

**Revelation 4: 7-11; “The Ministry of the Living Creatures”, Sermon # 33 in
the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on June 14th, 2015,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We have been looking at the subject of worship in this second vision of John’s in the book of the Revelation. We are looking at the kind of worship and service that God will receive all during the Church age. John was drawn up through a door into heaven and he beheld visionary pictures with a representative symbolic meaning to them. This afternoon I would like to review for you the meaning of the symbolic representations found here in this vision. And then I would like to attempt to explain to you the ministry of these “Zoa”, these Living Creatures which are found so prominently displayed in this vision.

1st of all – A Review of the Meaning of the Symbolic Representations found here in this Vision.

I have told you in a past sermon that these symbolic representations signify things that the Church which is on the earth should remember, at any given time period or generation. We have looked at 2 of them so far, and we are in the middle of the 3rd now. First, the Church should remember that she is presently reigning with Christ. This is the picture of the 24 elders clothed in white robes and with crowns of gold upon their heads. All the saints in heaven and earth are presently reigning with Christ in heaven. They are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. He has seated them there as Kings forever with Him. These elders sitting and ruling represent the fact that all worship and service that is given to God, is accepted by God, through Jesus Christ, in the heavenly places. It is His finished work of redemption, and His intercession, that makes our worship, and all of our works of obedience and service, acceptable in God’s sight. We who believe in Jesus are kings and priests ministering to God on the basis of the grace purchased for us by Christ. It is a truth that we need to remember.

These 24 “elders” which are mentioned here are not the pastors of churches, but rather they represent holy, wise, and discerning people in the churches. They know what true worship consists of. They know that worship is not entertainment, but rather it is giving to God the glory due His Name. God does not receive entertainment as worship. He receives that which is reverently and thoughtfully and joyfully offered to him from a heart which is thinking about how He is described in His word; that He is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity. Our God’s name is Holy, and He dwells in a High and Holy place, and with him who has a contrite and humble spirit. (Isaiah 57: 15) And 2nd, I told you, the Church should remember God’s holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in her midst. This is what is represented by the seven lamps of fire which are the 7 spirits of God. There is a fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the church, and to the people that will treat God as holy in all their worship and service of Him. This, I said, also includes the way that we choose to live our lives outside of the formal worship of the church.

We talked about loyalty to the Lord in relation to the fact that the “eyes of the Lord” run to and fro throughout the whole earth in order that he may strongly support those whose hearts are completely His. It is important to the Lord how we spend the Sabbath day after the services are ended as well as attending upon the services of the day. It is important where our hearts go during the rest of the week as well when we are not together as the church on the Lord’s Day. I urge you all to think upon these things, for God thinks about them. Then, the last time that I preached to you from this passage, I began to open up to you the meaning of the 4 living creatures under the 3rd point of my overall outline. The Church should remember that God will receive her worship and service if she remembers the significance of ministers whom He has appointed and called to preach His Word and the Gospel of His Son. This is the meaning of the Living Creatures here in the text. They represent the pastors-teachers and others who minister the Word of God and who

lead in worship. I said to you that there have been many views given by commentators of what the living creatures represent. One commentator mentions that there are as many as 21 views of what they represent. A number of commentators believe that they are angelic beings. It is true that in Genesis 3: 24 that when God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden because of their sin that he stationed flaming cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden. Certainly these must have been angelic beings whose ministry was to guard the way to the literal tree of life which was in the garden of Eden. But in the prophetic context here in Revelation, the ministry seen in heaven is not that of angels but that of men, praising God, that they have themselves have found the way to the tree of life, and they are leading men before the throne of God in worship.

