

**Revelation 4: 9-11; “The Response to the Living Creatures”, Sermon # 36 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2105, by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I have been speaking to you in past sermons about the worship of God; what the worship of God should look like in all generations during the Church age. We have seen that formal and corporate worship is to be given to the Triune God by His gathered saints. We see here in this text how the Father is being represented for us as a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance, and He is seated on the Throne. The Holy Spirit in all of His glorious ministry, in relation to the fulfillment of God’s eternal purposes, is spoken of as seven lamps of fire which are burning before the Throne. I will speak more in coming weeks of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to the Throne. He is in “the midst of the Throne” (Chapter 5, verse 6) and this position is a picture of His Office in the Godhead as well as His role as the only Mediator between God and man. We also have spent some time trying to understand the meaning of the 4 Living Creatures and the 24 Elders. I trust that I have been able to convince you that the 24 elders represent the entire Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, composed of believers from both Old and New Testaments; those who are holy, and wise, and discerning in their worship of God. And then, I told you that the four Living Creatures symbolically represent the ministers of God’s truth; those who lead in the worship and service of God.

We have looked at the ministry, the mission, and the service of the Living Creatures thus far. And this afternoon I would like now for us to look at the response given by the Church to the Living Creatures. We see the response given by the Church in verses 9-11 of the text. The 24 elders first “fall down before God who sits on the throne”. They then “worship Him who lives forever and ever”. And then 3rdly they “cast their crowns before the throne” declaring His worthiness. We will only have time for 2 of the 3 responses. Let us see whether we can learn more of what is the appropriate response of worship in these words. I will ask 2 questions.

**1st- What does it mean for the Church to fall down before God who sits on the Throne?**

The ministry of a pastor, we have seen, is a Living Creature. It is something that takes on an existence of its own, and that is because God Himself is in it. The minister is just a man, and as such he has many weaknesses and much remaining corruption that still plagues his heart; but he is a man who is called and used of God to be a helper and a worker together with God, to bring about the fulfillment of God’s good purpose in relation to building and adding to the Church, and the building up of the people of God. Ephesians 3: 18-22 speaks clearly of these things. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The saints and ministers, together, are being built into a holy temple in the Lord. They are built for the purpose of God’s dwelling in their midst and God’s being worshiped and glorified as they are transformed more and more, by His word and by His Spirit.

Turn with me over to Ephesians 4: 11 and 12. “And Christ gave some to be Apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” So this ministry of those who are pastors and teachers in the Church universal, just described, were given by Christ to “equip the saints for the work of service” so

that God will be worshiped and served in accordance with his word. This is indeed a very important thing in God's sight, and it is the reason why there is a whole chapter given here at the beginning of the prophetic section of the book to describe it symbolically. I believe that if we meditate on these verses and remember what God expects in worship, that what this means is that there will be a bowing of the mind, the heart, and the collective will of each true church of Jesus Christ to receive the ministry of the Living Creatures, and to worship God in accordance with the word preached to them. It means that the church will respond to what is being taught and led by the Living Creatures, and the church will act upon it in a way that will bring honor and glory to God. You notice that "whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him Who sits on the Throne, that "the twenty four elders fall down". It is an act of worship to receive God's word concerning who He is, and what He is like. It is a life of worship to act in obedience to the word that is preached to you.

You remember last week when we were studying the service of the Living Creatures that I spoke to you about the eyes of the living creatures from the book of Ezekiel. In the text in verse 8, it says that "the four living creatures...were full of eyes around and within". And further it says, "And they do not rest day or night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, Who was, and is and is to come!'" This is the ministry of the Living Creature; to declare day and night that God is holy. He, the minister, will declare this from the pulpit, and the Lord helping him, he will also declare it in his life. He will declare it in the way that he lives before his family and before the community that he lives in. But this ministry should, and it will, have a response to it from those who sit under it from week to week. Those who listen will respond if they are an obedient people and the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives. The minister, the living creature, teaches and leads in such a way that when he watches for the souls in his congregation, that they know that God is looking for obedience and praise to come forth from their lives, and that this would be given to God. The pastor is not ministering in order that the people would obey him personally. That is not his intention or his goal. Rather, he is looking for the congregation to hear God's voice in the preaching, and to heed what God has said. The pastor is looking to see if there is unity of purpose, to be a holy people, within the congregation.

