

EZEKIEL'S VISION

A SERMON

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“For the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.” Ezekiel 1:21

THERE cannot, I think, be any reasonable doubt but that the main design of this vision is to set forth the New Testament dispensation; for the New Testament dispensation, in all its characteristics, answers very precisely to this otherwise mysterious vision. In the first place, here are creatures that are delivered from a whirlwind of destruction that had carried them away from God; delivered from an impenetrable cloud of darkness, their sins; delivered from a fire that must have been to them unquenchable. And what is the first characteristic of the New Testament dispensation? Is it not this, that “you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins”? Salvation, therefore, is the first feature of this vision; salvation is the first feature and ultimate end of the Christian dispensation. The next feature of this vision is the character of the creatures; they are *living* creatures. And is it not the very business of the gospel to bring life unto the dead? Is it not the ministration of life? Is it not the bringing of the soul into that new and never-ending life that is by Christ Jesus, a life of infinite dignity, a life of unbounded pleasures, a life that knows no termination? And then, as to the qualities of these creatures, indicated by their four faces; we have of typical characters similar things said. It is said of those that came to David, that they were not of double heart, that they came with all their heart, and that they could keep rank, and that their faces were like the faces of lions, and that they were swift as roes upon the mountains. This evidently has a typical meaning. So those who are taught of God, they come to Christ with all their heart. And, then again, you have in this vision a conspicuous manifestation of the distinct personalities of the Eternal Three. And where have we such a revelation of the Trinity as we have in the gospel dispensation? And then, again, this vision is called the glory of God; and what is there so glorious to God as the everlasting salvation of his people? And then, again, this new world, this living chariot described in this chapter, which is nothing else but the new world, into which the people of God are brought, that this new world, this revolving, progressive world into which these creatures are brought, this world progresses, and finally settles down in that city, the name of which, from that day that everything is completed, from that day this is the name of that city, Jehovah-Shammah, “The Lord is there.” Who, therefore, can reasonably doubt but that, amidst a great variety in the Old Testament of representations of the coming of Christ, and the glory that should follow, this vision thus revealed to Ezekiel, as recorded in this first chapter and in the tenth also, point to the same things? And then there is another thing worthy of your attention before I

enter upon the subject, and that is this, that this revelation was granted to Ezekiel just at the commencement of the captivity of the Israelites. And there is no doubt, but Ezekiel was a preacher as well as a prophet, and therefore would explain, though the explanation is not put upon record, he would explain to his people in private the meaning of this vision; and those who were spiritual would apprehend its gospel meaning, would apprehend the grace of it and the glory of it, and would feel that it was something for them to look for under their privations: taken away, good people were, as well as apostates, they were taken away from their homes, from their native land, from their inheritances, and from all that was naturally dear to them, and carried barbarously into a foreign land. In that foreign land, when their harps were hanged upon the willows, and they wept when they thought of Jerusalem, how suited would be such a revelation as this unto them under these necessities, as well as the revelation granted to Daniel some years after, under the same circumstances! The Lord knows how to time his mercies; and if he lay upon you, or suffer to come upon you, some affliction that seems intolerable, and you bear it as long as you can, seems as though you can bear it no longer, be assured when that is the case mercy is not far off; mitigation, perhaps entire deliverance, is not far off; for the Lord is not an idle observer of the necessities of his people, but looks upon them with perfect knowledge, with perfect love, and after the order of those counsels by which they shall ultimately be made perfect in love, and each shall say,

“I know in all that me befell,
My Jesus has done all things well.”

We have, then, in our text, two parts, as you observe. First, *the imagery here used*, the wheels. Secondly, *the oneness of the Holy Spirit with the same*; “The spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.”

