Guest Preacher - Mr. Donald Macaulay

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Preacher: Mr. Donald Macaulay

[0:00] Let us turn back then to the chapters that we read, the book of Ezekiel, and we can read again in chapter 8, and we can read at verse 5.

Then he said to me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now towards the north. So I lifted up my eyes towards the north, and behold, north of the altar gate in the entrance was this image of jealousy. And he said to me, Son of man, do you see what they are doing? The great abominations that the House of Israel are committing here to drive me far from my sanctuary, but you will see still greater abominations, and so on.
And especially the words at the beginning of verse 6, Son of man, do you see what they are doing? Son of man, do you see what they are doing?
The book of Ezekiel is regarded by many people as an extremely difficult book to read.
[1:22] And that is mainly because of the visions that Ezekiel sees. And we see in these two chapters a particular vision which we'll go into in a moment or two.

But to understand the book of Ezekiel, like every book of Scripture, we need to set the context a little bit.
It's a book that's divided basically into three parts. It's one of the longest books of prophecy that there is in the Old Testament.
And there are three sections to it. The first section deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians.
That was to come in the years 587-586 BC. And that covers from chapter 1 to 26. 26 chapters dealing with that subject.
[2:24] Then secondly, the second section from chapters 26 to 39 deals with God's punishment on the nations round about Jerusalem and so on.

And in the third section, from chapters 40 to 48, which most people regard as the most difficult section of the book to understand, we see Ezekiel's vision of the restoration of the temple and the priesthood.
Now, time will not permit me to go into what the different sections deal. I'm going to stick mainly to the chapters that we read. Who is Ezekiel?
That's perhaps one of the first things that we ought to clarify. And if you turn back to chapter 1 at the beginning of the book for a moment or two, we see at the beginning of the chapter our identification of who this is.
In the 30th year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chiber Canal, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
[3:36] On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Joachim, that the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chiber Canal, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

Now, that allows us not only to identify who Ezekiel is, but also to date pretty accurately when this is taking place and the context of the whole thing.
And perhaps for those who are not so familiar with the book of Ezekiel or the prophet Ezekiel, I'll outline the background to that just a little bit.
Ezekiel probably was taken away into captivity in Babylon, more or less in the year 597 BC or 598, somewhere around there.
At the same time as Daniel was also taken into captivity. Whether they knew each other, Ezekiel and Daniel, we don't know.
[4:46] We have no indication whatsoever that they did know each other. It doesn't seem so, because Daniel spends all the captivity in Babylon, while Ezekiel is, as we see here, among the

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exiles by the Chiber Canal or the Chiber River.

Now, that river, or that canal, depending on which translation you use, was a tributary of one of the major rivers. I can never remember offhand whether it was the Tigris or the Euphrates.
I think it was the Tigris, but you can check that later and you'll see. And that is approximately 200 miles north of Babylon. Now, what led to that situation?
Well, you remember that at this particular time, the king of Judah, first of all Manasseh and others, had rebelled against the rule of Babylon over them.
And Nebuchadnezzar had come with his armies to encircle and to conquer the city of Jerusalem.
And when he comes for the first time, he does not destroy the city.
[6:01] What he does is he takes the king, the royal court, and most of the priesthood with him into exile into the city of Babylon.

Now, they're not taken away as captives or slaves, if you want to think of it that way. They're not in any kind of prison. They are allowed in Babylon, in the kingdom of the Chaldeans, as all of the conquered nations were.
They are allowed to practice their trades. They're encouraged to settle. And they're allowed to practice their religion freely while they are there.
And it is here that we see Ezekiel among the exiles by the Chibur Canal. And when we come to chapter 8, we see that he is sitting in his house at the beginning with the elders of Judah sitting before him.
And it would seem that they were perfectly free to gather together to worship God in their exile in the land of Nebuchadnezzar, the land of Babylon.
[7:12] And we are also told at the beginning that Ezekiel is a priest. And therefore, it would seem that he is the one to whom this particular group of exiles in this community look to for spiritual comfort.

It must have been very hard to have been taken away into exile like this from their own land. And what they bemoaned more than anything else, of course, was that they were taken away from the temple, Solomon's temple.
It wouldn't be much longer until the temple is completely destroyed. In about another 10 years or so, Nebuchadnezzar will come again to Jerusalem because of Sedekiah's rebellion.
You can read that in 2 Kings and so on and piece together the history of it. And the temple and the city of Jerusalem are totally destroyed.
And that, in effect, is God carrying out his judgment that we read in chapter 9.
[8:31] We read in chapter 9 about the destroyers and the man with the linen coat and so on. And we'll come to that in a little bit more detail later on.