I want you to turn with me back to the book of Ezekiel chapter 1 once again. Here in Ezekiel 1: 15 it says, "Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with it 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 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." "Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." "When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." You can see from this description, that the wheels in this passage, are what the elders are, in the passage in Revelation. The only difference between the wheels and the seated and crowned elders is that they represent different aspects of truth concerning the same entity represented, which is the Church of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Revelation, the elders represent the fact that Christ has come. All worship and service to God is now based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Believers are led, by faith in Jesus Christ, to the place where the truths revealed by Him and by His apostles are preached to them and they respond according to this revealed and preached truth. In the passage in Ezekiel, the wheels and the living creatures that they were united with, one wheel

each with one living creature; are representing the fact that God's judgments were coming upon the nation of Israel, the glory was departing from the city and the temple, because of the great wickedness of the majority of the people and the priests. But God would preserve the remnant of his people if they would listen to their prophets. The Old testament church, composed in part, of the remnant of true believers who heard Ezekiel's prophecy, would need to be very watchful in regard to holiness. They would need to stay very close to the true prophets and priests that remained, because God's judgments were going forth in the earth. It was God's glory that was at stake. And so, to repent and live a holy life by faith in God's word which was delivered to them through his servants the prophets, this was the essential thing. The spirit of the Living Creatures was in the wheels in this vision. What the prophet taught them came to live in them as they clung to the words of the true prophets.

But this vision, I believe, also has application, prophetically, to the New Testament Church that was coming someday. The spirit of the Living Creatures being in the wheels, each creature having one wheel next to it, and the fact that they never did anything apart from each other, and were being led by the Spirit; all this points forward to what Jesus Christ brought in, through His life, death, and resurrection. True unity in the church is based upon His work to establish the church and her ministers in one body. The glory of God is integrally linked to the Church and its becoming like Christ. The Church has "eyes all around the rims of her wheel" which are awesome. So even as the Living Creatures are full of eyes, around and within, so are the wheels, the true churches of Jesus Christ. They come to be watchful, they come to be discerning of what is morally good, and they strive to live that way because the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels. When the Living Creature, the minister, is lifted up and led and moved by the Spirit of God, then the wheel, that is the Church that he ministers to, is lifted up with him. And the two move together as a "holy chariot", knowing their commission is to take the gospel to every creature. They proclaim the gospel as they watch to discern what is false, what is wicked, and what is untrue. And they promote everything that is good, all that God has commanded in His Word. They do this together. They do not turn aside from this purpose. The universal Church on earth moves with this purpose; in every direction, to the four corners of the earth with the gospel. Ezekiel's vision simply encompasses a smaller geography than that which we find in gospel times.

### **2ndly- What does it mean to worship Him who lives forever and ever?**

Because this is what the 2nd response of the Elders to the Living Creatures is, in our text. Well turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 10. Here we have another vision of the Cherubim and the wheels. We find that this vision comes after it has been revealed to Ezekiel in previous visions that God was going to destroy Jerusalem because of the abominations which had been, and were being, committed by the people and the priests there. The reason that God was coming to judge Jerusalem and the nation of Israel was because they were living in unrepentant sin and idolatry. Here in Chapter 10 we see that the glory of God is His Holiness; and the glory of God is seen in the remnant of His people that hold fast His commandments and do not worship idols. In verse 4 it says, "Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory." "And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks." "Then it happened, when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, 'Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim,' that he went in and stood beside the wheels." "And the cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, and took some of it and put in the hands of the man clothed with linen who took it and went out."

Back in verses 1 and 2 it says, "And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of

the likeness of a throne.” “Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, ‘Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city.’” “And he went in as I watched.” I had to ask myself as I read these verses: Who is this man clothed in linen? The voice from the Throne is God the Father, as it is in this chapter of Revelation that we are studying. I think that the man clothed in linen is none other than the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 9 he is described along with six other “men” as having a writer’s inkhorn at his side. These other 6 “men” are the angels who had been appointed to be sent to usher in the judgments of the Lord upon Jerusalem. They “had charge over the city”, and they drew near, each with their “destroying weapon” in their hand. They were accompanying the destroying armies of Chaldean army who were coming from the North. Once again, here we find angels described as men, and living creatures or cherubim who we would think to be angels, are really men. The wheels are the congregation that listens to them, and moves with them in obedience. The man clothed with linen is responsible to “go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done”. These are those true believers who will be eternally saved because they truly mourn over their own sin and sigh and cry over the sins of others.

The significance of the man clothed in linen taking fire from among the wheels and the cherubim and scattering it over the city, is that the holiness of these, the prophet and the people that listen to him and live out their lives in accordance with his message from God, will be a tremendous witness that Christ will bear against those whom God judges, that His judgment was just. There was a real success to Ezekiel’s preaching among the captives. In verses 9 and following, of Chapter 10, it says, “And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub... as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.” Verse 12 says, “And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around.” “As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, ‘Wheel.’” “Each one had four faces; the first face was the face of a cherub, the second face the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and fourth the face of an eagle.” So you see, the wheels are now being described as the living creatures were described before. They were together growing into the likeness of Christ, showing forth by their words and their lives that they were holy. This is what the pastor and his people should look like, not only in their lives on Sundays, but all during the week as well; joined together to show forth the glory of God in obedience to the word which is delivered on this holy day. Thereby they become faithful and true witnesses. Will you not consider that this is the way to worship God, forever and ever? It is by living your life now in such a way that the things that you do and say will show the burning heart of holiness that you have for Him. You will worship Him Who lives forever and ever. Next week we will examine the Elders casting their crowns before the Throne, and declaring who is worthy to receive worship.