

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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Ezekiel 1 v 28

As the appearance of the bow that is
in the cloud in the day of rain, so was
the appearance of the brightness round about.
This was the appearance of the likeness of the
glory of the Lord. And when I saw it I fell on
my face and I heard a voice of One that spake

This whole book is full of mysteries. The prophet was anointed of God to set forth things relating to the world and to the church. The key to the whole of the prophecies of the Old Testament you will find in the first Epistle of Peter, where he says that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets. They searched what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified of the things that should come, to the saints. And this the Lord Jesus opened in His gentle reproof and divine instruction to the two disciples who were sadly journeying to Emmaus. Beginning at Moses He expounded in all the scriptures - Moses and the Prophets downward - the things concerning Himself. And this is the Scripture that came, not by the will of man, but in old time by the men of God who were inspired; the Scripture that is of no private interpretation. And this book, written by the prophet Ezekiel, who also was a priest, and whose name signifies "God will strengthen", this whole book relates to two great parties, the church and the world, God dealing with them both. And the prophet needed to be strengthened to declare these things, these mysteries which were taking place and would take place in the world, and things which today are taking place. He needed to be strengthened to declare the judgments of God upon Mount Seir, upon those who had wasted the mountains of Jerusalem and had made them desolate. He needed to be strengthened to declare that God would visit these enemies of the church of Christ with His heavy judgments, and also he was inspired wonderfully and blessedly to declare to the church in her oppression, in her captivity, in her desolation, good things, things of which we read in the Psalms "Glorious things of thee

are spoken, O city of God". The broken, the driven away, the lame and the maimed and the halt and the poor, these are all spoken to in this book, and the last chapters have a blessed description, in figure, of that Jerusalem, which is being built, which God has created, and is creating for His praise and glory, the praise and glory of His grace. The key then is very blessed. It does not remove mysteries, so far as some are concerned, but it does give, if I may use such a word, a general idea of what the prophecies of the Old Testament mean. They were all written by the Spirit of Christ. If you can bear that in mind, it may sometimes help you when you are reading the prophetic parts of the Word of God, that they were inspired by the Spirit of Christ who was in them, and those ministers of God, the prophets, searched, diligently searched into the things and into the times of which they were prophesying. They searched diligently into the things and time that the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand the suffering of Christ and the glory that should follow. And I am apt to think, and disposed to say, that that is one secret, if not the secret, of the way in which the Holy Ghost expresses Himself with regard to future events. As, for instance, the prophet Isaiah beautifully puts the incarnation and imputation of sin to Christ, the bruising and wounding and chastising of Him by His Father, and His death, all in the past tense. Not events to come, but events already past. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all". The Lord wounded Him and bruised Him and put Him to grief and shame. And Jesus Christ hath laid down His life, hath poured out His soul unto death. This was by the Spirit of Christ, who was in the prophet Isaiah. And if we can receive this by the Lord's teaching, it will give to this wonderful book in various parts of it, a reality and a sweetness and an application as to our own time, of the things of which he prophesies. And if you can dismiss from your minds that human figment of a city to be built; Jerusalem and Palestine to be rebuilt and inhabited, with Christ a literal King reigning there for a thousand years, it will be a good thing. It is a human figment, nothing more, nothing better. I believe it can be shown by measurements, that it is an impossible thing to put such a city into Palestine, as is described by Ezekiel in the closing chapters of this book. It belongs to the church, it belongs to some sinners here, who are being builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Dug out of the quarry of nature, hewn out of the rock of

hardness, and brought to Jesus Christ and built up in Him and bonded together in Him. It has reference to the Priesthood of Christ, it has reference to the entrance of Christ into glory, by that gate through which none other shall go. It has reference to the glory of God in the church of the living God.

In this chapter we have the representation of the cherubims, of the wheels, of the living creatures, whose brightness was as the terrible crystal. There are a good many conjectures as to what these creatures mean and what their work means and about this I do not propose to speak at all particularly, but I have no doubt that it is God working by His chosen instruments in the world to destroy Mount Seir and to destroy all who laid waste His mountains. There appears to me to be no reason to doubt they are God's chosen ministers. Whether, as some suppose, angels, or whether, as others think - and I am disposed to think with them - the ministers of the gospel, or, as some say, the four gospels, we must leave. My own opinion is, I just give it for what it is worth, that chiefly the ministry of the gospel is intended by these four living creatures. I can hardly think without trembling, because, if it be so, what must one say or think or feel of one's own ministry? But the text brings us to One who is the centre. The church is the centre of the world and Christ is the centre of the church, her life, her ground, her King, her hope, her All. And if we be the Lord's people, it will come to pass that we shall have need and when we receive this blessed truth concerning Christ, shall feel that He is All and in All.

