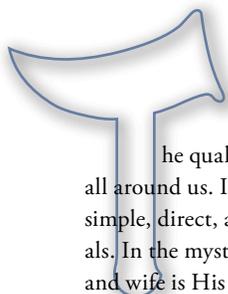
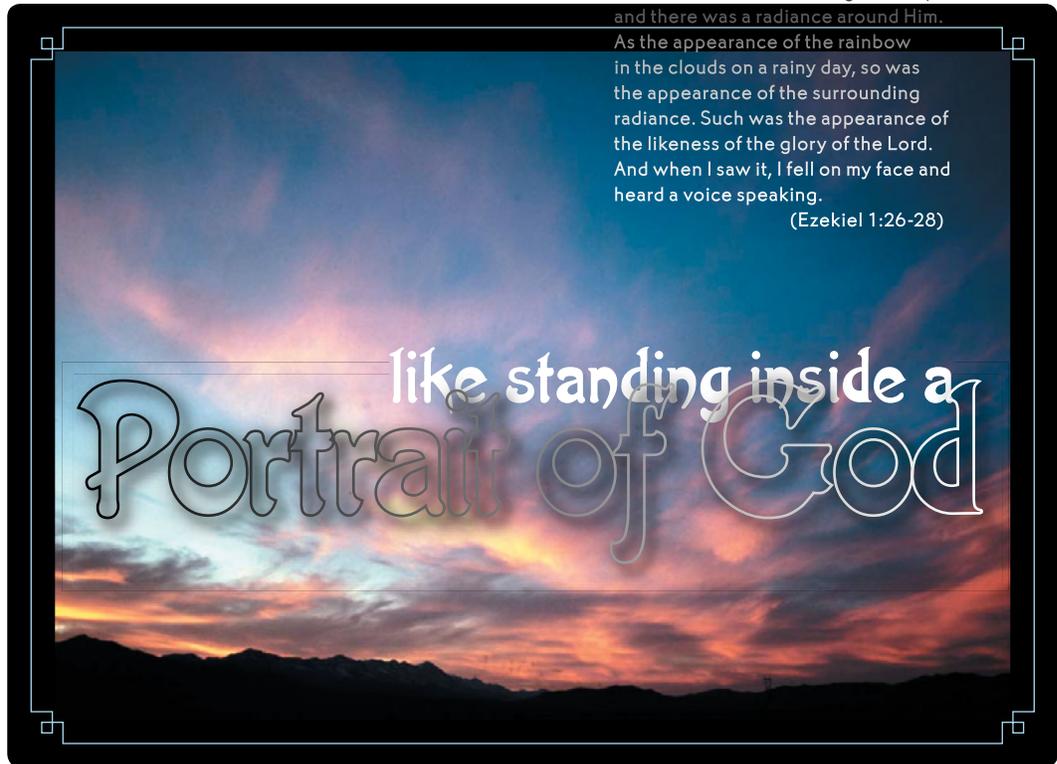


Issue #39
September 27, 2004

Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.

As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

(Ezekiel 1:26-28)



The qualities of God are on display all around us. In the face of a child is His simple, direct, accepting love for individuals. In the mystical bond between husband and wife is His faithful love, in Christ, for the church. In the tender ministrations of the volunteer worker, the nurse or doctor, the medical missionary, is His compassion. In the evangelist, as well as the motivated layman, is His salvation. In the preacher and Sunday School teacher is His wisdom. In the consolation of the pastor we see the arms of the Great Shepherd. Even in government and the courts are His laws of equity and justice translated for man.

But where is His awesome glory revealed? Where is His majesty proclaimed? In nature, for only in something not made by man can God's glorious portrait be eloquently painted.

Self-portrait

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the

Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

(Exodus 19:16-19)

Off the west side of our house, the lawn slopes gently down toward the surrounding field of grass and scrub trees. The field continues down toward the gravel road, and the distant valley. On the other side of the small valley that is so often shrouded in low-lying fog on mornings, the land slopes gently upward into the rise—not nearly a mountain, or even a hill; just a “rise”—of trees.