Even in the Old Testament prophetic texts of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 and 10, it is in the context of men who are being called and commissioned to speak for God to men, that we see these living creatures. I believe that they are being shown in those visions what their ministries were going to require of them; what they were going to be like, and what they were going to do. It may have involved more of preaching the judgments of God in a national political sense, and their ministry to Israel may have been backed up by an angelic ministry working out these judgments upon the Theocratic nation, according to the purpose and providence of God. But still, it was in the context of men being called to preach and prophesy. The living creatures are spoken of in Revelation 4: 9 as “giving glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne.” They are spoken of in Revelation 5: 9 as “singing a New Song” about how they had been “redeemed to God by Christ’s blood.” These things cannot be referring to angels, but only of redeemed men. We may think that they are angels based upon the other places where they appear in the Scripture, in Ezekiel and Isaiah. But they are never called angelic beings in any of those passages. They are always called “living creatures” or “Cherubim” and “Seraphim”. In each of those Old Testament passages, the context is the call and commissioning of a prophet. In Ezekiel 1: 5 it says, “And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.”

It is true that angels are mentioned in various places in the Bible as taking on the appearance of a man. I think especially of the “men” that came to visit Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But in these three visions we have the opposite; it is actually men taking on aspects of the appearance and ministry of angels. This is because there are definite similarities in the ministries of angels and men. The Cherubim of Genesis 3 were to guard the way to the tree of life. Ministers are to do the same thing in terms of guarding the truth of the gospel and the Word of God. It is they who will preserve the true worship of God and the preaching of the gospel during all the times of opposition to it in this Church age. Angels are messengers of the Lord’s will and word sent to men to tell them of his judgments or of his good will. So are the preachers of the gospel. And further, there is a definite link between the words “Cherubim” and “Seraphim”, and ministers of the gospel. Cherub is the singular of the plural Cherubim. It means “an ox”. William Lowth in his commentary on Ezekiel 1: 7 says this, “These living creatures are a sort of hieroglyphics, made up of several shapes, but yet they resemble most that of an ox or a calf; and therefore were called cherubims, that word signifying an ox; in which sense it is taken in chapter 10, verse 14 of Ezekiel, where the face of a cherub is equivalent to the face of an ox.”

Ministers of the gospel and the word of God are compared to oxen by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9: 9 where he says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” “Is it oxen God is concerned about?” No, he goes on to say, it is the man who is preaching the gospel full time that God is concerned about, and therefore he should get his living from the gospel. The word Seraphim used in Isaiah 6, means “a burning one”. This, as well, is used by the Lord Jesus in John 5: 35, to refer to a minister in the person of John the Baptist. “He was the burning and shining lamp and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.” And this is why I believe that these living creatures represent gospel ministers and not angels. The ministry of a pastor or preacher of the Word of God is a living creature and it has 4 main aspects to it, each represented by a creature. So what I want to do with the remainder of the time this afternoon is to open up these four aspects

of what a gospel minister and ministry should look like. It should look like a living creature. And then next Sunday, Lord willing, we will attempt to look at this ministry in motion with the representations of the wings, eyes, and hands.

So 2nd – I want us to look more carefully at the 4 aspects of the Christian ministry which we find here.

The description that we find here of the first living creature was that he was like a lion. The lion was a creature who Solomon used, to describe a righteous man in Proverbs 28: 1. It says there, “The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous is as bold as a lion.” This is because the righteous has a clear conscience, has nothing to be ashamed or afraid of, he can be bold and decisive in going about his business. The Lord Jesus Christ is described as being “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” in Revelation 5: 5. He had “prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seals”. In that passage He is described as boldly taking the book of the history of the Church, the books which reveals the purposes of God as regards the going forth of the gospel to the ends of the earth, and the oppositions made by Satan and wicked men to His kingdom, and He opens it. He can boldly take and open that book because He died for sinners. He being the Righteous One, died for men from every tribe, tongue and nation. And the preachers of the gospel and pastors and others called to the ministry are also called to be bold to declare the will of God as found in His Holy Word. This boldness comes from the Spirit of God, from having been with Jesus. You see this often in the book of Acts. In Acts 4 when the apostles Peter and John are hauled before the rulers, elders, and scribes for preaching in Jesus the resurrection from the dead, Peter declares to them in verse 11, “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief corner stone.” “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Then it says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled.” “And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

The outcome of all this was that the rulers severely threatened Peter and John and told them not to speak to any man in the name of Jesus. When Peter rejects this, they threaten them further and then let them go. But what do they do? They go back to their companions and tell them what has happened and then they pray for more boldness. "Grant your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word," is their prayer. And as they prayed it says that, "the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with all boldness." This is what you as a congregation need to pray for, for me as your pastor; that I would speak the word with all boldness, both to you here in this place and wherever I am. This is the kind of ministry that the Lord is looking for. Not that I would be bold to force myself upon other people, or to be bold in arguing with them; that is not what is being called for from a gospel minister. It is a holy boldness, uncompromising with the truth, gentle and loving with people of good will, firm and assertive in a self-controlled way towards evil and error. This is the first aspect of a gospel minister that God is looking for - boldness.

