

# Creatures Out of the Fire

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the character of Christ as exemplified by the four living creatures, urging Christians to embody these qualities in their lives.*

**Duration:** 33:30

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 4:4, Matthew 22:37-39, John 5:39, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:3, Revelation 4:6-8

**Topics:** "Preaching"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of looking to Jesus Christ as the ultimate model of humanity. He describes how sin can distort and mar the true beauty of humanity, but Jesus Christ embodies perfect humanity without any pretense or pose. The preacher also discusses the significance of the four creatures mentioned in the Bible, which represent different facets of Jesus' character. These creatures complement each other and serve as models for believers to strive towards being like Christ. The ultimate goal is to reflect the glory and character of Jesus Christ in our own lives.

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## Transcript

...and therefore had the face of an ox on the left side, therefore also had the face of an eagle. Long before I knew that traditionally this verse had been made to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the gospel, I saw this here and was telling people about it. Later on I learned that traditionally, I don't know how far back it goes, but very far back, the four gospels were issued, and over the four gospels there were the figures of a man, over Luke, over Lime, over Matthew, over Knox, over Mark, and over Neagle, over John.

And strangely enough, it wove itself together so that I bought a cheap copy of the gospel, the four gospels, a new translation some years back, translated and produced in England. And on the cover are these four creatures. Now I mention this because I want you to know that these living creatures that the man of God saw are here to set forth one figure, a figure that is at the center of the creation, a figure toward whom God directs all our eyes and says, Behold my servant in whom my soul delighteth.

A figure that says that by him and through him and to him and for him all things are and were created. Now, all creation exists to show Jesus Christ forth, this strange, lofty, mystical, divine one. God has given us the whole creation to show him forth.

But still, all the creation cannot set forth the glory of Christ, for Christ is the glory of God and the creation is the glory of Christ. And these creatures that I have read about here this morning disclose Christ's

attraction. Now, not all of his attractions can be gotten together in one place.

And I suppose that the man John, if everything that he had done were written, the world would not contain the book. And I suppose that if all of the glories, all facets of the shining glories of the name Christ Jesus were to be set forth, it would take not only this creation, which men have called the universe, but it would take a dozen other universes to show forth the wonders and the glory that belong to Jesus Christ. Now, our goal is to be like Christ.

And for that reason, these creatures have a message for us. Our goal is to be like Jesus Christ, our Lord. I think we all agree with that.

We sing, O to be like him, O to be like him. And this seems to sum up the yearning of the heart of the Christians to be like Jesus Christ, our Lord. And this is not simply a sentimental yearning, but it is a sound theological fact with sound biblical reasons behind it.

God made his son to be a man and sent him among us, and then he made us to be like his son. First God made man in his own image, and then when man sinned, God made his son in the likeness of man, in barring sin, and now he's making man again in the likeness of his son. And when we look at anything that sets forth the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we look at a model of what we should be.

And these four faith creatures, having the four faiths, setting forth the four facets of the character of Jesus Christ, our Lord, are here to be models for you and me. Now the Son became man, that's first. The four had the faith of a man.

And the Son of God became man and dwelt among us, and he honored our humanity. He dwelt in our humanity as in a sanctuary. He did not apologize when he came to the world to be incarnated.

He did not go as a society dame goes to the slums, careful and mincing and timid, but he came carefully down as far as it was possible to go and went through the simple and blunt and frank and downright process of being born of a virgin mother. And thus he became a man and took upon himself our humanity. The Holy Ghost says in Hebrews 2 that he did not take upon him the form of angels, but he took upon him the nature of Abraham and the nature thus of mankind.

And Christ thus assumed the exalted worth of the human of human nature, and he stayed in character. And Christ was the only perfect example of an unspoiled human being. We know very little about Adam and Eve before the fall.

We know a great deal about the master words. We know little about them in that happy blissful hour when they dwelt naked in their unabashed nakedness in the presence of God and each other, their own purity, their own recovering. We know little about them then, but after they had sinned and God had driven them out, then we learned about them, and we learned about all of their descendants, and we know about ourselves, sad and disappointing as we are to ourselves.