And if you remember the history in the Old Testament, the Jews are taken into exile in Babylon for a period of 70 years.
Now, God had warned them of this. He had warned through Jeremiah. Jeremiah is contemporary with Ezekiel. Although Jeremiah stays in Jerusalem until just before its destruction when he escapes along with others to Egypt and he dies in Egypt.
God had warned that because of the idolatry that was going on in the whole of Israel, not just in the northern kingdom but in the southern kingdom as well, that a time would come where he would deal with it.
And that they would be taken into exile for a period of 70 years. The ten tribes of the north are dealt with quite some time before that.
[9:48] They had completely left the worship of God and gone over to idols. And they are destroyed by the Assyrians sometime before this.

And any of those who survived were taken into exile and settled among the Assyrians. And the ten tribes of the north basically disappeared from history at that point.
So that the only two tribes you've got left here are the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. The other ones still in and around Jerusalem.
But they also, as again if you read the history in the book of Kings, you will see that they sway from period to period of idolatry. Along comes a good king, cleans up, they return to worship God.
Then again a bad king you see for Hezekiah, Manasseh, and then the reign of Josiah. And remember Josiah because we'll come to see a connection with this passage in a minute or two.

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[10:50] And God carries out what he has promised through the visions of Isaiah, the prophecy of Isaiah and so on, that he will take them into captivity for this period of 70 years.

Now 70 years is a generation. Basically one generation would pass. And very few of those who went to Babylon would actually return.
Some did. Along with Nehemiah and Esra when they come to rebuild later on what we know of as the second temple. The temple of Serubbabel.
And if you get confused between all the temples, it's very easy to remember there are three temples in scripture. There's the temple of Solomon, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.
Then there's the second temple rebuilt by Nehemiah and Esra, the temple of Serubbabel it's called.
And that temple lasts through until Herod decides to build a better and a newer temple after the Greeks have made a bit of a mess of it.
[12:01] And it's the third temple, the temple of Herod, that we see at the time of Jesus. Now that's just filling in the background for you.

But God has promised that he will deal with the idolatry of his people. It's an interesting fact that once the Jews returned from Babylon 70 years later, they never ever worshipped idols again.
If you go through the history of the Jews onwards, from the return from exile, they never again worship idols. In fact, that's where the synagogues started.
The synagogues started in Babylon. The Jews making places of worship that they were allowed to, in among the Chaldeans in the kingdom of Babylon, where they were permitted to worship.
And they bring the custom back with them from exile, as there is no temple until the second one is rebuilt, by establishing synagogues in various parts of the country to worship.
[13:14] And you see, of course, by our Lord's time, that the custom of worshipping in synagogues was extremely widespread. You see Jesus going in and out of synagogues frequently.

And so we come to this particular appearance in the beginning of chapter 8. In the sixth year, that's the sixth month of exile. In the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, and Ezekiel is very good at giving us the dates.
He allows us to actually date things and put them in chronological order very, very clearly. He is sitting with the elders of Judah, and the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.
It's quite remarkable. Historians have worked out, according to the dating that he gives us, that this was on a Sabbath day.
And it was, again, you see the similarity between John and the book of Revelation, that his vision that he's given begins also on a Sabbath day.
[14:20] Whether it lasted more than the whole day or not, we don't know. But here, the hand of the Lord God falls upon Ezekiel there.

And you have to bear in mind, of course, that this is a vision that Ezekiel sees. What does he see, first of all? I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man.
Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal. Other translations say amber, like amber.
That is the fossilized resin that is used sometimes as a piece of jewelry, but it has a bright orange color. And you notice that this is the Lord God, probably, almost certainly, the triune God, if we want to think of it that way, that is appearing to Ezekiel in this vision.
And you see how he appears, the appearance of a man, something that Ezekiel can relate to. Because, of course, we know that God is a spirit.
[15:36] And a spirit is not visual. You cannot see a spirit. Therefore, God appears when he does appear in human form. And some take from that that this is the Lord Jesus Christ, that this is a theophany that he is appearing here.

Personally, I don't agree with that. I think that this is an appearance of the God, the Father, particularly here. But you notice that he is below the waist in fire.
And this is a symbol that is used through Scripture frequently to signify the purity of God. God is a cleansing fire.
And what is it that he purifies with this fire? He purifies away sin. This is a reminder of his holiness. And that God cannot tolerate sin. And he takes Ezekiel by a lock of his head. And you think almost that he's just sort of lifting him up and plucking him by the hair.
[16:48] But bear in mind, again, it's a vision as such. And the Spirit brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem. And where does he bring him? Right inside the courtyard of the temple.

