

Revelation 4: 6-11; "The Living Creatures", Sermon # 32 in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 17th, 2006, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We are continuing in the second vision given to John on that great Lord's Day when he saw so many things that were almost too wonderful to describe. The Lord God Almighty is a God to be worshiped and adored forever and ever. And He is to be worshiped and adored as the sovereign God Who will not ever change and Who will not ever be moved by oppositions to the kingdom of His dear Son which will present themselves during much of this Church age. This is what the book of Revelation will describe. It will describe Christ's kingdom and its advance to have dominion over the kingdoms of this world which Satan and men do not want see come to pass, but which good and righteous men in every generation want to see. Last Sunday we were drawn up with John into heaven to see a very amazing sight. It was of a Throne, upon which God the Father is seated, and He is surrounded by 24 thrones upon which were seated 24 elders. They were clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads." I attempted to show you that these 24 elders have a symbolic representation, which many parts of this vision do; and in this case it refers to the Church of Jesus Christ which is presently reigning in heaven, seated with Christ. She is seen by God the Father as perfect, pure, and holy as a result of the precious redemption of her by Jesus Christ. Those believers who have died and gone before us, the spirits of just men and women, have been made perfect and await the resurrection of the dead, but in the interim they surround the throne of God in praise and worship. Those who are physically alive and upon the earth at any given time in Church history, are those who continue to do battle for the forward progress of the gospel and who uphold and maintain the true worship of God. They believe the promise of their Lord that He will be with them always, even until the end of the age. They know that it is their solemn duty, but also their great joy to faithfully witness to the truth of Christ's Lordship and the need of men to be saved from their sins. The Church's cause is the same as that of her Lord, the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness. It is the cause of living godly and being faithful to Christ, all the while seeking to be faithful and true witnesses to Christ as being the only Savior of the World, hoping in that way to see His kingdom grow and advance and prevail upon the earth. They desire to promote His glory and the true worship of God upon the earth in this way.

Believers in Christ who are here upon the earth need to understand what this worship and ministry of Christ's church should look like, what kind of worship will honor God, what kind of worship God will receive during the whole church age. Otherwise, how will He be glorified? God is telling us here, in Chapter 4, through the symbolic representations in this passage, this very thing. God would have Christ's Church to remember 4 things about the kind of worship and service that she will render to Him during the whole Church age, so that He will receive it and so that it will be acceptable to Him. We looked at 2 of them last week. 1st- The Church should remember that she is presently reigning with Christ. And 2nd- The Church should remember God's holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in her midst. We need to see that everything that we do in worship and service for God, as Christians is not accepted because we are doing it, but because Christ has done the work of redemption

and all of our works are acceptable to God as being "wrought in Christ." John 3: 21 says, "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done, or wrought, in God." The Church is presently seated with Christ and reigning in heaven because of the victories that Christ has won in the battle against all of God's enemies, and ours, upon the cross. He has overcome sin and death and has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. We as His Church are presently reigning with Him. We are a "kingdom of kings and priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2: 4) We must remember our calling, and not allow worship to degenerate into entertainment, I said to you last week. When we worship God we are giving to Him the glory due to His Name, not coming to church to please and entertain ourselves. And 2ndly I said to you that the Church should remember God's holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in her midst. His ministry is pictured for us here as "seven torches or lamps of fire burning before the Throne." Our God is a consuming fire. Our Savior has eyes like a flame of fire. The Holy Spirit's ministry in our midst is based upon the discernment of our hearts, whether we truly desire to remember to be a holy people. I spoke to you about the Lord's Day, that we would "turn our foot away from God's holy Sabbath, from seeking to do our own pleasure on this day. I spoke to you about the need for you to keep up personal devotion to God and family worship. And then told you to remember that the "seven eyes of the Lord in Revelation 5: 8 are the same as the seven Spirits of God which are before the Throne, and sent out into all the earth. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to him. Our loyalty is shown in how we worship Him and how we live our lives. Now this afternoon I want to give to you the other 2 things that Christ's Church should remember.

3rdly- She should remember that God will receive her worship and ministry if she remembers the significance of ministers whom He has appointed and called to preach his word and the gospel of His Son.

It says in verse 6, "Before the Throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal." "And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back." "The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature was like a calf, the third living creature was like a flying eagle." "The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within." "And they do not rest day or night saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'" Now it is best to remind ourselves at this point that we are not dealing with the actual state of things in heaven but the symbolic representation of things in heaven in relation to the worship and service of Christ's people here upon the earth. Otherwise we are going to be greatly confused. Some of the commentators are greatly confused in their understanding of these living creatures as well. Some of them think that they represent the 4 gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Others think that the living creatures represent aspects of the Divine government by God in His providential ordering of things on a world wide scale. (Albert Barnes and Lenski) Some think, more plausibly, that they are angelic creatures. And it is true that they are called Cherubim in the book of Ezekiel in Chapter 11. And they are called Seraphim in the book of Isaiah in Chapter 6. And never really examining the passages or their context in detail, we might reasonably conclude that they are angelic creatures.