The 2nd Living Creature that we find here is described for us as being like a calf. The calf, or the ox shows forth that aspect of ministry which is much needed and much appreciated; of being a hard working servant. A calf is bred for service. An ox is put into a laboring service. The gospel ministry is a ministry of laboring service. It is the work of being in the yoke, as an oxen, laboring in the word and doctrine; pulling the plow that breaks up the ground of men's hearts and plants the seed of truth there. It is the hard work of treading out the corn of God's word which will be made into bread to feed God's people. It is long hours of study and sermon preparation. The minister does this so that the people of his congregation will be spiritually fed. He is a spiritual householder bringing forth things old and new, giving to each person their portion of spiritual food. In that passage that I quoted to you earlier in this message; 1 Corinthians 9: 9, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25: 4, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” He goes on to say, “He who plows in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.” “If we have sown spiritual

things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?” This was Paul’s way to show the Corinthians, and to show us here today, what a laborious work the work of the ministry is; how much it needs to be prayed for, and how much it needs to be supported in a full-time ministry. It takes perseverance, patience, diligence, and a willingness to “spend and be spent” for the souls of men in order to have a ministry approved unto God. Will you not pray for this kind of grace for your pastor?

The 3rd Living Creature is described for us here as having a face like a man. This shows us the very human aspect of the gospel ministry. The ministry is not simply holding fast to sound doctrine and laboring hard in the word. It is also the ministry of a man to men. It is a very good thing in the ministry if a man is a lover of men, a student of human nature, and one who is able to sympathize with the difficulties, trials, struggles, and needs of the people in his congregation. It is good when he is able to be as his Master, the Lord Jesus, who it says in Hebrews 4: 15, can “sympathize with our weaknesses, and was tempted in all points as we are”. Jesus was without sin. A minister has many weaknesses and sins himself, but yet is blameless as regards the qualifications for his office. But he can “have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray,” just like the high priests of old that we are told about in Hebrews 5: 2, “since he himself is also subject to weakness.” When your pastor goes to prayer he confesses his own sins as well as his people’s sins. This is what Daniel the prophet is said to have done in Daniel 9: 20. This is having the “face of a man”. It is not necessary in the gospel ministry that a man carry himself in a magisterial way before the people. You know what I mean by that. A man like that feels that he must always be exercising and guarding the authority of his office, and making it clear to people that he is in charge. But the Apostle Peter says in 1st Peter 5: 2 – “Shepherd the flock of God which among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” And the Apostle Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2: 6: “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” This is the living creature with the face like a man. He is a man who loves the people of God.

The 4th Living Creature is described for us here as an eagle. Eagles are very sharp sighted, high flying birds, perhaps the most noble and majestic of birds. They have excellent eye-sight, they fly very fast, they build their nests very high, and they can carry their young on their own wings. God says, in Exodus 19: 4 that He brought Israel out of Egypt on eagle’s wings and brought them to Himself. The minister of the church is one who is called to preserve the majesty and the dignity of the work and the office to which he is called. It is to be hoped and prayed for that he will be a man of great spiritual discernment, one who can quickly fly to the aid of those in his congregation who need him, one who can help the people to see the importance of being separate from the world, and one who will carry them with him in his preaching, when he takes them to the high and lofty truths of God attributes, the Person and work of Christ, and His grace. He will not have the eyes of a hawk, to make people a prey or to take advantage of them. Rather he will carry them with him, leading them into all the truth. We will speak more of these things next week and also of the final thing that God would have the Church of Jesus Christ to remember; that He alone is worthy to receive the glory of whatever worship and service that the Church renders to Him. All that we do is to Him, and for Him.