These wheels, then, I take to be the truths of the gospel. And some have thought that they are properly intended to represent eternity, the circles of eternity. Well, perhaps they may; but it is very difficult to get anything whatever to represent eternity. We know the wheel has in one sense no beginning nor end; but then at the same time its circumference is measurable, and its diameter too; not that we have in these wheels any measurement given of their circumference or of their diameter, and therefore we must be careful. Let us, then, look at these wheels in the several characteristics in which they are presented; and I think, as we go along, we shall see that the gospel answers to them, and we shall see that each, I hope at least that we shall feel as we go along this morning, that each part concerns us now, as we are now. Now there were four wheels, and there are two reasons, as it appears to me, why they are represented to be four wheels. Not forgetting this, that the wheels are full of eyes; and this is a beautiful characteristic of the Scriptures. Here, then, taking the wheels to mean the testimonies of the Scriptures, they being full of eyes, the Scriptures are here very beautifully personified and represented as seeing everything. Hence, “The scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith.” Now they are said to be four, because the gospel bears a fourfold aspect, namely, east, west, north, and south; according to the dear Savior’s blessed words to the centurion, and what words they are! He says, “Many shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.” And then he gives us the characteristics of that kingdom, by presenting us with the persons who are a kind of representatives of that kingdom. “They shall sit down with Abraham.” Now to sit down in the scriptural sense there means to be contented, to feel at home. And so, through mercy, you are brought, most of you, to sit down with the same grace that Abraham did; you are

contented therewith; and the same grace and promise that Isaac did; and the same love that Jacob did. That is one reason why they are called four, because the gospel thus bears this universality of aspect. I will enter more minutely upon this presently, after just observing that there may be another reason why they are called four, and that is, that while we are in our state by nature exposed on every side to destruction, as shown in the 1st of Zechariah, where the four horns had scattered Israel, four to denote that the Israelites were exposed on every hand to destruction, that their enemies should compass them about on every side, and just such is our state by nature. Here is a sinner, and he is exposed in every way to destruction. If he looks backward, there are his sins; if he looks on the right hand, refuge fails him; or on the left hand, refuge fails him; or forward, there is hell to meet him at his coming. And when a sinner is thus awakened, he says, Why, I stand exposed on every side to eternal damnation, and how soon that judgment may come I know not. It may come before another hour, before another minute. Oh, what a state is mine! Now it is said of these four wheels, that they abode by these living creatures; therefore, they are called four, to denote that universality of protection which the Lord's people have. Now, then, the sinner, seeing himself thus exposed, he says, What a happy people they are that are delivered from the state that I am in! What are they? Who are they? Here come the Scriptures to throw a little light upon it; that "they that trust in the Lord", they are the people, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever." And how is it these people cannot be removed? Why, because "as the mountains", another simile, but the same thing, "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people henceforth and for evermore." How, then, let the Christian look back, and what does he see? Why, a mercy that remembered him in his low estate, opened his eyes, and brought him to God. Let the Christian look on the left hand, and what does he see? Why, he sees the Lord as his shield there. Let the Christian look on the right hand, and what does he see, I mean, when he is favored to see that the Lord is on his side? He sees the Lord there. Let the Christian look forward, he sees the Lord there, and hears him saying, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The gospel progresses with time and takes up sinners into this new world. Now let us come, if possible, a little precisely into this matter. What are these wheels, then, that progress, that make up this new globe? for the wheels were put into that position that formed a kind of globe, a new world, into which the people of God are brought, what are the characteristics? First, that of mercy. Mercy is full of eyes; mercy sees its objects. Are you saying to yourself, What a guilty, miserable, undone, unclean, helpless worm of the earth I am before God! are you saying that? Then mercy has its eye upon you; mercy is commiserating you; mercy is thinking about you, and you will be drawn towards it, and you will say, Mercy, that is it; that is what the publican sighed for; and that is what everyone taught of God shall pray for and seek for. Mercy. And then the next is truth. "Mercy and truth are met together." You begin to see that there is mercy, and then next will come truth. Mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Here, see, are four. Mercy, great mercy, lofty mercy, eternal mercy; and then comes truth. What truth? And I want you all to be nicely established in what truth is. The question is perpetually put, you know; universally by those that differ from us; and they differ from us, as I think, because they know not their own hearts, and because they know not the total depravity of their own nature, and because they know not the majesty of God's law, and because they know not their need of the true Mediator; they very often, with a kind of exultation, say to us, "What is truth?" And, you know, we are ready; our answer is as simple as possible. We go off to the 1st chapter of Ephesians; there it is, "After that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." So, then, the gospel of our salvation is the truth, and we know that the gospel of our salvation is a divinely sworn gospel. You cannot find a promise, you cannot find a provision, that

