

EZEKIEL 10

THE GLORY DEPARTS

Do you know what we have done?

Christian author Ravi Zacharias recalls a story from the life of Sir Isaac Newton.

He was working tirelessly on some important scientific projects. He spent countless hours alone, with only his dog at his side.

One day he left the room, and the dog loyally followed. But the dog bumped into the side of his desk and knocked over a candle. Soon all of Newton's papers were on fire. Everything was reduced to ashes.

When Newton returned to see the damage, he was heartbroken. He sat down, put his head in his hands, and wept. He said to the dog, "You will never, never know what you have done."

Do you know what we have done?

As we read through the Old Testament, we read a difficult story. God's people are supposed to loyally follow him, but they willfully follow another path. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaim God's words of anger against the people.

In Ezekiel, this proclamation looks different. Ezekiel is full of bizarre scenes and vivid images. Through these events and pictures, God declares what they have done, and how he is going to respond to it.

We see this most clearly as we read the words about the Lord and the temple. The Lord met with his people in the temple. His "presence" was there, in the form of a glorious cloud.

But in Ezekiel 10, the glory departs. As we read of this, we understand more of what we have done, and more of how God responds to it.

The glory departs. **WHY IS THIS?**

We only understand chapter 10, when we look back at chapter 8. There we read of a series of five visions, which reveal what the people have done.

THE FIRST VISION is of **THE HOLY GOD**.

Ezekiel sees a man. From the waist down, he is like fire. From the waist up, he is as bright as glowing metal. He stretches out his hand, takes Ezekiel by the hair, and transports him to the court of the temple in Jerusalem. The glory of the Lord is right in front of Ezekiel, filling the temple.

This is a holy sight. When we say God is holy, we are describing his...

* Goodness. God is perfectly good. He is utterly pure. No sin is in him.

* Greatness. God is astoundingly, magnificently, indescribably, great. As the Psalmist says, no person can fathom his greatness.

Ezekiel sees this cloud of holy glory.

THE SECOND VISION is of **THE JEALOUS GOD**.

Ezekiel sees an idol - a false god. This is a piece of wood that the people would worship.

But the point of the vision is not the idol itself. It is the jealousy that idol arouses in God. That idol's presence provokes God to jealousy.

Why is God jealous? He is the only true God, and he will not share his glory with anyone. To him is due all worship.

Ezekiel sees this holy and jealous God.

Then in **THE THIRD VISION**, he sees **THE GODLESS LEADERS**.

Ezekiel is told to dig a hole in the wall to the court of the temple. When he looks through that hole, he sees pictures of animals, other creatures, and many of the false gods Israel has worshipped.

And who is worshipping? The seventy elders of the land. The leaders. They say, "The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land."

Now the leaders themselves do not even acknowledge him as God. If that is what they are doing, what are the people doing?

We start to learn the answer with **THE FOURTH VISION: THE FALSE WORSHIPPERS**.

Ezekiel sees a group of women, and they are mourning for "Tammuz."

Who is Tammuz? He is a false god who allegedly provides fertility to the wombs of the women, and vegetation to the land. It was said that every fall, Tammuz would die.

How would he live again? The people would hold festivals, with all kinds of sexual immorality, to bring him back to life.

Then **THE FIFTH VISION: THE CREATION WORSHIPPERS**.

Ezekiel is brought into the court of the temple, where he sees 25 men bowing down in worship, toward the sun.

The Lord has forbidden this, because the Creator does not want his creatures to worship the creation. He wants them to worship him.

Before a holy and jealous God, the people have declared that either he does not exist, or he might as well

not exist. They worship other gods, and they worship even the creation itself.

The Lord asks, "Is it a trivial matter?" Is this no big deal?

It is a big deal. We do not confess God for who he is: the good and great sovereign of the universe. We turn from him and live for what he has made, instead of living for him.

Today, we are more refined about this. We know better than to literally kneel before a piece of wood. But refined rebellion is still rebellion.

We "worship" wealth, and we will give anything to get it.

We "worship" power, and we will take anything to have it.

We "worship" pleasure, and we will stop at nothing to enjoy it.

We "worship" reputation, and we will do anything to secure it.

We "worship" comfort, and we will do nothing to jeopardize it.

Do we know what we have done?

Why is this glory departing? Because of the rebellion of worshippers, against the holy and jealous God of all.

WHAT IS THIS? What happens in chapter 10? What is this departing? How is the Lord responding to this rebellion?

It starts with A CLEAR SEPARATION...

In chapter 10, Ezekiel sees:

* A throne. This is the throne of the Lord.

* The cherubim. These are angelic creatures who "travel" with the Lord.

* A cloud. This represents the glory of the Lord.

* Wheels. They move with the cherubim.

Then after Ezekiel sees all of this, he sees the glory of the Lord depart from over the threshold of the temple. Then it stops above the cherubim. Then it moves again and stops at the entrance to the east temple gate.

Then in chapter 11, the glory of the Lord leaves the city altogether, and stops above the mountain east of the city.

The cloud represents the presence of the Lord, so the cloud's departure from the temple represents the Lord's separation from his people.

During the recent California wildfires, we heard the stories of firefighters going to homes and screaming, "Get out! Get away!"

That is what God does here. He removes himself from the "fire" of the corruption and rebellion of his people.

That is how God responds to sin. A holy and jealous God will not be a companion to people who do what we have done.

We find this hard to believe. We assume God is "with us all." But this vision displays a God who will separate himself from sinners.

This is a clear separation...FOR COMING JUDGMENT.

The judgment has been declared already in Ezekiel, but we read of it again in chapter 11:

"You fear the sword, and the sword is what I will bring against you..."

"I will drive you out of the city and hand you over to foreigners and inflict punishment on you. You will fall by the sword, and I will execute judgment on you at the borders of Israel.

"Then you will know that I am the Lord."

He wants these rebellious people to know who he is. He will display his holiness and jealousy, by bringing judgment upon that disobedient nation. He will step back from them, and heap judgment upon them.

He still does. He still promises judgment upon those who stubbornly refuse to turn from their rebellion, and return to him.

Do you know this?

When was the last time you heard this? When was the last time you heard a Christian say this?

When was the last time you said this? When was the last time you told someone about the separation and judgment of God?

It is not popular. It is not pleasant. But it is what God reveals about himself, here and all through the Bible.

God is separate from sinners, and God judges sinners. So his glory departs from the temple.

So WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS? How do we respond to these real, vivid, difficult images of God?

To start with, these words reveal some things that we must NEVER do.

We must never diminish God. We must never construct an image of him, that portrays him as less than he is.

We do this all the time. We see others do this all the time.

We ignore his holiness and jealousy. "No, we don't need to talk about that. Don't worry about that.

Let's just talk about his love.”

We deny his holiness and jealousy. “Maybe that's the way he was, but that's not the way he is now. You can feel good about him now.”

We must never do this. All of Scripture is God's display of himself. He has given this to us, so that we may see him as he is.

If we diminish him by ignoring or denying how holy and jealous he truly is, we are creating our own “false god.” We are worshipping a God who is more like a creature we have made, than the God he has revealed himself to be.

When we diminish God, we downplay sin. We also must never do this. Christian writer R.C. Sproul describes sin as “cosmic treason” against God. He is the Sovereign Ruler of all his creation. It is his. When we sin, we are committing high treason against him.

Dare we easily dismiss it as a “trivial matter” before him?

“I just cursed by using God's name. What's the big deal?”

“I just took care of number one. What's the big deal?”

“I just used her to have a little fun. What's the big deal?”

“I just said a few words that he didn't like. What's the big deal?”

“I just thought about doing it. I didn't do it. What's the big deal?”

“I just pulled a few strings to get what I want. What's the big deal?”

“I just worshipped ‘God’ using another name. What's the big deal?”

It is a big deal. Our sin is not a trivial matter, before a God of perfect holiness, and pure jealousy.

What do we do with this? Never diminish God. Never downplay sin.

Never...and ALWAYS.

In response to this, we always appreciate grace.

This story, like the rest of the Old Testament, reveals our need of God's grace. The holy and jealous God judges sin.

Like the other Old Testament writers, Ezekiel hoped for something better. He hoped for someone better.

That Someone is Jesus Christ. What did he do? He did what the people of Israel, and the people of all nations, have so miserably failed to do.

He lived sinlessly, before his holy and jealous Father. Then he received upon himself, the judgment of the Father, for the sins of sinners.

If you dare not diminish God and downplay sin, do you see the enormity of that? Do you see the unspeakable mercy of a God who is so violently and unalterably opposed to sin, but in his mercy will provide a way for justice to be satisfied?

We capture this with words like “propitiation” and “expiation.”

“Propitiation” is the quenching of God's wrath against sin. God's anger burns against us, for he is holy and jealous. But on the cross, Jesus received that anger. It is exhausted. It is quenched. It is gone.

“Expiation” is the “sending away” of the sin. Because Jesus died on the cross, we who trust him can be confident that our sins are gone. We are no longer separated from God and under his judgment.

Yes, we may still face hard things. But they are from the caring hand of a loving Father, not the cursing hand of an angry God. He gives them to us to make us more holy, not to destroy us.

Do you appreciate this? Do you appreciate how Jesus has quenched the wrath of God against you, and removed your sins from you?

Or is this your attitude? “I deserve grace. Maybe I have done a few things wrong, but I'm not so bad, and God owed me.”

If he owes you, it's not grace! He owes you justice. He gives you grace, by sending Jesus to secure forgiveness.

Do you appreciate it? Does this stir your heart each day, as you realize how amazingly gracious this holy and jealous God has been to you?

If we appreciate grace, we will also, always, adore the gracious God.

Think of the rebellion that Ezekiel observes. It is all about worship.

God has created us to find our happiness in him, in the act of gathered worship, and in a life of ongoing worship.

So what do we do? We look for our happiness in everything but him. We seek joy in what he has made, and not in the Maker himself. We run and run after it, but we never quite get it, because we are looking for the creation to provide, what only the Creator can supply.

If we appreciate grace, we will adore the gracious God. We will gather for the act of worship, then we will scatter for a life of worship.

We will profess our adoration of God in the act of worship, and we will express our adoration of God in a life of worship.

Do you know that you are made to adore your gracious God? Do you live with a heart that longs to adore him in all you are, and in all you do?

“My lips must sing of you, my gracious God!”

“My daily labors will be done for you, my gracious God!”

“I will open my heart to you, and I will ask you to root out every bit of my rebellion, my gracious God!”

“I will love this enemy for you, my gracious God!”

“I will serve my parents for you, my gracious God!”

“I will cut off this temptation that threatens to turn me from you, my gracious God!”

“I will tell others about you, my gracious God!”

“I will offer my talents and my resources for you, my gracious God!”

O come, let us adore him.

Do you know what you have done?

And do you know what the holy and jealous God has done?

He separates himself from the rebellious for judgment. Yet he has sent his own Son Jesus, and he has separated himself from him, so that we may be united with the Father and the Son.

He is holy. He is jealous. He is gracious. See him as he is. Speak of him as he is. Appreciate and adore him. In all you do. In all you are.