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The entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces not where was the seat of the image of jealousy which provokes to jealousy. And he sees the glory of God there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.
Now that refers back to the vision in chapters 1 and 2. You remember the vision of the wheels. The wheels within the wheels, turning, etc. And so on. And I suppose you're wondering now, what was the image of jealousy?
This was something that had been erected in the court of the temple. And it was basically what was known as an Asherah.
You may have come across the term before. It was a kind of, if you kind of think of a totem pole, a tall carved pole with images on it.
[17:56] And it was in the worship, consecrated to the worship of Baal, the god Baal. And notice where it has been put.

It's been put inside the courtyard of the temple. Now this wasn't the first time that this had happened. Manasseh had done the same.
Josiah had cleansed the temple after that and removed all these idols that had been put in it. And this is the first thing that Ezekiel sees in the vision.
But then he's told in verse 5, Son of man, lift up your eyes now towards the north. And he sees in the north of the altar gate in the entrance was this image of jealousy.
And God says to him, Son of man, do you see what they are doing? The great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here to drive me far from my sanctuary.
[18:59] But you will see still greater abominations. And there are four different visions that Ezekiel is given of these abominations.

He's told to dig in the wall. And when he digs in the wall, he sees the vile abominations that we see in verse 10. And engraved on the wall all around was every form of creeping thing and loathsome beasts and all the idols of the house of Israel.
Where had they taken that worship from? Almost certainly from Egypt. These had been the things on which the plagues of Egypt had been brought by God during the time of Moses.
Because the Egyptians worshipped all sorts of different things like that as well. But there is significance particularly in who is there.
What do we see in verse 11? Before them stood 70 men of the elders of the house of Israel. Now the figure 70 is significant. We come across it first of all.
[20:13] We know that 70 was the number in the Jewish Sanhedrin, those who ruled the spiritual affairs of the Jews. But that dated back to the Mosaic time.

And it dated back to Moses struggling to deal and judge with all the difficulties and the cases that existed when they were camped at Mount Sinai.
And you will remember, I think it was Deuteronomy 18, but you'd have to check that. You remember that Jethro, his father-in-law, says to him, you need to learn to delegate.
Instead of trying to do everything yourself, learn to delegate. And so 70 elders are appointed to judge the things, the, shall we say, the not so serious cases, so that Moses would only deal with the really serious cases.
And that tradition of the 70 men signifies the rulers of the spiritual rulers of Israel. And then we get this fascinating detail with Jasaniah, the son of Shaphan, standing among them.
[21:23] He's the only one who's named, but it's interesting that he is named. Who is he? Shaphan had been a scribe with King Josiah, a godly scribe, one of the ones who helped Josiah cleanse the temple, and restore the worship of God to the people of Israel.

But here is his son. And what is he doing? He is leading in the worship of idols, each one of them with their censers, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up.
Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, the Lord does not see us.
The Lord has forsaken the land. Isn't that so common, even in our own day?
How many people go about their lives and about their daily business with no concept whatsoever that God is sovereign, that God sees everything.
[22:33] There is nothing that can be hidden from God. He knows every single thing that goes on. And he knows when fake worship is being carried out, as it is here in the actual temple itself.

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Having dug in the wall, he's now inside the temple. And then we see the third of the wicked things that are being done. At verse 14, he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord, and the woman sat weeping for Tammuz.
Now we are told that Tammuz was a Babylonian deity, worshipped by the Babylonians. And at a certain point in their mythology, Tammuz dies in some way or another.
He was supposed to be the god of the harvest, and so on. And he was worshipped particularly by women because of his so-called beauty, with all sorts of sexually immoral rights involved in that worship.
And that worship has been taken from Babylon here now into the house of the Lord itself. The women are weeping for Tammuz, weeping for this Babylonian god.
[23:57] Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.
And then finally at verse 16, he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord.

Now the only people who could go into the inner court of the temple were the priests. And therefore that tells us that the people that we see here, the 25 men here, are of the priesthood.
What are they doing? They have their backs to the temple of the Lord, their faces towards the east, and they are worshipping the sun.
Worshipping the sun. Now it's not unusual, if you study world religions, to come across people who worship the sun. And quite understandable, logically, for people who have no knowledge of God, to imagine that the sun is what controls everything.
It gives you heat, light, warmth, etc. Without sunlight, we cannot survive. And the custom of sun worship was very common, particularly in the Americas, among the Aztecs, the Incas, and so on.
[25:14] But also in other parts of the world as well. But here it has come into the holy place of the temple itself, where only the priests were supposed to go.