is not included in that sworn gospel. "He could swear by no greater; he swore by himself, saying, I will bless you." Come, then, here is mercy for the miserable, and here is truth to guide the wanderer. Which way shall I go? My answer is, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. After what order? Why, as the Mediator of a sworn gospel, the Mediator of a sworn covenant, a Mediator where the promise is yea and amen. So that if we are asked, What is truth? our answer is, The gospel of our salvation. And if you ask, What is the gospel? our answer is, A sworn covenant. And if you ask, Where is the scripture to prove that the gospel of your salvation is a sworn covenant? here it is, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: this is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." This mercy, then, is not blind mercy, it sees its objects; truth is not blind truth, it sees inquirers for it. "For these things I will be inquired of, says the Lord." Are we, then, brought to see that we are by nature exposed on every side, and brought to see that the people of God are cared for on every side, and to see that there is no people like them, and brought to know our need of this mercy? And then, as I have said, comes truth, gospel truth, truth, our shield and buckler: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." I will not be sparing in using the word truth, though some men are always ridiculing us, and saying we are always using the word truth, and truth, when, say they, these high doctrine men do not know what truth is. I wish the low doctrine men knew what truth is as well as we do, and then I am sure they would not differ from us, but take their standing upon the same foundation, glory in the same theme, and delight in the same everlasting gospel, a gospel that lasts forever. Here, then, the spirit of the living creatures, the spirit of the people of God, is in these testimonies of the gospel, in the testimony of mercy, in the testimony of truth. But we will go on again. I will get you into the new world today, if I can; or rather, prove you are there; and those that are not there, may the Lord open your eyes to see you are not there, and lead you to seek his mercy and his truth; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Mercy and truth meet together; poor sinner, there is mercy, and then comes truth. And then the third wheel, if I may so speak, or testimony, forming part of this new world, is that of righteousness. Here is not only mercy to pardon, and mercy and truth to secure me, but here is a righteousness to justify me. Ah, says such an one, now I begin to see, "You are complete in him;" and now I begin to see, says one, the beauty of that scripture, "In him is no sin;" "He was manifested to take away our sin, and in him is no sin." And yet the people are in him, they are loved in him, and chosen in him, and approved in him, and accepted in him; they are all in him, and yet in him is no sin. How can that be, that they are in him, and yet in him is no sin? Why, mark the preceding clause, "He was manifested to take away our sin, and" so "in him is no sin." There the people are in him; in him is no sin; there they are, they that are there, as free from sin as Christ himself; all fair, without spot; looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. Glorious testimony this! Here, then, is righteousness; here is mercy to commiserate all your woe; and here is truth, to secure you against all danger; and here is righteousness, to constitute you honorable, as Christ is honorable; and this very body, by-and-bye, shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. And then comes peace; that will make up the four. Mercy and truth met, to part no more; they met at Calvary's cross, they meet in the soul of the believer; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Again, these wheels were one, that is, the four wheels were transverse of each other, and would, therefore, in that position, constitute a globe, a sphere, or world. And so, the gospel is one; there is a uniqueness in it. One part cannot be separated from another part, no. The departments ascribed to God the Father, such as his sovereignty, and choice, and provision, are inseparably connected

