

Elder Vernon Johnson

Numbers

Four

(Part II) The Four Living Creatures

The prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 wrote of four living creatures who were also called four cherubims. In our previous study we looked at the four beasts in Revelation chapter 4. While there are similarities between the four beasts and the four living creatures, there are also major differences. For instance, the four beasts each had a different face, whereas the four living creatures each had four faces. In our last article we noted the parallels between the four beasts and the four gospels. Similarly the four living creatures parallel the gospel ministry. As we look at the word description of the four living creatures we will note the parallels with what the scriptures tell us of the gospel ministry.

First, there were four living creatures. The word creature means that which is created. Only God can create anything. In natural creation God created the heavens and the earth and all things therein. God created Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul. In addition, God created the spiritual inner man of the elect. We do not create ourselves. God alone is the creator. There would be no true gospel ministry today except God established it. God calls men to be preachers, he established the offices, he establishes their service and their qualifications. He directs their labors. Thus it can be easily seen that the true ministry of God has their ministry “created” of God and therefore they are living creatures of God.

Next in their appearance they had the “likeness of a man.” In Phil. 2:7 Jesus is said to be “made in the likeness of men.” Since Jesus Christ was a man as well as God the statement that he was “made in the likeness of men” serves to show that he was a man. Thus the living creatures are men, having all the attributes and characteristics, frailties, temptations, and problems of men. Being a gospel minister does not make one any more or less a man.

Furthermore, their feet were straight feet. The feet of a man are for walking. We are to walk thru the straight gate and the narrow path. The gospel ministry is to set an example for others to follow. Thus the gospel ministry are to walk straight forward in paths of uprightness and holiness. Also the “sole of their feet was like

the sole of a calf's foot.”

The sole of a calf's foot is hard enough to withstand the rocks and thorns, but soft enough to have feeling. The gospel ministers in their walk must have enough hardness to withstand the trials, troubles, slanders, and persecutions that come their way and at the same time not become cynical, but have a feeling for the conditions of those they serve. Furthermore, their feet “sparkled like the color of burnished brass.” Brass is often associated with suffering and affliction in the scriptures. Gospel ministers have many trials and afflictions in life, but this is not to derail them, but to burnish their faith so that it sparkles or shines forth as an example of how to walk in the midst of trials and afflictions.

“And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides.” A man's hands are for working. A gospel minister must work to provide for his family as Paul taught the elders by action and by precept in Acts 20:34, 35, “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Besides providing for ones own, the gospel ministers have a gospel work given them of God whereby they are to feed the lambs and sheep, be overseers over the flock, perfect or mature the saints, encourage the work of each member, edify the church, preach the gospel, etc. There is no room for laziness in the ministry of the gospel.

They each one “had four wings.” Now a gospel minister cannot fly except he is lifted up spiritually by the Holy Spirit. John was told to “come up hither” and so the gospel minister is sometimes lifted up in meditations of the glorious truths and wonders of an Almighty God. Furthermore, the wings of the living creatures “were joined one to another.” Oh how it should be in the mind of every true God called minister that we share a common calling and a common purpose and how we should strive to be of one mind working together for the furtherance of the gospel kingdom. “They turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.” Unfortunately, in our day there are those who started out on the right tract, but have become sidetracked by their own ambitions and have turned from the pathway of true doctrine and practice. We are to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith and since the scriptures are a thorough furnisher, there is no need to try to change or improve the church. Our pathway has been laid out for us in the scriptures and it is a straight pathway. “And two covered their body.” The

labor or work of the gospel ministers is not for their glory, but for the glory of God. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.” “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” This gift of the gospel ministry is not for man’s praise, but for God’s glory.

“And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went.” It is not up to the church to appoint the labors of gospel ministers or to send them to their labor. The Holy Spirit directs the labor of the gospel minister, giving him his messages and empowering him to preach in demonstration of Spirit and of power. Furthermore, it is not up to the preacher to decide his own course but to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

“As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire.” Jeremiah once said in Jere. 20:9, “Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” A preacher filled with the Spirit and not preaching will become weary with forbearing and like fire shut up will seek to vent. I don’t understand how a God called preacher could not become emotional about preaching the gospel. An unemotional preacher calls in question his very calling.

“And like the appearance of lamps.” A lamp gives light. Ps. 109:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” When the gospel minister preaches the word he is like a lamp giving light unto the ones he preaches to. Often we receive direction for our lives and instruction and understanding thru the preached word.