The prophet, having been shown the vision of these living creatures, and the wheels within wheels, and their movements, and their likeness, and so on, is brought to another vision, a continuation, and yet another. Above the firmament that was over the heads of these living creatures was the likeness of a throne. There must be a throne where there is a King. Is this throne the throne of grace? Is it not the throne of grace? And if it is the throne of grace, well, some of us here have been favoured both to see it and to approach it. And what a favour, O what a favour, to get near to God. What a blessing it is that He has erected a throne that can be seen. It is written by Paul to Timothy, that God only hath immortality, dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto, whom no man hath

seen nor can see. But here is the throne, that is a likeness, a sort of likeness that can be looked upon. Its colour is beautiful, it is bright, it is glorious, but it is seeable. What a mercy that God gives His children a sight of His throne and more than that, He invites them to it. "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need". What want is there, what sin is there, what trouble is there, that you are forbidden to take to this throne? What weakness, what fears, what bondage is there, that you are forbidden to go to this throne with? Everything, every want, every creature, every trouble, all opposition; these are matters which God will have His people bring to Him. "Come boldly". And John saw the same when he saw Christ, the Man, that glorious Person, whom He described in the 1 Revelation. He saw Him later as he speaks in the same book. He saw a mighty angel and round His head was a rainbow. A glorious high throne, Jeremiah saw and prophesied of. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary". Poor sinner, if you are concerned about your salvation, if you are concerned about your sinfulness, if you see your corruptions and feel your death, there is but one place where you will find relief, and that is this throne. There you will find it because upon this throne, above and upon it, is the likeness of a man. Who can answer to this but the Lord Jesus. The likeness of a man. "And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about it. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake." (Ezekiel 1 v 27/28)

Now we know from Scripture that the bow in the cloud is a symbol of mercy, a sign of mercy. Said God to Noah after the flood, making a covenant with Noah - "I do set My bow in the cloud in the day of rain" That bow is there. It is the sun catching in his rays the rain that is falling. It is the bow that says - though the rain is falling, it will not drown the earth. When in the midst of your trouble you get a sight of Christ, it is like the bow catching hold of your troubles and putting a sign of mercy into them and saying - you are not to be

drowned. There is hope in your end, there is hope that God will bless you, and this is the sign, the bow in the cloud in the day of rain.

Let us then, as enabled, for a short time look at this great sight, for it is a great sight. Great, first of all, because of this, it is incarnate Deity that is here showing Himself, none less, none else - incarnate Deity. What hope is there but in this blessed Person, the Son of God incarnate? His eternal Father sent Him. He came freely; He assumed our nature. He is seen above upon the throne, God and Man in One Person. Ah, whatever looseness about this there may be, whatever denials of it there may be, in the world, this, this is the centre of the hope of the people of the living God - God in human flesh. Each child of God can say in his turn and in his measure, as Christ is shown to him,

Till God in human flesh I see
My thoughts no comfort find

But if Emmanuel's face appear
My morning is begun

All the brightness of the sun, all the beauty of the morning star, all the graciousness of God, all the sweetness of God's love, all the tenderness of His compassion, all the steadfastness of His purpose, all the power of His arm, Jesus Christ fully expresses, for He is the brightness of His Father's glory, the express image of His Person. So that this is the point to which we must come, to which I would bring you in thus speaking, I mean, namely, to ask the question whether or no we have seen this Person by faith exalted at the right hand of God. Just as the bow in the cloud in the day of rain calls attention to itself, and each one of us can tell how we have looked on the bow and admired it, so, if we have seen Jesus Christ by precious faith, we have looked on Him and admired His Person, admired the constitution of His Person, the fulness of His Person, the greatness and the glory of His Person, and have felt the attraction of His Person; have felt as if something were irresistably drawing and fixing our eyes on Himself; as if, for the moment, there was not another object on which to fix our gaze, another person of whom we could entertain a thought;

so full, so attractive, so good, so suitable, so gracious, was Christ in our view. Well, what a mercy that is. Reflect on this truth for a moment. Ezekiel had this vision given to him. He was among the captives in northern Mesopotamia, among those who were taunted by their enemies, to whom their enemies said, "Sing us one of the Lord's songs; among those whose heart was directed by the Lord. And the Lord had chosen him to be a prophet, and there came a day when the word came expressly to him and then began this vision. Now sinner, in quite another way, not to make a prophet of you, but to do you good, this sight will be given. You may not say it came expressly on such a day, but you will be able to say, there was a time when I did not see that Blessed One and there is a time, and it may be known, when you can say, I do look on Him. My eyes do look on Him and sometimes I am afraid of losing the sight, for I do feel that, losing sight of Him, I should lose my centre, and if I did not lose my hope, its vigour would wither and I should be a prey to fear. You follow me? Ah there is a moment when a child of God comes to this; he looks on Christ with eyes given to him, and feels about Christ as he felt not before. This is a great thing.

Now if we are led a little to enter into the very Person of Him who has a rainbow about His head, let us a little consider what this rainbow says. God had visited sin and sinners by a terrible judgment. He had commanded Noah to make an ark whose dimensions and account you have in Genesis. He commanded him, when the day had arrived for His judgment to be opened and poured out, He commanded him to enter into the ark with two of every kind and they entered, and then the flood came, the windows of heaven were opened, the bottles of heaven began to empty their contents upon a defiled, a cursed earth and the earth was drowned. The waters disappeared and the earth re-appeared and Noah with his eight little crew came forth from the ark and God met with him and spoke to him and gave him an assurance that never again would he destroy the earth for man's sake, and to seal, so to speak that covenant, He gave the sign of the bow. "I do set my bow in the cloud in the day of rain." It signified therefore several things. First it signified mercy. Is not that what you need? Can you live without it? Can you expect to escape destruction from the presence and glory of God without it? Can you think that God will let you live without punishment unless you see this bow? Is it not full of mercy?

Is it not a triumphant declaration of mercy? Is it not, when opened to faith's eye, a vision of mercy, mercy extending to the whole earth? Now spiritually, what a sight it is when God comes to a sinner sometimes, saying in his heart, the Lord wont destroy you for He is full of mercy. With the Lord there is mercy that He may be feared and with Him is plenteous redemption. Now if any of you are concerned about salvation and have never been brought to a point about your interest in Christ, should you get a sight of this, you will see that which means to you, whether you can realise it or not, heaven. It means an escape from drowning. It means that there is a Rock on which God has placed you, on which you will stand, and neither flood, nor wind, nor rain, nor devil, shall ever prevail. It means all that God in His infinite mercy gave the Man Christ Jesus to express His heart of mercy, to express to a sinner, who fears drowning, who feels he deserves it, the truth that it never shall overtake him, and you must feel this to understand the comfort of it. What! a guilty sinner may say to himself, is it so indeed, that my guilty soul shall escape the deserved wrath of God? Is it so indeed that I, who am full of sin, from whom sin seems to exude, and excell everything else about me and in me - I am full of it - that I, a piece of hell, shall one day enter heaven? And but for the appearance of Christ in His Person and His mercy, such a hope would be impossible. But here, it is not only possible, but it is made over to a sinner, and it becomes a living experience in his heart.

This bow is mercy, my friends. This bow is most potent evidence of God's mercy to a sinner, to His own church, that the whole of sin shall not drown him, that the floods of wrath shall not drown him. That he shall not be overcome, but that God will see to it that he shall find a place of refuge in the day of storm. It does not say there shall never be any more rain. It does not say that the child of God shall have no more trouble, no tribulation, but it does say that neither tribulation, nor floods of trouble shall overcome him and ruin him. It does say that the good covenant God the Father has given His eternal Son incarnate to save him. It does say that there is a throne to which these may fly and find a sanctuary, that is a refuge. O how suitable it is. May it be suitable to some of you. May it fall into your hearts with power, that there is a bow in the cloud in the day of rain. When you are in trouble, when sin threatens you, when

