

CAN YOU SEE THIS?  
Ezekiel 1:28-2:10

Question: if you were on our church's Nominating Committee, would you make an effort to help the person you were recruiting see exactly what the job would entail? Or, instead, would you try to make it sound easier—in hopes that they would say "yes?"

It occurs to me that Jesus always tried to make sure that those who chose to follow Him had a pretty clear understanding of what they were getting into—what His expectations of them would be.

He lost some followers by doing this, but He evidently felt it better for them to walk away at the outset than to have them tag along until they decided that following Jesus involved more than they had in mind.

Well, this is certainly consistent with what we find in the Old Testament as well—and specifically what I'm thinking about here is God's call in the lives of the prophets. Take the prophet Ezekiel, for example.

God calls Ezekiel to be His prophet. He is to speak to the Israelites the words God gives him, even though God warns him that they probably won't listen. And there's much more to this call; but rather than me telling you about it, let's turn now to our text so you can hear it for yourself.

In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the prophet has a vision of God. Then, in chapter two, God issues His call to Ezekiel. We'll begin reading with the last verse of chapter one where Ezekiel is telling us what he saw. He says (Ezekiel 1:28-2:10):

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking."

**2** <sup>1</sup> He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." <sup>2</sup> As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

<sup>3</sup> He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. <sup>4</sup> The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn.

Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' <sup>5</sup> And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them.

<sup>6</sup> And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. <sup>7</sup> You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. <sup>8</sup> But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

<sup>9</sup> Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, <sup>10</sup> which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

Well, how many folks do you think we would get to serve around here if we used that approach? But this IS how God approached Ezekiel; and get this: Ezekiel said "yes." Why?

Well, I think it's because of what Ezekiel was able to see; and as we consider his story this morning, we need to ask ourselves what you and I are able to see when it comes to God and His will for our lives.

Just so you'll know, I'll be raising this question often today: "**Can you see this?**" We'll look at what Ezekiel saw, and then ask ourselves if we can see it too.

So with that, let's get started. If we had read the first chapter of Ezekiel, we would have found a remarkable account of this soon-to-be prophet being encountered by God. Ezekiel sees God. And His vision of God is pretty incredible—I hope you'll read it soon.

But it's this vision of God that suggests the first question we need to ask this morning: **Can we see God?** At any time in our lives, have we truly had an encounter with the Almighty? Have we SEEN Him—not physically, but in terms of recognizing his awe-inspiring greatness and knowing His presence in our lives?

Here's the thing about this. If we are to ever see what we most need to see in life, we must begin by seeing God. It won't happen by just looking at ourselves. Nor will it happen by

observing the lives of those around us. To meet our deepest needs, we have to see God.

And in the world in which we live, that's not an easy task. We've done a lot to hide God's presence—to tune Him out. It's not that God no longer speaks, but that we're not listening. It's not that He no longer seeks to reveal himself to us. We just don't have the eyes to see Him.

Sociologists call this the "secularization of society." Outside these walls, we don't hear much about God anymore--except during political campaigns, maybe, when some politician wants to make the claim that God is on his side. Our recent guests from Ireland had some interesting observations about this phenomenon.

But now that the elections are over, we won't be hearing about faith and family in those political ads, and God will be pretty much restricted to church once again. All the while, we wonder what's wrong with the world and what's wrong with us. Maybe THIS is what's wrong with us!

Like the prophet of old, we need to see God. We need to see God as He is and not as we try to make Him out to be in order to serve our own purposes. We need to truly see God, but how?

Well, probably not in the spectacular way that Ezekiel did. But if we are open, the vision will come. If we have faith that God is still present in our world, combined with an attitude of expectancy, and a willingness to seek Him—we'll see God.

This verse by Elizabeth Barrett Browning points to the difference between the secular mind—one that's closed to God--and what might be called the God-conscious mind. She wrote:

**Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.**

Do you see what she's saying? If we'll open our eyes we can see God in the beauty of nature. But so often, we just pluck berries without ever considering, let alone acknowledging...their source.

One of the blessings Pam and I received from having guests in our home from Northern Ireland was the way they saw everything here with fresh eyes! I'm talking about the stuff we see every day—so often that it's become commonplace for us.

For them, it was all brand new! And all of it was "just brilliant," to use their terminology—just as everything in their homeland had been for us back when we visited there. Interesting, isn't it?

Why do we quit seeing the things that we really need to see? Why do we take the beauty around us for granted? Why does it cease to fill our hearts with wonder...and praise?

Every encounter with the grandeur of the mountains or the bright colors of autumn leaves or the beauty of our fellow human beings—yes, even those who've been familiar to us for a long time--should not only leave us a bit awe-struck, but also provide us with a new vision of the God who made them.

The Psalmist reminds us, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). So look for God in nature—look for Him in the people and things that surround you each day. You'll find Him. You'll see God there.

But consider this: there is even more of God to be seen here, in this place, as we gather for worship. In the songs and prayers, the Scripture readings and sermons, God is present if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

But we won't find Him if we enter with a "here we go again" attitude. We won't find Him if our minds are focused on where we'll go for lunch later or whether today's "round" will be better than last week's...or whatever our favorite distraction is.