with the work of Christ, and the work of Christ is inseparably connected with the work of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit is inseparably connected with eternal glory; "He that has begun the good work will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ." So that there is no schism, no break-down part, no failure, in the gospel. See how the apostle traces out this oneness. He gives us a sevenfold oneness in few words, and a fourfold all. I like the sevenfold oneness, and I like the fourfold all. "Endeavoring to keep the unity," of the flesh? Endeavour long enough; would not do it, depend upon it; no. He as well as we can; but we shall never do that. We must have a large margin for the different temperaments, tempers, and characteristics, of the people of God, "Endeavoring to keep the unity," not of the flesh, but "the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace." Now comes the sevenfold oneness. "There is one body;" there is one mystic body, the church; and "one Spirit," that is, that animates this body. In the true church of God, as a church considered, there is one Spirit of life and light, one Spirit of truth and liberty, that animates the whole body of the church; one body, one mystic body, and one Spirit. Third, there is one hope; "even as you are called in one hope of your calling." Jesus Christ has been the hope of the saints in all ages, he is their hope now, and that hope, he being the hope, is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. "One Lord, that is, one Lord Jesus Christ, only one, one Mediator. And "one faith;" there is only one kind of faith, that that is found in the body mystic, that that is of the Holy Spirit, that that precedes one hope. One faith: never was but one faith in the true church, and there never will be; and that one faith is this, "It is by faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure unto all the seed;" that is the faith that has been in the church in all ages. And "one baptism," belonging to Jesus Christ; there is but one ordinance of baptism. And "one God and Father." Here is the sevenfold oneness then; here is the one church, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Mediator, and the one faith, and the one baptism, baptized into Christ, risen with him and by him; and one God the Father. And then here are four *all's*. "One God and Father *of all*." So, all are brought into the Father's eternal love, into the Father's choice, and into the Father's counsels. "Who is above *all*" what a mercy! is above all; above all our sins, above all our foes, above all our necessities; he is above all. "And through all;" bless the Lord for that! he abides by us through it all. Let every Christian learn divine sovereignty, divine predestination, and divine mercy, from two sources, his own personal life and experience, and from the word of God. I cannot reflect upon the way in which the Lord has taken care of me for so many years, done what he has, without seeing in it the truth that he is through all; bless his holy name! And, therefore, learn his sovereignty in suffering things that sometimes grieve and distress us, yet that same sovereignty is essential to our welfare. And "in you all;" that is, in what you are. Are you a loved one? God the Father is in that in loving you. Are you a chosen one? God the Father is in that in choosing you. Are you a redeemed one? God the Father is in that in providing the ransom. Are you a called one? God the Father is in that in sending his good Spirit to call you. Are you a preserved one? God the Father is in that. "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands." And are you planted in the likeness of Christ's death, and from that precious death your soul is nourished? God the Father is in that. "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up;" but he has planted you there. And do you by-and-bye get possession of eternal glory? God the Father is in that, having appointed you not unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, then, if this living globe in this chapter represents the New Testament dispensation, represents salvation, represents the various qualities of the gospel, and represents the uniqueness or oneness of the several parts of the gospel, and represents the people of God in their eternal oneness with Christ and with each other in these things; if this be the meaning, how nicely the

gospel answers to it all. I have not used the word *if* there with any doubt in my mind about it. I have not troubled you with the theories of men, various opinions they have propounded. **Ever remember that Jesus Christ is the very essence of the Scriptures.** Wherever there is anything that we cannot understand, if it seems to bear upon anything of a merciful kind, let us take into consideration the person, and the work, and the glory of Christ, and test those Scriptures by what he has done; and if that law or way of interpretation does not explain it, then we must leave it as it is; for you will get a very poor explanation if your explanation does not say anything concerning Jesus Christ. Forever blessed be his holy name for that one sentence in the New Testament; it speaks volumes upon volumes; that “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself;” “concerning himself.” Bless the Lord for ever and ever! The Lord explains a scripture to me, and shows me that scripture relates to Jesus Christ, and consequently to my life, to my salvation, to my welfare, to that he has given me; it is this that endears the God of heaven and earth, it is this that carries our affections up to a brighter and a better world. Thus, then, they are four wheels, to denote the universal aspects of the gospel; to denote the people of God are cared for on every side; and that they are one, to denote the uniqueness and certainty of God’s truth.

The third characteristic I notice is, that these wheels were lofty; they were so high that they were dreadful. It is very seldom that we poor, despised Nazarenes get into a position in which we can say a word for ourselves; but I think we may this morning, Ah! says the man who does not yet know his real condition as a sinner, but is a professor nevertheless, “Do you go to hear such a man?” “Yes.” “Oh, he is so dreadfully high, he is so out-of-the-way high; he is so shockingly high, he soars above everything, dreadfully high!” Well, Ezekiel says the wheels were so high that they were dreadful; only Ezekiel did not use the word dreadful in an objectionable sense, but in a worshipful sense; he used the word dreadful in a worshipful sense, the humiliation sense; just the same as Jacob did, when he said, “How dreadful is this place!” What do you mean, Jacob? Do you mean it is something you reject, something you think out of the way? Oh, no! I will explain my meaning. There is a majesty, a solemnity about it, I have never experienced before. “How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” So, these wheels, they were so high, they were dreadful. So that this mighty globe goes on just as independent of man as the globe we inhabit. The earth continues, the earth we inhabit continues her diurnal, her annual, her recessional, and her onward, in connection with other worlds, progress. This fourfold motion our earth has, and entirely independent of man. And so, this mighty globe of the gospel, when it stood still, the living creatures stood still. And is it not so? When the gospel does not go on in us, we cannot go on with that; if it stands still, we stand still; when it went forward, they went forward. Just so it is. If this new world should take you up this morning, carry you a little way on the road towards your ultimate destiny, you will be thankful, if it be only a little lift by the way. And when this chariot ascended, or this globe, this new world, ascended up on high, the living creatures went up with it. And is it not exactly so? Are there not times when your soul is taken up by the gospel, your affections taken up, and you forget the things that are below, they will not bear looking at? Where is there a Christian that has not his thorn, his troubles, his burdens, his days of sighing, mourning, and groaning? In what a vast variety of ways the Lord solemnizes the minds of his people, humbles them into the dust before him, and makes them feel that there is no abiding-place anywhere but in Christ Jesus! And when thus cast down, heaviness in the heart makes it stoop. When the gospel then comes, carries them up above it all, oh, how precious these seasons are! Now, then, these wheels were commanding in their appearance, and this mighty globe rushed

along, and still goes on, I mean, this new world, as independent of man as the motions of the earth we inhabit are independent of man. Moved by the laws of nature, the earth, the globe we inhabit; and this new world, the gospel, moved by the laws of grace, bless the Lord for it! Well, now, what do you say? Do you think you have got into this new world? Oh, say you, I see my exposed state, and see that I can be defended on every side only by being there; and I do see that the gospel is one, and I do love mercy, and I do love truth, and I do love righteousness, and I do love peace. Well, then, all I say to you is, You are no more a stranger and foreigner, but you certainly are an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. If God meant to destroy you, he never would have taken you up into this new world. You are a living creature, to die no more. There appears to be no weaknesses about these living creatures, that is to say, they are represented simply in their saintship character. And they are said to be fiery, not the fire of the law, but the fire of the gospel. And they moved like flashes of lightning, like burning lamps: they are fiery ones. And so, in all ages the saints of God have been fiery ones. Say you, I am afraid I am not, then. You would be if the Lord had kindled the fire a little. You know what one says, Ah, that I had more love, and, more zeal, and more life, and more power! I think I shall give it all up. I am a poor, cold, wintry creature; there is nothing in me but death. But “while I was musing the fire burned: then spoke I with my tongue.” “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way?” See what the Master can do. The servant may talk long enough; if the Master do not speak by the servant, all is cold; the word is a mere sound without his Spirit. But I am digressing a little here. Now these wheels were high, lofty. It was not a small globe, but large. The dimensions of its circumference and diameter are not given; for, in reality, infinity is the circumference of the gospel, and infinity, consequently, its diameter, and eternity its duration. It is a gospel that embodies the blessed God in all the perfections of his nature. And their being high, see how it accords with other scriptures. “As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts.” “The saints of the Most High”, and they dwell on high. The lofty truths of the gospel, they go forth in all the majesty described, “My word shall not return to me void, but shall accomplish that which I please.”

