

# The Throne - the Living Ones and the Wheels

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the profound symbolism of the Throne of God, emphasizing the integral relationship between holiness, life, and divine purpose in the world.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 66:18, Isaiah 6:3, Isaiah 33:14, Ezekiel 1:28, Habakkuk 2:14, John 11:4, Romans 8:28, Revelation 1:14, Revelation 4:1

**Topics:** "Gods Throne", "Holiness"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the profound symbolism of Ezekiel's prophecies, focusing on the visions of the Throne in Heaven, the Cherubim, and the wheels. The Cherubim symbolize holiness and life, emphasizing the inseparable connection between holiness and life, and their role in proclaiming the holiness of God's Throne. The wheels represent movement with purpose, signifying the energetic and active nature of God's Throne in fulfilling His divine purposes. The sermon highlights the importance of holiness in God's government and the perfect intelligence of His Throne, which operates with complete knowledge and vision, seeking to bring glory through holiness.

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## Transcript

With the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies open before us, let us note how much it contains that is instructive and helpful in connection with the movements and ways of God in relation to the glory. As we pointed out in our last meditation, the key phrase, inclusive not only of the chapter but of the whole book, is found in the second half of verse 28:

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face..."

That refers, as I have said, to all that is in that chapter, but it relates especially to the vision of the Throne in Heaven, and to the 'likeness as of a Man upon it above'. It is the glory of the Throne of the Exalted God-Man. And from that, everything else proceeds. All that is here, and all that comes later, right to the end of this very full book, is the expression of that Throne, of that government, of the meaning of that Man being there, where He is.

In summarizing the visions which came to Ezekiel, when he said: 'I saw visions of God', we said that under the Throne there was a two-fold symbolic medium of its expression; and that two-fold medium is the four living ones, or cherubim, and the wheels. To both of these quite a considerable section is given. You notice that they are not just mentioned and passed over, but they are very fully and minutely described.

You have got to stop with this; you have got to take time and give attention. The prophet is giving us every detail. It is very difficult to understand; I certainly do not claim to understand it, but I think I see some things that are almost on the face of it. Nevertheless, since these things are brought in here in very clear definition, and in very full presentation, right at the beginning of all these prophecies and movements and visions, they must evidently be taken account of. They must have a place, and a very serious place.

#### The Cherubim: Symbols Of Holiness And Life

Firstly, then, the Cherubim. We need not describe them; their description is here. We need say very little about the detailed features of their make-up: all that will be familiar. We want to come quite simply and directly to the real function of these living ones. Of course it must be underlined that this is oriental symbolism. It is a symbolic representation of something spiritual. People in the East reading these things would have a more ready apprehension of this way of presenting truth than perhaps we have. But God has chosen to convey His great truths in this symbolic and illustrative way; and we have to get through the symbolism and the illustration - if need be forget the forms, forget the characteristics described - and get straight to the heart of the matter: what is their message? What is it that they are intended to convey?

From a reflection upon the many appearances of the Cherubim in the Bible, it can be seen that invariably, on every occasion, they stand related to one thing; their function is ever and always to proclaim that the Throne of God is a HOLY Throne; that His government is a government of HOLINESS. It will at once be seen how vital and appropriate this is, standing right at the beginning of the history of judgment contained in these prophecies. For everything that follows, including the large section of judgments, both of Israel and in the nations, under this supreme Throne, is in relation to an unholy state, and a demand that that shall be judged and put away. The glory waits for that, and waits upon that. The glory ever and always waits upon holiness, because it is a Throne of Glory which is the glory of Holiness. The government of that holiness is represented here in this Throne, and in the Man on it.

But that is not all. These cherubim are called 'LIVING ones'. The idea of LIFE, of LIVING-ness, is always associated with them. They come up again and again in that connection. At the moment it is this, that HOLINESS and LIFE are combined in them: the life waits on the holiness; the holiness gives rise to the life. You cannot separate these two things. You cannot have the life without the holiness; you cannot have the holiness without it leading to life. It is always working like that, to and fro. More holiness, more life; more life, more holiness. These 'living ones' are, in representation, the custodians of the Divine holiness for the sake of the Divine life. For the things that are in the balances all the way through this book are life and death; that is where the battle is being fought out. It is a question of life and death for Israel, for the nations; but the deciding thing is this matter of HOLINESS.