The landscape here in the middle of mid-America is not terribly grand. There are no towering mountain peaks, no statuesque redwoods, no crashing ocean waves. Our land-locked, undulating terrain was carved and shaped by ancient sheets of ice oozing down from the north during the Wisconsin glaciation. While those of us born and bred in these parts may be warmly inspired by the sight of rolling prairie, or vast fields of corn, there is little here to inspire awe for the visitor.

So God, taking pity on us poor deprived Midwesterners, has written the grandeur across the skies.

On a summer's eve unclouded by smog or pollution, when the cicadas are singing in the trees and the crickets chirp in chorus from the grass, God paints His own grandeur across the canopy arching over our humble land. The orange ball easing down behind the opposite rise paints the lingering clouds with shifting colors, and, suddenly, the small man standing on the humble loam of earth is in the presence of almighty God.

On just such a summer's eve, a few days ago, I stood in awe as He revealed Himself in the glory painted in the sky. Standing on the open, downward slope of the west lawn, with the lower valley spread below and the painter's concave palette curving overhead, it felt as if I were part of the painting—more than mere spectator, but actually a participant in the pageantry of God's throne room.

Family Portrait

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 1:12-13)

There are places in this world where God is hard to find, places where the sucking gravity of the soil makes it nigh impossible to pry our gaze from the oft-depressing squalor in which we dwell. And our habitation is squalor indeed, when compared to the pristine majesty of God, and the glory of His habitation. For the believer, it is his home as well. For the one who calls God "Father," and Jesus Christ "Lord," heaven's glory is something tangible and real. More than that, it is something promised.

There was a cripple who spent his life in a room where he could not see the sun. He heard of its existence, he believed in it, and he had seen enough of its light to give him high ideas of its glory.

Wishing to see the sun, he was taken out at night into the streets of an illuminated city. At first he was delighted with the bright lights, dazzled. But then he reflected on the sky, and realized there was darkness spread amid the lights. So he asked, "Is this the sun?"

Next he was taken out under a starry sky and was enraptured until, on reflection, he found that night covers the earth and was bewildered. Again he asked, "Is this the sun?"

Finally he was carried out on a bright day at noon, and no sooner did his eye open on the sky than all questions came to an end. There is only one sun! His eye was content; it had its highest object, and knew that there was nothing brighter.

The same is true of the soul: it enjoys all lights, yet amid those of art and nature, the soul still inquires for something greater. But when the soul is led by the reconciling Christ into the presence of the Father, and he lifts upon it the light of His countenance, all thought of anything greater disappears. As there is only one sun, so there is only one Son. The soul which once discerns and knows Him, knows that there is none greater or brighter, and that the only possibility of ever beholding more glory is by drawing nearer.

(Reverend W. Arthur)

Thus it is not presumptuous for the believer to place himself in the portrait of God. The majesty of a holy God does not repel, but *draws* the one who holds Him in his heart, who bears the likeness and rights of Christ through adoption. As any child is drawn toward a loving, affectionate parent, so too are we, as believers, drawn to our loving, affectionate, heavenly Father. Even in His supernatural glory, our hearts are possessed not by fear, but by our deep longing to be with Him.

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."
(Isaiah 6:4-5)

Like Isaiah, we may feel shattered, and profoundly unholy in God's presence, but in the blood of Christ we may attend. And when His majesty is broadcast across the sky, we may embrace the power and other-worldly glory declared there. As much as we are His, He is ours. We can be at home in His presence.

*His priest am I, before Him day and night,
Within His Holy Place;
And death, and life, and all things dark and bright,
I spread before His Face.
Rejoicing with His joy, yet ever still,
For silence is my song;
My work to bend beneath His blessed will,
All day, and all night long—
For ever holding with Him converse sweet,
Yet speechless, for my gladness is complete.
(Gerhard Tersteegen)*