But when our Lord Jesus Christ came to the world, he took upon himself the form of a man without man's sin and weakness. He had the simple weakness of man, if I might correct that statement, but not the weakness of sin. He could become tired and need to rest and sleep and eat, but that was his humanity, that was not fallen humanity.

Christ did not take upon himself fallen humanity. And we can learn something of how beautiful humanity is in two ways. We can learn how beautiful humanity is by looking at a baby.

A baby is unspoiled, now it's fallen by nature, but it hasn't had time to develop its devilry. So a baby is lovely because it is simply humanity as near to natural as it can be. Later and not long after, when sin has done its work in the young fellow, I saw a little fellow upon Yonge Street, a little gray pale-faced fellow with glasses and a hard face, and he was walking with three other boys, probably nine or ten, and they the same age.

And he was simply bristling. He'd turn that pale, gray, angry face on the other boys and bawl them out. The other good-looking little chaps were evidently trying to get them out of his hair.

And he was one of them, but he wanted to be boss, and he was boss. He had on Bermuda shorts, believe it or not, yesterday. And he was swinging his shoulders around there, trying to make up for the fact that he was gray, pasty-faced and wore glasses of tin, trying to make up for that by throwing his weight about and jerking his shoulders and threatening.

Well, when you see that, you don't see pure humanity anymore. You see what sin can do even at ten or eleven. And so it gets worse and worse as time goes on.

But how beautiful and how attractive is humanity in a baby. But if you want to see humanity at its most delightful stage, you will have to look at Jesus Christ, our Lord, because there was in him a relaxed simplicity of perfect humanity. There was no pose there.

We posed so. Have you ever stopped to ask yourself for a long time, do I ever act natural? You know, we preachers, Brother Gray will have to watch it, but we preachers are likely to fall into the habit of doing what Emerson said, put on a waxed smile. You know, a waxed smile.

He wasn't talking about preachers, he was talking about society people at the time. But you put on a waxed smile and walk about looking as much like St. Francis as possible. But it just won't work, brothers and sisters, I tell you, that we ought to get to a place where we don't have to pose, where we don't have to hide anything we are, and we don't have to try to be something we're not.

Jesus never tried to be anything he wasn't, and he had nothing to hide. And there was no perversion in Christ. Christ was humanity walking upright without perversion, and without affectation, and without pride, and without fear.

These are the five devils that work on humanity to turn us into something else from what we are. Pose and perversion and affectation and pride and fear, these work on us, I say, and destroy us. They do to us what insects do to the garden.

We're there, but the fruit we bear is poor, wormy, shrunken, undersized fruit. But the wholesome humanity of Jesus was something beautiful to see. He had the face of a man.

He was no hermit. He didn't have to go away to be good nor hide to be holy. Now, afterward, when the simple beauty of Jesus' humanity had gotten lost under the leaves of tradition, then men went away and hid themselves in order to be good.

They said the only way to be good is to get away from people. You get tainted by contact. Nobody was ever tainted by contact yet.

A lily, said Dr. Simpson, can grow out of a manure pile out in the yard, the farmyard, and be unsullied and pure, growing in the sunshine, fragrant and beautiful, untouched by the very soil it grows in and the surroundings. And so it was with Jesus. He walked among men, wicked men, vicious men, evil men, proud men, hypocritical men.

But he himself was as pure as the lily, and it's called in the scriptures the lily. Our Lord was no ascetic. John the Baptist came not eating and drinking.

Jesus came eating and drinking, and he went among the people simply. He didn't believe that he could make his soul good by punishing his stomach. He didn't believe that by not eating he could become a good man.

He knew better. Later on they thought that if they punished themselves, and almost were, they're held out. I have read the life of Henry Sousa and the life of St. John of the Cross.

And while they were good men and became great saints, they went through a long period before they found out better when they punished themselves tragically and terribly and only the mercy of God kept them alive, starving themselves long days on end, getting up early in the morning, going late at night to bed, hardly getting any sleep, eating only a bit now and then, and punishing their bodies. Our Lord had absolutely nothing of that there. God made the human body to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, and he doesn't punish his temples.

And then our Lord was no misanthropist. That is, he was not a hater of people. There are so many good people that have withdrawn themselves in cold scorn of the human race.