#### The Cherubim In The Garden, In The Tabernacle And In The Temple

Now, if you will briefly pass your mind's eye over some of the instances where the Cherubim are in view, you will see that that is the connection each time. When things went wrong in the Garden; when sin entered; when disobedience, through pride, came in and operated; when man was expelled from the place of life, where the 'tree of life' was: at the gate, to guard it, were placed the Cherubim with flaming swords. Their presence there said, That is a holy life, and that which is corrupt, polluted, tainted, unholy, cannot have it, cannot touch it, cannot come near it, is expelled from it. The Cherubim would say, We are the custodians, not only of that life, but of the essential holiness that it demands.

Then, figures of the Cherubim were interwoven on the screen, the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, and man would pass that veil in peril of his life - it would be death. They were inscribed again there in testimony of the fact that they were the guardians of what is holy, and as such, anything unholy would perish if it passed their way. They, on the veil, declared that things were wrong with man; they were a testimony against the wrong state of man, because of which he cannot come into the presence of the Glory, and the presence of the Life.

### The Cherubim In Prophetic Visions

But then we remember Isaiah: the features are impressive in this connection. Isaiah 'saw the Lord, seated upon a Throne, high and lifted up', and the Seraphim (only another name for these, I think) were heard crying: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts!' Why was this? King Uzziah had forced his way into the temple, to serve unlawfully at the altar, and took the censer in his hand. Man had pressed in to the presence of the Holy God, and had touched holy things. The priests besought him, pleaded with him: 'Go out! It pertaineth not unto thee, King Uzziah!' But Uzziah asserted himself there, and he was smitten with leprosy, and remained a leper to the day of his death. He died a tainted, corrupted man. And "in the year that king Uzziah DIED I saw the Lord", and heard the Seraphim crying: Holy, Holy, Holy. The Throne is the throne of holiness and of life; but where there is not the holiness it means death. Life is on the ground of holiness.

Jerusalem has become grievously and terribly defiled - read Jeremiah. It is a terrible book, a terrible revelation of spiritual condition. In the resultant judgment the people are carried away into captivity. And we find Ezekiel there, with the captives of the southern kingdom of Judah, by the River Chebar. This is a scene of desolation, a scene of death; this is a scene of judgment; they stand in the place of Uzziah, defiled. Judgment has come upon them, and death. If you have any question about that, or if you want that particularly emphasized, just turn to the great chapter in these prophecies about the 'valley of dry bones' (Eze. 37). That is God's conception of this people at that time. A valley of dry bones; very many, and scattered - that was Israel's condition as in Babylon, as in captivity. Are these people going to be saved from death, from judgment? How will it be? The Lord will say that He will have to take away their unclean, polluted, stony hearts; 'a new heart will I give you'. In other words, they will have to be cleansed from their iniquity, washed from their sin, made again God's HOLY people, and they will LIVE. The Cherubim are very active in relation to that matter. See them 'on the wing'! They are characterized by a deep concern that this people should be saved from death by being delivered from the bondage of corruption.

### The Cherubim In The Revelation

We come over to the Book of the Revelation - the marvellous fourth and fifth chapters. Here the Heavens are open again (4:1). What did John see? Here are the twenty-four elders, and the four 'living ones', and myriads of angels, before the throne of God and of the Lamb; here they are round the Throne, singing their song of redemption. But the four 'living ones' are there, not now feverishly, fretfully, hurrying hither and thither, concerned with this matter of getting a people saved and right - their wings are let down, and they are joining in the worship. The work is done! Their work is finished, and now they can worship and join in praise with all the redeemed. That is how it ends: it is the picture of GLORY AND LIFE THROUGH HOLINESS.

That is a message not for the days of Ezekiel only. It is an abiding message; the truth and the principle which runs from the beginning to the end of time. That Throne, if we want it on our side, demands that

something be done to cleanse us from our sin, to deliver us from our way of wickedness, to bring us into the 'white raiment' of His Divine righteousness, sanctified. It is for those who are thus walking with Him in fellowship, and who, as far as they know, are eschewing every evil way, are repudiating all iniquity; are having no truck with iniquity, are not compromising, are not in any way condoning or dabbling in what is evil, what is wrong.

I know that the whole matter of holiness can become very oppressive; it can become very legal and bring us into bondage. But the fact remains that the Lord's Throne is a throne of holiness; His government is a government of holiness; and His life is HOLY life. We know quite well, in practical experience, that if we do, voluntarily or even involuntarily, touch something that is evil or corrupt, touch this world in spirit, the glory fades! We know within ourselves that, if we even say something that is wrong, the glory fades. We know it by the fading glory in our hearts; a shadow, a cloud, comes over our spirit; and it stays there until we have gone and got that cleaned up in the presence of the Lord.

### The Wheels

We pass now to the other side of this symbolic medium of the Throne: to the 'wheels'. You notice that these are quite definitely in union with the 'living ones', with the Cherubim - they move together. They are really only two aspects of one thing, but the wheels contain their own particular emphasis and message. What do they signify? What is the impression that is left with you after reading verses 15-21? If you just sit back after reading, how do you feel? Sometimes it is a good thing to put yourself into the Word, and take its temper - take its atmosphere. I venture to suggest that if you read these verses in that way, and sit back, you will heave a sigh: My word, they are moving! There is something doing here! At least you will not be left with a quiet or passive feeling. We have the impression of tremendous energy; of motion with purpose; that is the atmosphere of the 'wheels'.

Wheels symbolize movement, motion, going; and here the 'spirit of the living ones' is in the 'wheels'. The energy of the Spirit is here; it is ENERGY and MOVEMENT WITH PURPOSE, is it not, of which they speak? They say to us clearly and simply that this Throne is a very energetic and active Throne in relation to the end which God is seeking. All the energies and activities contained in these prophecies are the expression of that Throne, and are, as it were, the carrying out of the meaning of the wheels. The Throne is on the move; the Throne is not passive; the Throne is governed by a tremendous energy: God is deeply and greatly concerned about this great end of His, to have everything glorious, filled with His glory, for His glory.

### Suffering With The Glory Of God In View

It is no light or easy-going thing with the Lord, to have that end. If we did but know it, if we could only see it and understand it, we should be able to recognize that so many things in our lives which the Lord permits to come in, and which the Lord sometimes even sends into our lives, are the workings of His energy to make a way for His glory. John, the apostle, tells us that the whole of his Gospel which he wrote was written with one object, and that object was THE GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS; that governed all. All the way through, from beginning to end, it is that.

Take one fragment only - Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but FOR THE GLORY OF GOD" (John 11:4). Strange event of providence; strange ways of God, causing deep sorrow, distress, perplexity. It is a distressing thing for those concerned, but quite deliberate on the part of the Lord Jesus. His attitude and His handling, His tarrying when He received the news (verse 6), were quite deliberate. He has it all in

hand, and He says: 'It is for the glory of God, that the Son of God should be glorified thereby'. The end of this strange thing, this painful thing in human life, is the glory of God! Would that you and I could always look at our sufferings and our sorrows like that! Every time when some perplexing, bewildering, heart-breaking thing comes into our lives, if only we could say and believe and stand to it - 'God is going to get some glory out of this! There is some glory somewhere bound up with this!' He is working to His end in all things. Paul says: 'God works in all things good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose' (Rom. 8:28) - and by that word 'good' he means glory - glory to God.

We see, then, that there is an energy of God, of the Throne, toward glory, and to glory through holiness.

### Perfect Intelligence Of The Throne

Another feature of the wheels was that they were "full of eyes round about" (1:18; 10:12). Surely this means that the Throne is operating with perfect intelligence, with complete knowledge of everything; an utter apprehension and grasp of all the elements, of all the features, of everything that has to be dealt with. Perfect vision; perfect knowledge: that is how the Throne of Holiness works.