But let us consider first that they are not called angelic creatures in this passage, or in the other two passages. They are not "beasts" which is an even poorer translation of this word in the original. They are called in the Greek, Zoa, or living creatures. Secondly, in our passage, these creatures are distinguished from angels in chapter 5 verse 11, when it says, "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the Throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, etc.'" You say to me, "Well, they may be a different order of angels than these here mentioned." That would be possible except for verses 9 and 10. In verse 9 the twenty four elders and the four living creatures are described as "falling down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." And they are singing a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood." Notice the word "us." The Living Creatures are "redeemed unto God if the word "us" is correctly supplied in the New King James translation. The NAS translators seem to think that the word "us" should not necessarily be supplied in the translation and so have put in italics the word "men" in its place. In verse 9 they have twice put the words "them" in the place of "us" and "we" in verse 10. But what we can conclude from these observations is that in the context of Chapters 4 and 5, the living creatures represent those who worship, those who speak, and those who sing the New Song. It seems to me very irregular to include these creatures in this whole vision if they are not redeemed humanity who are being represented before the throne. And we have already seen that the overall meaning of this vision is intended to represent the kind of worship and service that will be received in heaven by God during the whole church age. This is the picture of the elders seated. So what I believe is being represented by these living creatures is not angels, it is not aspects of the Divine government of the physical world, but it is rather ministers of the word of God that are being indicated by these creatures. It is ministers and the kind of ministry that they are called to by God Himself. It is aspects of their ministry and their involvement in the Divine government of the Church that is being represented here. This is also the reason why these living creatures are given to Isaiah and Ezekiel to describe in the visions that they receive at the onset of their ministries to the nation of Israel. They are given in those places as the ideal picture of what a true and faithful prophet would look like; a symbolic representation of what the man of God would be like in his ministry from God's standpoint. This is not simply my own view of the meaning of these creatures but is also the view held by a number of eminent and godly men such as John Gill, Matthew Poole, James Durham, Thomas Scott, and Andrew Fuller. I think that this interpretation fits the context. Let's look at their description more carefully.

Verse 6 says that "Before the Throne was a sea of glass." Everything in the future and in God's providential ordering of things during this Church age is clear to Him, crystal clear, and He knows what He wants the ministry by all of his called servants to look like. These living creatures are "in the midst of the Throne" and "around the Throne." God's ministers, His pastors and teachers, are those who are in the midst of the Throne in the sense that they are extensions of the Divine rule of His Son's kingdom in the midst of the Church. They are responsible for teaching and ruling God's people, having received authority to do so by their being called by God and having their call verified also by the church that he is called to minister to. God rules in His church by

His word, and his word is preached and taught by His ministers. "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary," it says in Jeremiah 17: 12. It is so in the New Testament Church as well. God's ministers are "around the throne" in that they also are those who have been redeemed by Christ, they are worshippers of God and Christ just as the rest of the saints, who in this vision, are symbolically represented by the 24 elders. The number four is less than 24 and shows that they are a smaller, separate and distinct group who are associated in the worship of God with the 24. There will only be a few who will be Pastors and teachers in the church.

Their ministry is well described in the phrase, "full of eyes in front and in back." A minister is one who is a "watcher over men's souls." They will keep watch over the souls of many persons and everything that concerns the Church of Jesus Christ over which they are placed. They will keep watch for the souls of every member of the church as those who will give an account before God. That is why you are commanded to obey them in Hebrews 13: 17. Ministers are described needing eyes in the front and back of their head. This is physically impossible, but with the help of the Holy Spirit and by means of prayer, the minister can come to a discernment that is greater than just his own by nature; that is his own nature without God's help. He has been given a gift by God to be able to see things in God's word and to see how they can be applied to the lives of each of God's dear people. He is a living creature who has a living ministry in the sight of Almighty God. He is not infallible in his discernment but he has a sufficiency which is from God. He knows that he has a great need for God's help even though he is always looking and always watching. And so prays for and is looking for the wisdom and discernment that comes from God Himself; wisdom and good discernment in doctrine and teaching, and wisdom and good discernment in relation to people and the needs and condition of the souls of the people under his charge. He is given "eyes to see" what the Spirit is saying to the churches and especially to the church that he ministers to in particular. We will have much more to say about the gospel minister, the pastor-teacher and minister who is a living creature and whose ministry is a living thing in relation to God and Christ's church, the next time that we are together around this text.