But if, instead, our songs are outlets for the praise that has too long been pint-up inside, if our prayers are offered with a firm conviction that we have a loving and compassionate Father-God who hears and cares; and, if we listen intently to the words of Scripture and the words of preaching for the Eternal Word of Truth, then we'll see Him. We'll see God.

Each time we gather for worship, our hearts' desire should be a fresh vision of God. And it will come. But when it comes, be prepared for what comes next.

**2.** For when we see God, we will also see ourselves more clearly than ever before. Which brings us to our second question: **“Can we see ourselves?”** If we do, I mean, if we really see ourselves after having seen God—then let me warn you, we’ll not like what we see.

When the prophet “Isaiah” had his vision of the Lord, it shocked him. He saw himself in relation to God, and he cried out, “Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).

When Ezekiel saw God, he fell facedown in the dust. It was too much for him. The great chasm between God’s perfection and his own imperfections, God’s holiness and his sinfulness, was more than Ezekiel could handle. He fell on his face.

We are a very self-conscious society. We spend a lot of time looking at ourselves, spending tons of money as we do in hopes that it will make what we see in the mirror look better!

Now, we need to look at ourselves, but the problem is our self-examinations tend to be rather superficial. We pay close attention to our clothes and grooming, even our houses and cars—because these have all become part of how we see ourselves today.

But do we give much attention to internal matters: our thoughts, attitudes, motives? And if by chance we do discover something within us of poor quality, we dismiss it, saying, “Why worry? I’m as good as the next fellow.” And we’re probably right.

But once we catch a vision of a holy God, our rationalizations no longer work. We’re under conviction; and we know that it really doesn’t matter how our lives “stack-up” in relation to others. We now see ourselves from God’s perspective--through His eyes.

Only then is our self-righteous, good as the next guy attitude crushed; and we bow our head in humility and say, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It is then, and only then, that something life-changing takes place in us.

God says, “Get off your face, Ezekiel. Stand up. I want to speak to you.” And Ezekiel tells us that before he could even move,

God's Spirit came to him, raised him to his feet, and spoke to him.

What a beautiful picture of God's grace: Ezekiel being lifted to his feet by a God who refuses to leave him with his face in the dirt. Sometimes we have to reach the very depths of despair about our lives before we will allow God to do something with them. But once He gets our attention, we need to keep our eyes open, for there is much more to see.

God does not set us on our feet just to stand there. He sets us on our feet that we might be His prophets, called and commissioned to speak and to live for Him.

**3.** So there's a third question we need to ask this morning: **Can we see our mission?** Or if you prefer, can we see our purpose? Do we understand what we're here for?

Every person and, yes, every church, has a reason for being. There is a divine purpose for our existence, a direction our lives are to pursue, a mission that God has for us to accomplish.

Twelve years ago, our church adopted this mission statement:  
**Our Purpose Is to Reflect the Love of Jesus Christ by...  
Loving God through Sincere Worship and Devoted  
Discipleship,  
Loving Others through Consistent Witness and  
Compassionate Ministry,  
Loving Life in Christ through Faithful Involvement in the  
Fellowship of His Church.**

Why did we spend so much time in study and prayer composing this statement? We did it because we need to see and understand what our mission is. We did our best to state it clearly. This won't guarantee that we'll carry it out, but at least it serves as a reminder of what we should be doing.

There is a bit of a crisis within the Church and among Christians today. We don't always seem to have a very good handle on what we're about or what our purpose is.

That's a dangerous position to be in. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). That's serious, friends. The absence of vision can be fatal.

So how do we avoid this slow, visionless death? Well, first, we must see God. And to see God, we have to see Jesus; for it's in Him that we behold the Father. Jesus says to us, "He that has seen me has seen the Father."

There is a simple chorus which we often sing. It says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face..."

Until we do that, until we look at Jesus, see His life, study His teachings, learn of His atoning death and resurrection, any vision of God that we have is incomplete.

Likewise, we can't see ourselves until we've seen Christ Jesus. Only as we compare our lives to His do we discover our ineptness for living.

A close look at Jesus will dispel any false pride that we have concerning our own lives. Placed along side His life, our lives grow very pale; and we realize that we're sinners in need of a Savior.

But it's also only in Jesus that we realize the vast potential life holds for us. He is what God intends for us to be.

We look to Jesus and discover that we also have a mission. We look to Him and find the grace and courage we need to be about the ministries God has for us.

So there it is. This is what is involved in being a follower of Jesus Christ. It's not always easy, but it's always best. He wants us to know.

Jesus wants us to see our Heavenly Father in Him. He wants us to own up to our brokenness, so we will turn to Him and find in Him the mercy and forgiveness that fixes us and makes us whole.

He wants us to discover our purpose, the meaning of our lives, in Him, and to love Him, serve Him, and live for Him each day.

Can you see this, friends? I believe the Lord wants all of us to see this—and then to respond to everything that He enables us to see. Will you? Now?