That is a solemn message, as well as perhaps an encouraging one. The fact is that that One on the Throne, whose 'eyes are as a flame of fire' (Rev. 1:14), sees right through, knows all the hidden motives, and acts accordingly. It is not what we see, and not what we are willing to see, but what He sees. The eyes of His glory look us right through; they know all our self-deceptions; and all our deceivings of one another. They know us perfectly, and the Lord is acting with us according to that knowledge, and we are not going to get away with it. If the Lord takes in hand to deal with us in a form of judgment; if He really does take action in regard to us, it is because He has seen or is seeing something; something that is injurious to us; something that is limiting or hindering the glory in us, personally or individually, or in our companies. He has seen something that is against the glory, and so with energy He takes in hand, and He will judge it. He will go to great lengths in order to get that eliminated and put right, in order that the glory may come in, and make way for new life, and that we may go on anew in a fresh phase in His purpose.

We perhaps would not have it otherwise; we do not want to be deceived; we do not want to lose something by some unrecognized wrong; we want to have everything open. The end of the Bible sees a City which is absolutely transparent: God is really seeking transparency in His people - no duplicity, no deception, no questionableness. How we need to judge our motives! How we need to keep in the presence of the Everlasting Burning (Isaiah 33:14b)! How necessary it is to abide in the light of His countenance, so that nothing is allowed to go on with us, perhaps unconsciously, that is limiting His glory in our life. This is a message of very great concern.

Let us by all means pray for a 'new thing'; pray for revival; pray for God to move in some great way of power: but remember, all His movements are based upon this - a holiness that corresponds to His Throne; and He just cannot do anything until that holiness has been vindicated in His people. Does this not explain much unanswered prayer? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). It is a very big principle, covering so much. May the Lord give us understanding, in the presence of what could be a very solemn word; and yet it has GLORY in view. The Lord give us understanding that the energies of His Throne are holy energies. His goings, His continuous goings, are in this very connection, that what is consistent with the Man in the glory shall be found in us, and amongst all the Lord's people.

### The Throne Intimately Concerned With This World

Lastly, notice that these wheels occupy a place between Heaven and earth. They are not wholly of the earth - they do not remain earth-bound, held by an 'earth touch'; there is a kind of suspendedness; they touch the earth, but they are not of it. They bound along in their energy in relation to Heaven, but also in relation to earth, as the embodiment of the Divine energies. What that says, amongst other things, is this: that God's interests and activities, and God's Throne, are not remote from things here on this earth. He is not just reigning on His Throne in remote isolation, somewhere away there in the undefined heavens. His energies relate to things here: His mighty interests are near, are imminent: they are concerned with this world, with this earth, and with what is on it. He wants this earth, and all that is here, to be holy. In Isaiah's vision there is that phrase: "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). That is the conception; that is what the Lord desires. He is working to that. And we know, from the description of the end, that that is how it will be when 'knowledge of the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. 2:14). Holiness everywhere!

The fact is, God is intimately, closely, and intelligently associated with the state of things here, both in the Church, and in the churches. He is cognizant of everything that we do not see or do not realize. His eyes see it, and He is active concerning this state, to have it holy, and to be able to bring back THE GLORY.

The Throne is not far away after all - it is here, in representation. If the first section (chapters 1-3) of the Book of the Revelation means anything at all, it means that this very God-Man, this Man of the glory, is here; He is imminent, moving amongst the churches, the lampstands. The Throne is fully cognizant of everything; it is not blind; it is never deceived by anything at all. The Throne is active and its activity may be found in many, if not all, of the experiences into which we come. The Throne is determined to have one end, everywhere, in all things, and that is GLORY.

This wonderful symbolism of the 'living ones' and 'wheels' is but a declaration of this activity of the Throne. That Throne has not given things up because they are so bad; it is still pursuing its goal, to have a state that can be filled with GLORY. May the Lord interpret this to us, and write it deeply in our hearts, and keep it every day in our consciousness. This message is intended to be "not unto death, but for the glory of God".

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