

Ezekiel 2A

- Last week we experienced Ezekiel's remarkable opening vision of God's glory
 - Ezekiel described seeing the Lord seated on His throne
 - But remarkably, his vision didn't focus on that detail
 - Rather, chapter 1 focused on cherubim, the angelic guardians of God's glory
 - Those cherubim dominated Ezekiel's description of the scene
 - Which tells us that the Lord wanted the cherubim to leave the greater impression on Ezekiel to make a point
 - And I can summarize that point by revisiting three essential details in Ezekiel's description of the cherubim
 - First, we saw four cherubim with their four faces
 - The number four in scripture represents the earth
 - For example, we speak of four winds, four cardinal directions, "four corners", etc.
 - Furthermore, those faces featured representatives from the four divisions of earthly creatures God established in the Creation week...man, lion, ox and eagle
 - So we learned that the cherubim represent all the Earth, for all Creation
 - Secondly, Ezekiel spent considerable time describing the elaborate wheels upon which the cherubim were carried in synchronicity with the Lord
 - The Spirit was in the wheels, so that wherever the Lord's glory went in His Creation, the Spirit carried these cherubim instantly
 - They moved like lightning without turning or diverting so that they were never distracted or delayed in attending to God's glory
 - Their every moment was dedicated to upholding the glory of God

- Thirdly, with their four wings, the cherubim upheld the throne of God in all His glory
 - God didn't need them to hold Him up
 - But He has assigned them this role to set the example for how all Creation should serve God
 - They set the gold standard for all Creation
 - Just as cherubim have been created to guard God's glory so should all Creation serve the same purpose
 - And in particular, Israel was created by God to glorify His name among the nations of the world
- Serving the Living God well requires a dedicated focus on upholding His glory
 - We do this by following Him wholeheartedly, according to the leading the Spirit
 - Without diversions, without delay
 - And when we do this, we fulfill our created purpose and we find our fulfillment in life
 - Moreover, we will share in His glory as we enjoy His presence
 - But when we live without considering the glory of God, we fail in our mission
 - By our self-centeredness we offend the God Who has called us and saved us by His grace
 - Such was the condition of Israel in Ezekiel's day
 - Israel served themselves rather than serving God's glory
 - That's what God wanted Ezekiel and the nation to understand through this vision
 - But there is still more for Ezekiel to know, so now God proceeds to call Ezekiel, the priest, into service as a prophet
 - The Lord gives Ezekiel a sobering assignment
 - One that quickly makes clear why God granted Ezekiel such a profound vision of His glory

Ezek. 2:1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!”

Ezek. 2:2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.

Ezek. 2:3 Then He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

Ezek. 2:4 “I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’

Ezek. 2:5 “As for them, whether they listen or not – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them.

- The Lord’s first words to Ezekiel were “stand on your feet”
 - At the end of chapter 1, we read how Ezekiel responded to the vision the Lord delivered
 - Ezekiel fell on his face, prostrate before the majesty and authority of the glory of God
 - Certainly this is the proper response to the glory God
 - It demonstrated appropriate humility and reverence
 - But almost immediately, the Lord calls Ezekiel to stand on his feet
 - There’s a striking contrast between the way God works with Ezekiel in this moment and the way He dealt with Moses at their first meeting

Ex. 3:4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Ex. 3:5 Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Ex. 3:6 He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

- Moses approaches God standing with sandals
- Which prompted the Lord to order Moses to show greater reverence, causing Moses to hide himself
- While Ezekiel responds to the approach of God by falling face down, to which God responds get up on your feet

- So which is it? Should we show reverence or readiness before the Lord?
 - The answer is “yes” because both responses are required to serve God
 - Service to God requires both an acknowledgement of His holiness and authority and a readiness to stand and serve
- In Moses case, he hadn’t recognized that he was standing in the presence of the glory of God, so his approach to God lacked reverence
 - Therefore the Lord instructed Moses to treat the ground as holy and to acknowledge the holiness of God
 - That scene captures Moses’ story perfectly
 - Moses always seemed ready to serve God’s people
 - In fact, we could say Moses was a bit too ready, since he acted 40 years prematurely while in Egypt
 - He killed the slave master to defend the Jew, yet the people of God would not follow Moses so he fled
 - On the other hand, Moses struggled at times to appreciate the power and authority of God in his service
 - He was tentative and even doubting when God called him and during times dealing with the stubbornness of Israel
 - Which is why God reminded Moses over and over that His authority and power deserved Moses’ reverence
 - That Moses could be sure that God’s glory would prevail through him
- God also reminded Ezekiel of the importance of humility, when He addresses him as “son of man”
 - That term in Hebrew is literally son of Adam, which serves to remind Ezekiel of his humble origins
 - But God dealt with Ezekiel differently than with Moses, because this prophet demonstrates an opposite weakness at times
 - Ezekiel receives a tough assignment to bring bad news to people who didn’t want to hear it