wrath threatens you, when devils threaten you, when various things threaten you, that, in that very day, there is a bow. And as it shines, and its shining reaches your trouble, immediately just catching it as it were in itself, and letting you see the beams of mercy like the bow in the cloud in the day of rain, and that bow, thus beautiful, and formed most wonderously, says, no drowning; so Christ coming to you in a day of trouble, may say and will say, no drowning, no hell, no wrath, no curse. O what a word. The bow has a loud voice, a voice of mercy, and thus has this in it, namely, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is very beautiful in those concluding chapters of this prophecy, to see the house where the beasts were slain, where the sacrifices were brought, and it is very wonderful to see by faith where Christ is brought forth. Where, as in the case of Isaac, there was a ram caught by its horns in the thicket to save Isaac's life. So this precious Christ is set forth as the One whose sacrifice saves a sinner, saves him from wrath, saves him from curse, and says in his heart - you will never sink into hell, for Christ has opened a new and living way to God. Nay, He is that way. Therefore says Paul in the Hebrews "Having boldness brethren to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say His own flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near". Let us draw near to this great God because we have a Priest through whom we may go. Did you ever see this? A bow in the day of rain is not more visible to our eye than is the sacrifice of Christ visible to the eye of faith sometimes. I speak to some who understand what I say, the eye of faith has looked on the sacrifice of Christ. The heart may have said, you are not quite sure about an interest in it, but, says the sinner, I have seen the sight, I have seen the sight. You may be tempted that it was only a natural sight, but still there it remains; you have seen the sight, Christ crucified, and that has taught you that there is a new way to God. As the bow in the cloud in the day of rain, so is the appearance of the glory of God; so is the appearance of Christ's death, that it tells all who see it, that there is a new, a living way unto God. And this again is beautifully expressed in the Hebrews in words just before you come to the exhortation "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace". The Apostle says that the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, joints and marrow and is a

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not naked and opened before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. What a shower, what a deluge this may seem to be. What trouble it brings, the searching, discriminating, dissecting word of the living God, that brings you to your own view, dissects and brings to you your motives, your inner life, things you have done that no creature knows about and never will. These are open to your view. It is like a shower; it comes upon you and you are ready to perish. Now just in that there is this wondrous connection, this blessed verse, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" able to sympathise, able to have compassion, able to bear with us - "Let us therefore come boldly". The death of Christ is connected with this throne. The death of Christ makes access to this throne a sweet reality to all who get it. The death of Christ is the plea of everyone taught of the Holy Ghost. The death of Christ will be your plea and your only ground of hope of escaping the wrath to come. As the bow is in the cloud, so is Christ's death brought to view. Christ's death is made visible to faith, and the new way, different from the old way of works and obedience, a new way.

Why, some of you may be very glad of the Old Testament history, yes, very glad. I mean this, here is a nation chosen of God to be His peculiar inheritance and treasure, His portion. This nation receives from Him laws, good laws and statutes, evidence of His favour, miracles of preservation and deliverance over and over again. Brought into the land of promise, blessed with the presence of God in the very heart of it. This nation is daily more or less guilty of unfaithfulness, apostacy, idolatry, and all manner of abominations. What that has been to me sometimes I could never express. Then God comes to this nation and He says - I will search out and I will seek and bring again that which was driven away, that which was wounded, that which I have chastised. I will bring all of them back to Me. I will punish those who have punished them and, though they are polluted, though they have been so perpetually unfaithful, breaking My covenant with them, I will call them and I do call them a virgin. My dearly beloved friends, we are as black as the Jews, we are as guilty as they were. In different ways, on different grounds, but we are as black as the Jews. Is there any hope? Is there a ground

of hope? O yes, and what is that? This precious Bow, the Lord Jesus appearing in the firmament of the heaven of divine grace, the covenant of grace. He appears and He says "I will no more drown the earth". I have driven them away, I have chastised them, I have punished them. I will no more drown them, and the uncircumcised and the Phillistines and the Canaanites shall no more pass through the land. I will make them an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. And all this is mercy. If you follow me I believe you will say with me, this is mercy, and it will make the history of the people of God sometimes more precious to you than you ever can express, for therein God exhibits His amazing forbearance, His tender love to the worst of sinners, the vilest of men, and He says to them - I am a merciful God, I am a merciful God. I have punished you but I have saved you; I have chastised you but I have blessed you; You are Mine and I am yours. You are My portion, I am your portion. You live by My death, you are justified in My righteousness, you are cleansed in My blood, you are saved in Myself with an everlasting salvation. So is the appearance of the glory of the Lord. So you will see this glory. So you will do what the prophet did, in your spirit, when you see this glory, you will fall on your face and you will hear a voice speaking to you and that voice will say "Rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice". What, says a sinner, rejoice! I rejoice! Who has such cause for shame and dumbness? Says the Lord "Rejoice in the Lord". Why? Bought with His blood, saved by His grace, justified in His righteousness, quickened by His Spirit, revived by His Spirit. Brought again and again to this position, to stand before the Lord blameless, without spot and unrebukeable in His sight. This is the bow. This is the declaration of the bow. This is the mercy of God. This is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

AMEN.