And you see how the spiritual leadership of Israel has been corrupted and defiled. Have you seen this, O son of man?
Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose.
That's a very curious Hebrew idiom. And what it means literally is like thumbing your nose at someone. Like we used to do when we were kids, when we would sort of try and mock someone, you would stick your nose up at them.
I don't know if you still do that or not. Probably not. It's probably died away that. But thumbing your nose was the idea. Not literally putting a branch in their nose. And having detailed to Ezekiel the things that God sees, now comes the judgment.
[26:33] And the judgment comes through chapter 9. And you see that with the executioners, the six men who come to carry out God's instructions, comes a man clothed in linen with a writing case at his waist.

And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Remember that the altar is in the courtyard of the temple. Who is the man clothed in linen? The majority of commentators think, and I tend to agree with them, that this is the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Why? Because the linen signifies the priesthood. And the linen signifying the priesthood here could only be the high priest himself.
One of the officers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as he directs the sword of God's justice, you notice what God says in verse 4.
The Lord said to him, and he said to him, particularly to this person, the man clothed in linen, pass through the city, through Jerusalem, put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan, men, women, children, boys and girls, who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.
[27:59] And you see in the instructions of the slaughter that is to follow, in verse 6, kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary.

And at the end of chapter 10, we see the man clothed in linen with a writing case at his waist, brought back words saying, I have done as you commanded me.
Now, what does all this signify for us? How do we understand this and how do we apply all this in terms of our own situation and in terms of a scriptural situation?

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Well, first of all, we have to see that the sword of God's vengeance is carried out on Jerusalem and on the temple by Nebuchadnezzar when the temple is destroyed and basically all those who were there are slaughtered.
But the remnant has been saved. The remnant has already been brought in exile to Babylon and preserved there, among whom are the most, the most foremost we see are Ezekiel and Daniel.
[29:18] But then later will appear Nehemiah and Ezra as well and the others who go back with them to restore the wall of Jerusalem and the temple. And you can read that yourselves in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah if you're interested in the historical part of it.

But there's something else that we need to think of here. the temple is no longer the center of worship.
The temples, all three of them have been destroyed. The Romans would destroy the temple of Herod later on. There is no temple, no central temple where the presence of God was like it was originally in the temple of Solomon.
You remember the Shekinah cloud of glory that came down at the consecration of Solomon's temple. By the time you get to Herod's temple and the resurrection of Christ, you remember the veil being split from top down to bottom.
There's nothing inside the most holy place. The Ark of the Covenant is no longer there. it's taken to Babylon. Some think according to, I think I mentioned this to you once before a long time ago, that in the book of the Maccabees there's a mention there that the Ark was actually hidden by Jeremiah in the mountains and it's there to this day, says that.
[30:53] But I'm not going to go into that in any further detail. But where is the temple of the Lord now? Well, it's here.

It's in the heart of each person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as a Savior. That's what Paul tells us. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit.
The Spirit dwells in you. And because we are now the temple, we are now the center of the church of God, that is, the believers, you and I have to guard against the abominations which may come into our temple.
When we come to worship, I presume that's what you've done coming here this evening, that you have come to worship. But perhaps in some cases that's not why you're here.
Maybe that's not why you come. Maybe you just come out of custom or convenience or to please somebody or whatever. But if you come to worship, then you have to be careful that the abominations of this world do not interfere with your worship.
[32:18] We are to worship in spirit and in truth. And we are reminded at all times that this is the God who is a consuming fire, a God who will not tolerate sin.

And yet, we know that each one of us sins each and every day in thought, word, and deed. How can we reconcile these two things?
We can reconcile them through the man clothed in linen with the light of writing case at his waist. this is the man who comes as the Lord Jesus Christ, who is born at Bethlehem and who at the cross of Calvary satisfies God's justice.
That's where the atonement takes place. That's where we can be, I love the word atonement, I've probably mentioned it before, if you break it down, at one meant with God, where we can be at one, at peace with God.
Why? Through the shedding of blood. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, without the shedding of blood, there is no remission for sin.
[33:41] And you see here, God had no mercy, no mercy on those in this vision. No mercy at all.

And there will come a day, of course, when God's justice will be poured out in its full wrath in the day of judgment at the second coming of Christ. What else can we apply?
Oh, there are so many things here, time has passed, but there are so many things that we can apply to our own country and our own situation. The principles of God's word are being eroded from our society.
People no longer pay any attention to the things of God in many parts of our land. Even in this island, which was renowned for its piety at one time, you see now how the Sabbath day is desecrated by many in ways that it never was before.
You see customs creeping in bit by bit. Things are changing. And many will tell us, but you have to move with the times.