- He will be treated poorly by the very people he is called to serve
- So though he revered God, Ezekiel needed encouragement to stand up in the midst of such adversity
- Reverence of God is a necessary requisite for serving Him properly
 - But it's not sufficient for our service
 - We must combine humility with a self-sacrificial willingness to stand with God regardless of what may come
- Consider the cherubim again
 - They show reverence for God
 - They covered themselves in humility with two wings
 - And they upheld the glory of God with the other two wings
- But remember also they were standing erect on their legs, ready to serve God
 - They moved with Him without distraction
 - And their most prominent feature wasn't those wings that revered God
 - It was those wheels that transported them in service to God
- So having reverence for God can never become excuse for failing to serve Him
 - Acknowledging His power and might doesn't relieve us of the responsibility to give effort to our assigned work
 - Do you respect the power and majesty of God?
 - Then you do well...better than many in fact
 - But are you serving this God you revere? Or do you merely admiring him from a distance?
 - Are you like Moses, ready to serve but without an appreciation for the power of God to make your service useful?
 - Or are you like Ezekiel?
 - So enraptured by the presence of God that you've overlooked the reason He revealed Himself to you in the first place?

- We don't uphold God's glory when we deny Him our service
- And when we seek to serve God, we can only do so by His power
 - The Spirit of God entered Ezekiel which resulted in Ezekiel standing on his feet
 - During the Old Testament dispensation, the Spirit of God worked differently among God's people
 - The Spirit didn't permanently indwell a saint as He does today
 - Instead, the Spirit would come upon a person temporarily to empower them to serve God in a certain way
 - We see that happening here to Ezekiel, and this was true for every Old Testament prophet
 - Every prophet was indwelt by the Spirit to accomplish their ministry of prophecy, as Peter confirms:

2Pet. 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

2Pet. 1:21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- Apart from such special situations, the Spirit of God did not actively empower Old Testament saints following the moment of their salvation
- Instead, God's people were to live according to the Law given through Moses
 - The Law served as the believer's guide for obedient service to God
 - Following the Law didn't save the Old Testament saint, but it did direct a saint into a sanctified life of obedience
 - It served as a custodian, guiding and protecting God's people until the new and better Law of Christ was available to be written on our hearts
 - As Paul explains:

[Gal. 3:23](#) But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

[Gal. 3:24](#) Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

[Gal. 3:25](#) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- When situations warranted during Old Testament times, the Lord would place His Spirit in a man for ministry
 - Ezekiel was one such man
 - He lay prostrate because of the awesome glory of God
 - But now he stands ready to serve this awesome God by means of the Spirit of God
 - That's how we live to serve the Lord too
 - Our relationship should begin in humility, worshipping the God we serve with our whole heart understanding our unworthiness
 - But our expression of worship finds its fulfillment in our service to God
 - And we are equipped for that service by the Spirit of God
- So then God tells Ezekiel he will be "sent" to the sons of Israel
 - Remember, Ezekiel is already dwelling among the exiles, so the Lord isn't talking about a physical journey to a new place
 - God's sending Ezekiel as His representative
 - Ezekiel is being sent to minister to God's people Israel
 - But then the Lord adds that He sends Ezekiel to a rebellious people who have rebelled against the Lord
 - The Lord is referring both to Israel's past track record and to their future destiny
 - Historically, the people of Israel rebelled against the God Who called them out of Egypt
 - The Old Testament is nothing if not a record of Israel's repeated rebellion against the Lord

