

**Revelation 4: 8b; “The Service of the Living Creatures”, Sermon # 35 in the series –
“The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on July 19th, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We have been looking at the pastor’s ministry for several weeks now, and have seen his ministry, what it is like. We have seen that it is his mission to fly as a seraph with the gospel of Christ to the aid of sinners and saints alike. Ideally he will be bold like a lion in his preaching, hardworking and persevering like an ox, having compassion and sympathy for all whom he ministers to, like a man in that regard, and like an eagle in his discernment and vision of all that the Christ's people will be endangered by or what they will need. This is a very high standard, and it is held up for us here with the realization, as we said last week, that in many things each man who is a minister will fall short of it. Let us remember that our focus is not to be so much on the minister as being someone great, but upon Christ and His grace making that man sufficient; able in his ministry to help you to understand spiritual things better, so that you will serve and worship God with your life. His job and calling are to preach Christ and not himself, even though he is to be a good example of the believer. It is the service of the living creatures, that is ministers, that I want us to look at this afternoon. And this is represented for us here in this passage by the eyes. Last week we looked at the wings, this week we will look at the eyes, because they represent a great portion of what the minister or pastor does in his service to you and for Christ. We will look at the eyes of the minister first, and then we will look at the eyes of the Church with the time that we have remaining.

1st- The eyes of the minister in relation to the church that he pastors.

It says in verse 8 it says that the four living creatures were “full of eyes around and within”. We have been looking at these living creatures in chapter 4, giving them a real consideration, because they are of great significance to the Church of Jesus Christ and to the fulfillment of God’s purpose upon the earth in every generation. We have seen that they represent a hieroglyphic composite picture of what the ideal minister, or pastor and his ministry, should be like. There may be plurality of eldership and this is good but this is what it should look like, which is symbolized by the living creatures having the faces of the lion, the calf, the man, and an eagle. You might be asking yourself why doesn’t the Lord just come right out and tell us what all these things are without our having to grapple so much with the symbolic representation. You will understand this better as we proceed through the book. It is because visions and messages given to Christ’s people through prophets like John, need to be understood especially by ministers and also by their people so that they would have a means to be strengthened by the truth while they are being opposed by Satan’s malicious forces. They will be able to have this take place if wicked men cannot understand the meaning of that which gives the Christian strength. This symbolic representation is a great aid in the spiritual battle that we face.

All Christians in all generations and cultures down through the Church age need this kind of holy secrecy of understanding which comes from God Himself. I say holy secrecy because there are secret societies like the Masons which delve into mysteries which are contained in the Scriptures and they do not understand them rightly. They will be judged according to how they have twisted or misapplied the Scriptures. Indeed all men will be judged in relation to how they have handled or mishandled, received or rejected, the Word of God. Ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God. They must study to be good stewards and good interpreters of the word of God. Jesus says in John 12: 46 – “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” “And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.” He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge

him in the last day.” There it is, plain and simple; the word which Jesus has spoken will judge all men.

And let us also see that many of the things that Jesus preached and taught were given to the people in parabolic form. Often Jesus would use picture language. Prophecy is not only the conveyance of pictures of what will take place in the future history of the Church and the world. It is the conveyance of God’s will for His people concerning the most practical spiritual activities of their soul. “He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men,” it says in 1 Corinthians 14: 3. This, I believe, is why God has chosen to use the form of picture language and symbolic representation in the book of Revelation as well as in other portions of His word. God wants the particulars of historic fulfillment of prophecy shrouded in mystery, so that we cannot determine when Christ will return, and yet so that we can see the overview of the oppositions that the Church will face in all the generations of the Church age. It is also the overview of the Church’s triumphs through the grace and power of Christ. All this is given so that we will come to understand that Christ has overcome all of our enemies, and will enable us to overcome them, and to bear fruit in doing so, as well. So it is good and practical to study this book, as well as edifying and encouraging to God’s saints. Spiritual study is practical study when it has regard to how we should think and how we should live our lives. This book is eminently practical at many points.

When we read that these living creatures were full of eyes around and within, we should realize that this is an indication of the primary duty and service of ministers and pastors. It is that they watch and look out for the souls of people over whom they are appointed. They are under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus Christ and overseers of the flock. Let me turn you to a few verses which will show this. The 1st verse that comes to my mind is Hebrews 13: 17. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give an account.” “Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable to you.” God has appointed pastors to “keep watch” over your soul. He uses his physical eyes to observe you and his “spiritual eyes” to think about what he has observed. He is appointed by God to do this for your good, not for your grief. The believers in the church are called in this verse to submit to this good work, for it is a good work; not with a blind submission, but with a thoughtful submission. They should thoughtfully examine the Scriptures to see if the things that they are being taught by him are so, and they should also thoughtfully receive his counsels and advise in relation to concerns that he may have about their spiritual state.