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[34:54] You have to live according to the society in which people live. That's not what God tells us. He says, come out from among them, be separate, be ye holy.

You are my people, you are called to holiness. And yet how difficult it is for us not to be contaminated by the things of the world. But we are reminded day by day, are we not, that if it were not for the blood of Christ, there would be no mercy for us at all.
No mercy for us at all. But aren't you thankful, you and I, that even today we are on mercy's ground, that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, that this blood is freely available to all who come to faith, to all who believe.
And perhaps, my friend, you're still struggling this evening to come to faith, to come to a belief. And yet, what does Jesus say to you? He says, come unto me, come unto me.
Perhaps it's no secret that the term Son of Man, as it's applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, is also used in the Old Testament for both Ezekiel and Daniel.
[36:15] Because the connection between them is so clear. Prophesying of the justice to come. Daniel prophesies of the kingdoms.

He tells us, in fact, it's not really a prophecy. He's given the visions in the book of Daniel of what will happen during the whole of the intertestamental period, the 400 years from the end of the Old Testament until the coming of Christ in the new one.
And again, time has passed. I can't go into that in great detail. There are others who think that the Son of Man is simply a term here that is used to refer to both Ezekiel and Daniel.
And you can debate that later and make up your own mind on it. But the connections are drawn very clearly for us. that were it not for the cleansing influence of the blood of Christ, you and I would have justice doled out to us in exactly the same way as we see it given here.
Your eyes shall not spare and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark.
[37:40] The Lord's people are kept specially by him. We see the mark put on them here. We see the mark in the book of Revelation, the mark in their forehead.

Each one is special to him. and whatever will happen, that mark cannot be removed.
And isn't that something that gives you confidence this evening? That when you see and you think of Son of Man, do you see what they're doing? Do you see what people are doing in churches, in worship, in governance, in corruption, in war, in all the various things that our world is suffering from, man's inhumanity to man, that eventually the sword of God's justice will come and it will come in judgment and it will show no pity.
Why? Because the pity has already been shown. The pity was shown when the Lord Jesus Christ came and it was shown throughout his lifetime, throughout his crucifixion and throughout his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father.
That's where he is now. What is he doing there? He is interceding and mediating for his people. He is the mediator between God and man.
[39:18] And you as the temple of God, you and I as the temple of God, have the Holy Spirit in us also interceding for us. Isn't it such a comforting thought to you this evening that there are two who are interceding with the Father?

Christ as mediator in heaven on the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit that dwells within you, interceding for you with groans, as Paul puts it in Romans 8, with groans that cannot be uttered.
And yet forgiveness is available for all while we are here on mercy's ground through the shed blood of the cross. Look to the cross.
That's where our salvation comes from. Let us pray. Amen. Lord, we thank you for being able to meditate upon your word this evening.
and we thank you for the vision of holiness that we see in your being, that you are a God who is holy and who does not tolerate sin. And we are aware that we are nothing but sinful creatures.
[40:29] But nevertheless, we thank you for the shed blood of Christ, for the blood that cleanseth from all sin, that we can come to you and we can find forgiveness.

Bless these thoughts to us this evening and be with us and guide us as we conclude our worship and pardon sin. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Let us conclude our worship then by singing in the first psalm that we had, Psalm 97. On page 360, we'll sing verses 9 down to the end of the psalm.

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For thou, O Lord, art high above all things on earth, above all other gods thou art exalted very far.
Hate all ye that love the Lord, his soul, saint soul, keepeth he, and from the hands of wicked men he sets them safe and free.
And here's the difference. For all those that be righteous, sown as a joyful light, and gladness sown as for all those that are in heart upright.
[41:42] Ye righteous, in the Lord rejoice, express your thankfulness, when ye into your memory do call his holiness. Let's sing these verses in conclusion to God's praise then, in Psalm 97 at verse 9, For thou, O Lord, art high above.

For thou, O Lord, art high above all things on earth that we are, above all till■'ough ye lads of curse, love of for thou, or xam■ know and page.
He till o'er that loved the Lord, this saintsouls keepeth And from the hands of wicked men he sets them safe and clean.
For all those that be righteous, so is the joyful light.
And gladness, soulless, for all those that have a heart of pride.
[43:43] He was just in the Lord, rejoice, express your thankfulness.

When he is through your memory, call his holiness.
Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all now and forever. Amen.

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