

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

Commentary by Michael Sigler

November 2, 2014

God's Divine Glory Returns

Read Ezekiel 43:1-12

Key verses: “Then the Lord’s glory came into the temple by way of the east gate. A wind picked me up and brought me to the inner courtyard, and there the Lord’s glory filled the temple” (Ezekiel 43:4-5)

“The Lord’s glory” or “the glory of the Lord,” in the Old Testament, was God’s manifest presence. God’s “glory” or manifest presence was seen in the cloud that led Israel through the wilderness. This glory later came to reside in the temple, where the people gathered to worship God.

In Ezekiel’s time, God judged the Hebrew people because of their sins of immorality, idolatry, and spiritual apostasy. Ezekiel received a vision from God in which God showed the prophet the tragic departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple and from the city of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8-11).

Later, Ezekiel saw another vision meant to give hope to the Hebrew people living in Babylonian exile. This vision brought God’s promise of restoration and the return of God’s glory to a restored temple and city of Jerusalem.

For us, there is in these accounts both warning and hope. The warning is that, as with the ancient Hebrew people, God’s glory can depart from our churches. And the word of hope for us? God is forgiving and more than willing to restore our churches and fill them with His glory.

Perhaps, in reading Ezekiel, we should ask ourselves: What am I doing, or not doing, so that my church is filled with God’s glory?

Craig Larson shared the following illustration based on a news story from the Associated Press:

Orthodox Church officials in Russia discovered in 2008 that one of their church buildings had disappeared. Poof—gone! The 200-year-old building northeast of Moscow had gone unused for a decade, but the Orthodox Church, which was experiencing growth, was considering reopening the church building, and that’s when they discovered their building wasn’t there.

They had to get to the bottom of this. After investigating the matter, the church officials did not blame aliens from outer space for the missing structure. Rather, they said the perpetrators were villagers from a nearby town, whom they said had taken and sold bricks from the church building to a businessman. For each brick, the thieves received one ruble (about 4 cents).

This two-story church facility did not go from being a building in one bulldozing stroke. Rather, the bricks were apparently chiseled out one by one by lots of people.

In the same way, some churches—built not of bricks but of “living stones,” that is of Christians—are not reduced in one fatal stroke but rather by Christians one by one choosing not to be involved. Stay home and watch a TV preacher. Read the Bible and pray, but don’t mess with the organized church. Do your own spiritual thing. Each decision means one less living stone.

In the end, the church, intended by God to be the display of Christ’s glory, is chiseled away. Conversely, each person who gets involved helps to build a holy temple in the Lord made up of living bricks, where Christ is glorified.

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