The minister is also watchful for evil and error which may come to the flock from outside or even be raised up in the church itself. Turn to Acts 20, verse 28. Here Paul is giving a charge to the elders at Ephesus before he departs from them. He will never see them again and so his words are in relation to what they ought to consider their duty in relation to the holy ministry. He says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace...” Paul is leaving them with that all important word to a pastor—“watch”. Ezekiel is spoken of several times as having been made a “watchman” to the house of Israel. In Ezekiel 3: 17, He was to give Israel the warning of God’s judgments upon them if they did not repent, and if he did not warn them, their blood would be required at Ezekiel’s hand. He would be chastised for not warning both the wicked man who would not repent and the righteous man who turned from his righteousness.

The beautiful thing which is shown to us, in our text of the verses in Revelation, is that these living creatures are “full of eyes around and within”. This means that the minister is one who watches his own heart and prays to God to reveal to him what he needs to see about himself as well as those for whom he will give an account for in his congregation. If anyone is overtaken in any trespass, he remembers the words of Galatians 6: 1, “Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” If anyone is excelling in good things, He prays thanking God that it is so, and asking God for the grace to be full of good things himself. He is a man who watches his own heart and life as well as the people of the congregation which he pastors. He watches both to warn and to commend. Will you not pray for your pastor that his discernment of each of you, and his discernment of himself would be accurate and righteous so that a good account can be given to God for both? This is a very important thing in God’s sight.

Now 2nd – Let’s look at the eyes of the Church in relation to the eyes of their minister.

Where do we find this in the text? We do not find here in the text in Revelation. But we do find a number of things related to our study in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 1. Turn with me over to this chapter. In verse 4 we read: “Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.” “Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures.” “And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.” “Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.” “Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves’ feet.” “They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.” “The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings.” “Their wings touched one another.” “The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.” “As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.” “Thus were their faces.” “Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies.” “And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.”

“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures.” “The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning.” “And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.” “Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.” “The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness.” “The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.” “When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went.” “As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them.” “When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.”

Here we find Ezekiel among the exiles of the captivity, by the river Chebar. He saw a great vision there, which is given to us in some detail. He sees in verses 5-10 the four living creatures which we have been studying in the context of the book of Revelation. The description is slightly different from John’s but it is similar enough to know that the same creatures are being spoken of. Here we find that the character of their faces is described as they are in Revelation. Their likenesses are the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle. Their wings are numbered as 4, whereas there were 6 in Isaiah’s vision, but I think that in Ezekiel’s vision he saw the flying wings as one set and the wings covering the hands and feet as

one set of two joined together. There seems to be an indication of this in verse 23 where it is said: "And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another." "Each one had two which covered one side and each had two which covered the other side of the body." I believe this two on the one side, and two on the other side, are 4 wings all together; and then the 2 with which the creature flew are the other set which would equal Isaiah's creature's six wings. Verse 11 says, "Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another and two covered their bodies." These living creatures, these ministers of God are always thinking in a practical way of how they can lift the thoughts of themselves and their congregation up to God so that they will remember God's holiness, and so that they will live holy lives.

Their appearance in verse 13 is like "the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures." "The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning." The apostles on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, "there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them." "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." The gospel was then sounded forth from them to all the people who had gathered that day from other surrounding places. (Acts 2: 5-12) Ministers are torch bearers of the gospel, bearing the light before the people of the congregation and before unbelievers as well. Verse 14 of Ezekiel 1 says, "And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning." This shows the great desire of ministers of the gospel for the Word of God to "run swiftly and be glorified" among the people that they minister to, and to the community that they live in, and even to ends of the world. They strike with their words at error and unbelief like lightning to bring conviction of sin and to establish the truth of righteousness. They preach and spread the word by running back and forth from the church to the community in every way that they can find, to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 15 we find another very interesting aspect of this vision, "a wheel on the earth beside every living creature with its four faces". In Revelation it is the 24 elders representing the church that are next to the living creatures. Here it is a wheel beside every living creature. These two descriptions represent the same entity; the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. These symbolic representations of the Living Creatures and the wheels are the same as the representation of the Living Creatures and the Elders in the book of Revelation. They show forth the close relationship between ministers and the churches that they pastor. They show forth the way that the church and its ministers are to work together in the work of the Lord; that the ministry of both will be to take the gospel out to the communities they represent, and that all of the strength of their worship and their service would be to the praise of God's glorious grace. In this way, the truth of God's word will be lived out in a unity of purpose between pastor and people. We will look more at this the next time we are together. We will see the living creatures leading in the worship of God and the twenty four elders falling down before Him Who sits on the throne. We will see that the wheels in Ezekiel have rims that were "full of eyes all around the four of them". We will see that the "spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels".