! Why is that? Because Ezekiel once again is beholding a manifestation of God-a Theophany!

Ezekiel 1:22, “Now over the heads of the living beings *there was* something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads.”



This was the platform upon which God’s throne rested. From the description, it had the appearance of “the awesome gleam of crystal [the word for ‘awesome’ has reference to ‘ice’].” In the book of Revelation the expression is translated, “a sea of glass, like crystal” before the throne.

And so, to add magnificence to that which already was glorious, the Lord’s throne here is pictured as resting on a translucent yet solid platform through which the lightening, glory, and radiance of both the angels and God refracted with a magnificent brightness! And yet all of this fades to insignificance as the focus shifts to the Being seated on the throne...

=Ezekiel 1:26-27: “Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance [“lapis lazuli”/sapphire was one of the most precious stones in the ancient world. It was bluish in color having the appearance of a glaze... this is what the throne of God was made of!!!]; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man [this is the pre-incarnate Jesus (again cf. Rev. 1:12-17)]. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him.”



Recall THE BREVITY of words intensifies the theophany! Upon the throne of God sat a Being of such glory and splendor that He cannot be described! Accordingly, Ezekiel ends the vision with this:

Ezekiel 1:28a, “As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord...”

In this regard, recall the words of A. W. Tozer:

...when the prophet Ezekiel saw heaven opened and beheld visions of God, he found himself looking at that which he had no language to describe. What he was seeing was

wholly different from anything he had ever known before, so he fell back upon the language of resemblance. 'As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire.' (Tozer 2009, 15)

Now looking at the call of Ezekiel from chapter 2 onward, we falsely assume that the Theophany of chapter 1 has faded away... that Ezekiel was done with the image. Yet the fact that it reappears in our text and then a couple of more times throughout this book¹ gives the distinct impression that while WE might have forgotten about chapter 1, EZEKIEL most certainly did not! The vision of the glory of the majesty of Almighty God never left Ezekiel, which is the key to the next statement. In response to the vision that continued to rest heavily upon the prophet, Ezekiel wrote these words:

Ezekiel 3:14b, "...and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit [the idea is that of a fierce temper or anger- as of a mother bear robbed of her cubs (2 Samuel 17:8)], and the hand of the Lord was strong on me."

We are talking here about a holy zeal for the Lord which at times manifests itself in

- Love and devotion to the Lord, 1 Peter 1:6-8!
- A longing to worship and serve Him, Psalms 84:1-2!
- A passion to know Him, Philippians 3:10-11!-

Yet here and throughout this book² it took the form of a righteous anger on account of the rebellion of God's people which resulted in the compromise of the Lord's worship and service on this earth! J. B. Taylor describes it this way:

It is not impossible that he was roused to such bitterness by the prospect of being committed to a patently unsuccessful ministry of the word of the Lord. His natural feelings rebelled against his calling and so the hand of the Lord had to be heavy upon him to subdue and control him. The more usual interpretation, however, is to regard this as an example of the prophet's being caught up into the righteous anger of God against his people so that he enters into the burden of the 'lamentation and mourning and woe' which constituted the message of God to Israel (2:10). (Taylor 2009, 70)

You must see that this zeal, this anger for the Lord, has been a major part of the lives of God's people throughout Redemptive History. Lot was moved by this zeal. Peter speaks of "righteous Lot" who was "oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men..." (2 Peter 3:7) Yes, Lot chose unwisely to live in Sodom and Gomorrah, yet that didn't stop this man of God from being grieved at the sin and compromise of man AND the fact that, because of it, God was NOT honored in His place! Lot had a zeal for the Lord!

We see this zeal in Christ. He wasn't very gentle when He cleansed the temple. "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Thy house will consume me.'" (John 2:17) Truly this is the natural response of a man/woman in love with the Lord! Accordingly, we ought not to be surprised that a faithful church will be moved by this zeal.

Zephaniah prophesying about the people of God in the future, listen to how God describes a faithful gathering of God's people:

Zephaniah 3:18, "I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts- they came from you, *O Zion*; *the reproach of exile* is a burden on them."

How can we love the Lord and long for His glory to be over all AND YET not be grieved when the world or God's people set His name at naught? In fact, this is how God would have us all to be moved. Recall Christ's teaching on prayer.

Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.'"

This is a prayer for God's glory to be felt by all in this world... for God's name, His honor and worship, and so His right as the Creator to be restored to their proper place! That is how Christ would have us first be moved when it comes to our prayer life as individuals and a people! That is where our passage found Ezekiel!

A seventh characteristic when it comes to the forging of a servant of God is their passion. God raises His servants up to be moved/driven by the honor of God's name not only amongst the people of God but also amongst the nations!³ Indeed, we all must be burdened by the rebellion of the world against God, the compromise of the church, and so the sad state of His worship and service today! If you are a servant of the Lord, don't squelch this concern, but feed it! "Grieve" about the appointed feasts! "Be burdened" on account of the reproach of the Lord and His people!

You say, "*I love the Lord, but I don't have this burden.*" Where does this zeal come from? Is it something we have to whip up within ourselves? NO! It comes as you and I gaze upon the glory of God revealed to us IN HIS WORD!

- Ezekiel saw it via the Theophanic vision God gave him throughout his life (Ezekiel 1, 3, 10, 40-48)!
- Job saw it and was never the same.

Job. 42:5-6, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

- The disciples saw it when they gazed upon Christ.

John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Now as revelation has ceased (which means no more Theophanies) and the Lord has ascended

into heaven (which means no more visible manifestations of Christ on this earth), the only way you and I can behold God's glory as did Ezekiel is by gazing upon it in the word. To do this is to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds!"

2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

This is the seventh element to the raising up of a servant of God: A word-wrought passion for the Lord and His glory on this earth! This naturally leads to an eighth aspect when it comes to the forging of a servant of God, insanity.

Ezekiel 4:1, "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you, and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem."

The activity prescribed here would have occurred in a public place, most likely on the street in front of Ezekiel's house or possibly even the community square. Once again J. B. Taylor wrote,

We must imagine that the strange actions which Ezekiel was now told to perform were to be carried out either just inside his house or, more likely, on the open space in front of his doorway. The actions were pointless unless they could be watched by a large number of people, and we must suppose that it was not long before the word got around that Ezekiel was doing some unusual things near his home. In a close-knit community like that of the Tel Abib exiles nothing could be kept secret for long. Stories about life in prisoner-of-war camps during the Second World War have shown quite clearly how news could spread like wildfire among thousands of internees. Ezekiel's trance-like state, described in 3:15, had obviously been noted and so it was not surprising that some supernatural or ecstatic pronouncement or sign should follow. (Taylor 2009, 76-77)

This was the first of many bizarre activities that Ezekiel was called to perform as a servant of God. He was to take a sun-baked brick used in building houses and draw on it a picture of the skyline of Jerusalem so that any watching would understand that the brick was intended to be the capital city of Judah, Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 4:2, "Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall [this would have taken the form of erecting mini-siege towers around the brick], raise up a ramp [this would have been a mound of dirt that besieging armies dumped against the besieged city wall so that the army could fight on level with those on the wall], pitch camps [that means, make little tents and camp fires], and place battering rams against it all around."

What is being described here is NOT something you could erect in a couple of minutes. It would have taken Ezekiel many hours to make a siege wall, to raise a ramp, to construct model battering rams, and to make hundreds of little tents and camp fires all of which would have

picture an attacking army endeavoring to take down the “city of peace”- Jerusalem!

Now whether it be in our day or in Ezekiel’s day, at first blush we would all agree that is NOT the activity of a *SANE* adult when he should be working or caring for a family. *As a child*, we speak as a child, reason as a child, and do childish things. But when we become *adults*, we put away childish things. Ezekiel didn’t do that here! As this was his first act as a prophet, there is no doubt many would have thought of him as a *CRAZY MAN!* The text continues.

