

Elder Vernon Johnson

Numbers

Four

(Part IV) Four Faces of the Four Living Creatures

Ezek. 1:10, “As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.”

The descriptions of the living creatures in Ezek. Chapter 1 given in figurative language are typical of the gospel ministry. The number four is often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel. The four faces of the living creatures answers to four necessary characteristics of the ministers of the gospel.

First, it must be remembered that God, the Holy Spirit, calls men to preach the gospel. They are men both before the call and after the call. As men they have the trials and temptations of men and go thru the problems and affairs of men just as other men do. Preachers of the gospel are not to be exalted or worshiped. Peter, when Cornelius met him and fell at his feet and worshiped him, took him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself also am a man.” Men are not to be worshiped nor are to receive worship. Jesus said in Matt. 23:8-10, “But be ye not called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called master: for one is your Master, even Christ.” Thus the gospel ministry is not to be called Rabbi, Father, or Master! Similarly, the scriptures say that “God’s name is holy and reverend.” Since God’s name is “reverend” it would be wrong to call men “Holy Father or Reverend.” Such exalted terms are to be reserved for God only who is worthy of such praise.

Also it should be noted that the gospel preachers, being men, are men called of God and their work should be respected as such. When he preaches the word and it convicts or reprimands us, we shouldn’t respond saying, “well he is just a man.” Yes, he is a man, but he is a man called of God to preach the word of God in power and demonstration of Spirit.

Next, the gospel ministry, as men, are to be examples of how men are to live. Pete, when addressing the elders in 1 Peter chapter five said to the elders, “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” Paul said in Phil. 3:17, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” Additionally in 2 Thes. 3:9 he wrote, “Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.” Thus the gospel ministers, as men, are to live their lives in such a way as to be good examples of godly living unto those that they serve. To this end Paul told the young minister, Timothy, in 1 Tim. 4:12, “Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” James taught a similar lesson in James 5:10, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.”

The second face of the living creatures was that of a lion. The lion is one of the most bold of creatures. The gospel preacher must be bold. This boldness, however, is not to come from the fleshly nature. Some men have fleshly boldness based on their position in life or society or based on their education or natural strength or on the size of their financial statement or political position and popularity. Paul said of such things, “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ...” Thus Paul concluded, “rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Since the gospel ministers as well as all of God’s people, are to have no confidence in the flesh, then where is their boldness to come from? Paul said in 1 Thes. 2:2, “But even after we had entreated, as you know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God with much contention.”

In addition, in Acts 4:13 we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men, they marveled and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” To the end that the gospel might go forth the disciples prayed in Acts 4:29, “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” Then in verse 31 we read, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake

the word of God with boldness.” Thus we conclude that the boldness of the gospel ministry comes from a walk with the Lord and the filling of the Holy Ghost, so that they may speak in power and demonstration of Spirit as Paul said, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” The disciples spoke boldly in the face of much opposition, persecution, and ridicule. To speak the word of God is to speak with the authority that God gives and to boldly proclaim his word. There is no place in the gospel ministry for a timid or cowardly preacher. We are to proclaim the whole counsel of God and some times those to whom we preach will find that offensive. Nevertheless our preaching is to be to the honor and glory of God, not to the pleasing of men.

Next, they four had the face of an ox. An ox is a burden bearer. There is much work and many burdens that the gospel ministry are called on to bear. Paul wrote, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” Thus the gospel minister is a laborer in the word and doctrine. As Peter was admonished of the Lord, he is to feed the lambs and the sheep. Thus they are to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Likewise, Peter admonished the elders to “feed the flock of God which is among you.” Of course that food that is to be fed to the flock is the word of God. Likewise, the elders are to be overseers over the flock as recorded in 1 Peter 5:2, “taking the oversight thereof,” and Acts 20:28, “over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers.” Also Acts 20:31, “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Similarly Paul told Timothy, “But watch thou in all things...”

Additional parts of the work of the gospel ministry are set forth in Eph. 4:12, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The gospel ministry is to labor to “perfect the saints.” The word, perfect, here means “maturing.” We are to labor for the maturing of the saints that they may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Next, we are to labor to teach and encourage the saints of God to labor in their individual ministry. Thirdly, we are to “edify” or “build up” the church or “body of Christ” in the worship and service of God.

An additional work of the gospel ministry is to comfort the Lord’s people. Is. 40:1, 2, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” 1 Cor.

14:3, “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort.” The gospel ministry are to speak comfort to the hearts of God’s people concerning their sins. Also, they are to speak comfort concerning the loss of loved ones as set forth in I Thes. 4:18, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

The gospel ministry are to labor to the timely salvation of God’s people, teaching them to “save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Also they are to teach them to save them from their ignorance and from going about to establish their own righteousness (Rom. 10:1-4). Also, they preach to save the Lord’s people from a condemning conscience (Mk. 16:15, 16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

The fourth face of the living creatures is the “face of an eagle.” The eagle flies high and sees far. Similarly, the gospel ministry thru the leadership of the Holy Spirit are blest to “come up hither” that is to be lifted up in Spirit to the understanding of God’s word. Thru the leadership of the Holy Spirit the gospel ministers are given insights in the understanding of the scriptures and are blest to be lifted up in giving praise, honor, and glory to the Almighty God. In so doing thru their preaching they also raise up the congregations they serve to give praise, honor, and glory to the God of glory for his grace, mercy, and love toward them. The gospel ministry are blest to see the covenant of redemption God made before the foundation of the world and the end results of that covenant that will be fulfilled when time shall be no more. Thus they are permitted to see far off (eternity passed; eternity future) and to be lifted up to preach and lift up the Lord’s people to praise God for his goodness.