- The Lord notes this track records at the end of v.3 when He says that they and their forefathers have transgressed (or sinned) against me
- He's referring to the nation's failure to keep the Old Covenant
- They have transgressed in the sense of violating the terms of that covenant
- And they have done so repeatedly despite having been forgiven many times by the Lord
- But the Lord also tells Ezekiel that the sons of Israel are a rebellious people
 - They still have hearts of rebellion against the Lord and the covenant
 - This is a remarkable statement when you consider what's already happened to the nation of Judah
 - For the first time in their history the city of Judah has been conquered by a Gentile enemy
 - The temple has been defiled and will soon be razed to its foundation
 - The people have been scattered and taken captive
 - Many have died and many more will die
 - Yet despite this severe rebuke by the Lord, still the people have rebellious hearts
 - If you ever wanted an example of the hardness of the human heart, just consider this example
 - These people have seen their lives devastated, everything they own taken away, and their future forever in doubt
 - All because they would not obey the Lord Who loved them and gave them His word to bless them
 - And still after four years sitting in captivity, they remain intent on rebelling against Him
 - How can this be? Simply put, they lack a humble heart
 - They lack a heart that recognizes that the glory of God is the goal of their existence

- They lack a heart that seeks the pleasure of the Lord over the pleasures of the world
- They need a heart that loves the Lord above all else
- In v.4 the Lord adds they are stubborn and obstinate children
 - The Hebrew word for stubborn is a phrase made up of two common words with a wide variety of meanings,
 - And these shades of meaning can really help us understand what God is saying about His people
 - The phrase in Hebrew is qasheh panim, which means hard face
 - And depending on the context, panim can also mean “east,” “honor,” “humiliation” and even “upside down”
 - How does the word face become associated with all these ideas, including with being stubborn?
 - The answer is because all these ideas are related
 - Face, honor, stubbornness, humiliation, and even concepts like upside down and east are all related
 - They all relate to our pride
 - Our face is a representation of our honor
 - In fact, we often describe a public humiliation as a “loss of face”
 - And pride is our appetite for receiving honor
 - Our pride drives us to defend our honor under all circumstances, even when we are acting dishonorably
 - So even as we disobey the Lord, we stubbornly cling to the perception that we are worthy of honor
 - Euphemistically speaking, we have a “hard face”
 - It’s upside down logic born out of pride
 - And the Bible labels such pride a sin, symbolized in scripture by the cardinal direction east
 - Israel was a stubborn people, because even as they sat humiliated in the east, in Babylon, still they remained defiant

- They continued to guard their pride long after it had given way to humiliation
- Their self-perception and their very world were upside down
- And yet they refused to turn their face to God in repentance
- Their face remained as hard as their hearts
- All of these ideas are bound up in a single Hebrew phrase: qasheh panim
- Then we have the word obstinate, which in Hebrew can also be translated as a question, "Who is stronger?"
 - Israel's longstanding defiance against the Lord had become a test of wills
 - Who was stronger? The Lord or Israel?
 - Who would get their way? Whose will would prevail?
 - The answer is obvious...the Lord's power and will prevails over His people's stubbornness
 - But if we persist in that battle of wills, the collateral damage adds up
 - If we don't learn early we suffer greater losses as time goes on
 - Israel's presence in Babylon was proof they didn't get it
 - They continued to resist the Lord's word spoken by His prophets
 - They maintained a defiant attitude despite repeated warnings
 - And even now they resisted His will, which means worse times were coming
- So to this stubborn and obstinate people the Lord sends His prophet, one who shares their predicament if not their hearts
 - But given Israel's history of rebellion, what prospect did Ezekiel have of reaching this people?
 - The answer is not much
 - And even the Lord seems to acknowledge the futility of Ezekiel's task

- In v.5 the Lord tells Ezekiel to speak whether Israel will listen or not
- Obviously, the Lord already knows what will happen when Ezekiel speaks to Israel
 - So His statement isn't suggesting that the outcome is a mystery to God
 - The Lord's speaking as from Ezekiel's perspective
 - That regardless of what kind of reception Ezekiel receives in the end, nevertheless he is to persist in his mission for other reasons
 - Specifically, the purpose of Ezekiel's ministry is to demonstrate to Israel that he is a prophet
- This is the key verse of this chapter and it sets up the rest of the book
 - God's purpose for Ezekiel's prophetic ministry wasn't to reach this generation of Israel necessarily
 - Though some may be reached in the process
 - Ezekiel's purpose in speaking to Israel was to validate his call as a prophet
 - So that as Ezekiel foretold future events for the exiles and those events came to pass, then Israel would understand that Ezekiel was truly a prophet
- At first, this may sound to us like circular reasoning (e.g., prophesy for the purpose of showing them you're a prophet)
 - But it makes sense when we look beyond the exiles in Babylon and consider those generations of God's people to come centuries later
 - Ezekiel has much to say to the people of Judah in exile
 - He prophesied about the judgments coming to them for their continuing rebellion
 - But Ezekiel had even more to say to God's people in an age to come
 - To those future saints, Ezekiel prophesied about amazing and marvelous things yet to come

- Of a great war coming at the end of this age which ends in a spectacular supernatural way
- Of a new and greater temple in Jerusalem that will be a square mile in size
- Of a mountain that rises up in Jerusalem so high that it becomes the highest mountain on earth
- Of a river that will one day flow from Jerusalem into the Dead Sea making it fresh again and cause it to be teeming with fish
- Most of all, Ezekiel speaks of the glory of God residing again in Jerusalem reigning over a worldwide Kingdom
- Truly, Ezekiel's future visions are so fantastic and unparalleled in scripture they can be hard to believe
 - So how could God's people believe that Ezekiel knew what he was talking about? How could they trust his prophecies?
 - Because Ezekiel prophesied about the exiles, and those prophecies came true just as he said
 - And based on Ezekiel's flawless track record of prophecies, we can also have confidence in those things yet to come
 - That's why Ezekiel had to prophesy to the exiles whether they listened or not
 - Because his ministry was meant to extend far beyond that audience
- It must have been a great blessing to Ezekiel to know this
 - There were many dark days during his ministry to the exiles when Ezekiel offered words of life only to be mocked and rejected
 - Days God called him to do difficult, even humiliating things
 - I'm sure he persisted in his service knowing the Lord had a greater purpose in using him
 - Don't we all wish we could have what Ezekiel had?
 - Wouldn't we all like to know God's true purpose in our ministry?

- Wouldn't it be easier to persist as a struggling missionary if you knew that your lack of converts wasn't the end of the story?
- Wouldn't Christian parents feel relief if they knew God purposes didn't depend on them raising perfectly obedient children?
- Wouldn't that Sunday school teacher work with greater joy knowing their success wasn't measured by how many people attended class or how much each student learned?
- My point is that we all tend to limit our service to God based on the results we can see
 - When things look good to us, we serve gladly
 - When the results aren't to our expectation, we tend to give up
 - At the end of the day, that's a self-centered perspective
 - We're assigning ourselves too much credit and assigning God too little
 - And I think any Christian can be guilty of serving God from this selfish mindset, often without even realizing it
- If you want to test your own heart on this point, ask yourself this question
 - How would you feel if God told you something like what He told Ezekiel?
 - What if God told you go to a far away place and preach the Gospel but you won't convert a single soul
 - Still, go anyway just so they will know God sent you
 - Or be a godly parent raising your child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but they aren't going to obey you or take your advice
 - Still, do it anyway so they will know God sent you
 - Or organize and teach a Sunday school class but only a couple of people are going to show up and even fewer will listen
 - Still, do it so they might know you serve God
 - Would hearing those instructions lessen your desire to serve the Lord in those way?

- If so, it means you've been serving God for your glory
- You've been serving Him for the chance to see your result and to feel a sense a pride in that accomplishment
- In reality, if that's where your heart is, then you're only serving yourself
- But what if God told you a little more...
 - What if the Lord told that missionary that even though he wouldn't gain a convert himself, yet in a generation to come, God would use the seeds he planted to bring a great revival?
 - What if He told those parents that even though their children wouldn't heed their advice, God would use their example of faith to inspire a hundred other families to raise godly children?
 - And what if the Sunday school teacher learned that even though his class was small, one of his students would later hear the call of God to become a renown preacher of the Gospel?
- Knowing God can use our service to bring Himself glory in ways we couldn't imagine encourages us to persevere in our service even though we don't see the results
 - We're willing to withstand personal failure and to look past our difficult circumstances because we have faith it will glorify God in the end
 - Then let me share a secret with you...
 - God *always* has a bigger purpose in your service
 - He is constantly using your service to accomplish eternal outcomes
 - Most of those outcomes you won't see in your lifetime and will only learn about after you enter His presence
 - So operate in that faith now and see what He can accomplish
 - We must come to God in reverence and ready to serve Him
 - We serve in His power by His Spirit for His purposes, not our own
 - Which means we serve obediently without concern for our results today...but only with concern for His eternal glory