Ezekiel 4:3a, “Then get yourself an iron plate [this would have been a pan which was placed over the hot coals of a fire on which would be placed bread for baking; Ezekiel was to take this and...] and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city [a picture both of God’s iron determination to judge His people AND the separation that occurred on account of the people’s sin⁴], and set your face toward it [IOW, glare at it!] so that it is under siege, and besiege it [this means, Ezekiel was to play with his model and so commence physically to lay siege to the brick with his army men]...”

Amazing! It wasn’t enough that Ezekiel spent the better part of a day or two constructing a model of a besieged Jerusalem, he now was to be as the child playing with the model!! From his facial expressions, to his moving of the toy soldiers against the city, to his pushing of the battering rams (*like a car*) toward the brick, to his fighting noises and cries, Ezekiel literally was to lay siege against a sun-baked brick!

Now we know that the first seven years of his prophetic ministry, Ezekiel himself- his actions- was the revelation that God intended for the people of God in exile (cf. Ezekiel 4:3b; 3:26-27). That meant Ezekiel could NOT explain what he was doing when asked; he just had to keep on playing! As such, initially there is no question that Ezekiel would have been thought of as being crazy or insane!

Yet we ought NOT to be surprised. A large part of ministry involves the willingness to be a fool for Christ!

Recall the insanity of Luther. In the course of his ministry, R. C. Sproul has frequently spoken about *The Insanity of Luther*. Sproul references the assertion of many liberal scholars and social scientists who, because they deny the existence of God, explain Luther’s bizarre behavior as a monk and later a Christian in terms of a psychosis. Yet, when we take into account that there is indeed a living, glorious Lord angered by the rebellion of the sinner. At one point Luther understood himself to be condemned before this Lord on account of his sin and rebellion. In other words, Luther believed the teaching of Scripture and so responded NOT as a deranged man, BUT how any and all should respond if they truly believed themselves to be condemned!

The grace of God radically delivered Luther from the wrath of God. We conclude that the Reformer was NOT insane, BUT quite rational as he was moved by the greatness of the glory of God! Because of this, Luther became a fool for Christ — and so an outlaw, an enemy of the

state, as well as the object of many a people's hatred, ridicule, and scorn!

In Geneva, where dogs were looked upon with scorn and so kicked and abused, many named their dogs John Calvin!

Christian, if you would be faithful to the Lord, you too will be a fool for Christ! Paul speaking not simply of the apostles, but real the trail-blazers of our Christian faith wrote:

1 Corinthians 4:9-10a, "For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake..."

Paul was ever mindful that ministry in God's Kingdom is NOT compatible with being loved by this world! Think of it, the ministry to which you and I have been called involves a message which:

- Is foolishness to the world (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- Is disseminated in a foolish way- Paul calls it, "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21)
- Will make you out to be an enemy of and so a joke to the world...

1 Peter 4:4, "And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*."

That is why it is irrational to withdraw from ministry on account of the fear of what people might think about you! We *begin* ministry with the knowledge that this world is NOT our home and so WILL be hostile to any work done in the name of the Lord! Remember the promise of Christ:

John 15:19-20a, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

Christian, with Ezekiel, you must be willing to be labeled as "Insane" if you would be a faithful servant of the Lord! Truly, this most certainly is NOT what we are after in life; BUT if it should come, let us know we are in good company!

Works Cited

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Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper One, 2009.

End Note(s)

¹ Cf. Ezekiel 10:16ff; 40-48.

² The book of Ezekiel contains 31 of the 85 occurrences of *hēmâ* in the Old Testament... clearly Ezekiel's ministry was driven out of a righteous anger for the Lord!

³ We'll see this in detail when we consider the "nations" section of Ezekiel, chapters 26-32!

⁴ L. E. Cooper, "He set up an iron wall to represent the iron will of God's judgment and the impenetrable barrier of Babylon's army, which was God's chastening rod." (Cooper 1994, 94)