Now I must advance one more point, and then, without a quarter finishing the subject, I must close; and that is this, the wheels are four, they are one, they are lofty. And then the fourth point is, that the prophet heard a voice indicative of the astonishment of the change of things brought about by the progress of this mystic chariot. “It was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel! I do not think that there is a Hebrew scholar existing that would call in question the propriety of the remark, if I make it, that with equal propriety, perhaps with greater propriety, ought to have had the word there *revolution*, “It was cried unto them in my hearing, O revolution!” What a change is brought about! What person ever brought about such a change as did the Savior? See the law unfulfilled, and then look at it fulfilled. See sin unatoned for, then look at it atoned for. See the law unmagnified, then see it magnified. See Satan unconquered, then see him conquered. See the sinner lost, and then see him saved. “O revolution!” What a change! what an alteration! Never was such a change wrought as the wondrous revolution wrought at Calvary’s cross, a wondrous change. When your soul was born of God, what a revolution! How the heavens, your moral heavens, were then darkened! how your moral moon was turned into blood! what an earthquake there was in your soul! how it swallowed up all your thoughts, and former purposes, and intentions! and how you came out now a new man, determined to live a new life, to be a praying man, to be a God-fearing man, to be a Christ-loving man, to be a truth seeking man! What mighty change was that! Truly, truly, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Go on to the last great day, and let us see the poor body,

that dies corruptible, mortal, weak, earthy, made of dust and ashes, see the mighty revolution when it shall rise at the last great day and realize all the blessedness implied in this beautiful vision, where your body and your soul then possess all the strength, elasticity, purity, durability, and perfection that shall make you like the dear Redeemer. See what a revolution is this! "It was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel! O revolution!" Oh, what a change has mercy wrought! What has God wrought! It will take a whole eternity to tell out one millionth part of the wonders of the Lord our God.

Can there then be any doubt but the four living creatures here in Ezekiel are the same with the four beasts (or, as better rendered, living creatures) spoken of in Revelation 5th, where we find these living creatures, having every one harps and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints? These living creatures, then, are heavenly musicians, and they are saints, and therefore are a praying people; and they sing the song which none but the redeemed can even learn, much less sing; and as in the Revelation, we find these living creatures associated with the throne of God, and with the eternal three, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, and with the progress of the gospel. Watching very narrowly the opening of every seal, and with delight they beheld the rider on the white horse, going forth conquering and to conquer; so here in Ezekiel is the throne of God, and the rainbow to show that it is a throne of mercy, grace, and peace; and here also in Ezekiel we have the Holy Spirit, the Divine Word in human form, and God the Father as commanding the whole, and all go straight forward. God the Father goes straight on in counsel immutable; the Savior goes straight on with the will of the Father; the Holy Spirit goes straight on, giving to every one severally as he will; and so the gospel goes straight on, prospering whereto it is sent; the saints go straight on with the truth; and so they went, says Ezekiel, every one straight forward. And though I have here treated upon only one part of my text, I am giving what I believe to be the mind of the Holy Spirit in the revelation made to Ezekiel. Truly the heavens, the *Christian* heavens, were opened unto him, and he saw the visions of God; again and again did these gospel glories appear to him, until he saw them all finally settle down (as we see in his 43rd chapter) in the ultimate city of God. For that is the city at the end of Ezekiel's book. But *another* representation of the Christian economy, given partly in Levitical dress, but all with a Christian meaning. Into this city Ezekiel saw the living creatures come, where there is no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb. And these living creatures shall serve him, and see his face, and reign for ever and ever.