But our Lord was friendly to the human race. He was holy and harmless, and he dwells among sinners, holy and undefiled and higher than the heavens. And yet he was a lover of the human race.

He loved people. Neither was our Lord any bookworm. I gather on some of these Christians, and particularly these learned ministers, and there they smell of the books.

They've worn out one pair of eyes and bought another and are busy looking at books always. And when you speak to them, they do not respond to you in the simple, unaffected language of one man to another, but they put it into the language of the book they've been reading. There was nothing about that in Christ.

The only book Christ quoted was the Old Testament. He constantly said, It is written. It is written.

Have you not read? Have you not read? He was a man of one book, but it was the inspired book. It was the living book. Now the saints down here have forgotten that our Lord had the faith of a man, that our Lord glorified humanity and dwelt in it unembarrassed.

They've forgotten it, and they've made two mistakes. One is trying to be more than human, and the other is trying to be less than human. There are Christians who try to be more than human.

I knew a young lady in a certain city. She came to see me a number of times. She was in great trouble.

She had promised the Lord that she wouldn't get married, that she would just kind of stay around being an old maid and serve him. Now she wanted to get married. She found a fellow, and now how was she going to get out of it? I quoted Shakespeare, the only book I could think of at the time.

I said that there were some pledges that were better honored in the briefs than in the observance. I said, If you foolishly promise God something that God never wanted you to promise, and then find out later you're mistaken, don't be stubborn and hang on, but go to God and say, Excuse me, God, you never accepted that promise anyhow because it wasn't in the scripture. I wasn't led by the Holy Ghost to do it.

Well, she died hard, but she finally married the guy, and alas, I heard they were living happily ever after. The Lord never told her not to get married. If she'd wanted to find out what the Lord had to say, the Lord said, I would that the younger women marry and keep house and obey their husbands and bring up children and be an example of godliness.

Now, if they can't, that's another matter, but if they can, that's what they're supposed to do, you see. This woman wanted to be more than human. She promised the Lord that she would not marry because she thought that would be a holy thing, and the Lord said, Get married.

He said, That's the holy thing to do. Well, there's some people that want to be an angel before their time. Well, in fact, we'll never be angels.

I remember that D. L. Moody said that he had once gotten into distress of mind over the... He didn't want to be an angel. He said, I thought about to go to heaven and be an angel, and he said, I was so happy being a man that I didn't want to be an angel. Then he said one time the Lord revealed to him that we would be glorified and have a body like unto Christ, glorious body, and wouldn't be angels at all.

So don't think of your little dead baby that God has taken to be with him as a little angel up there. It's still human, still human, and there isn't anything higher. If God had changed it into a seraphim, it would have been a demotion.

When the Lord made humanity and came and sent his Son to be incarnated, he placed the highest compliment upon humanity. Therefore, we're going to be redeemed men in heaven, perfectly human, Christ-wise, and nothing higher is possible to us. So to be redeemed humans, cleansed now, and purified and spirit-filled, that's the ideal, because in being so, we'll be like Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then there's the second faith. I should have made four sermons out of this, but I've made it into one, so I'll hurry through it. The faith of the Lamb.

Now, what are the Leonine qualities? Well, the Leonine qualities are courage, dignity, confidence, poise, and daring. Have you ever in your time been around a zoo and seen a great bearded lion? They have more dignity than the Pope. They look out at you there, they cross their great paws and never look quite at you.

Have you ever noticed a lion never looks quite at you? He looks like, they say an Englishman never looks at you, he's so dignified he always looks past you. And it's the same with a lion. He always looks just a little to your right or left, but never right at you, he looks past you.

As if you amounted to absolutely nothing. You see me, I am the king of the jungle. That's what he's saying to us.

There's the dignity of the lion, and there's the courage of the lion, and there's the poise of the lion. Have you ever noticed that Jesus, our Lord, never allowed himself to get embarrassed, to lose faith, to say something he didn't mean, to back out, to straighten himself. He never did.

Now, if we have it to do, the thing is to humble ourselves and do it. But our Lord never had to do it. And the daring of the lion.

All these are the qualities, what we call the Leonine qualities. These were large in Jesus Christ. They were part of his perfect humanity.

He didn't cringe and apologize. He went about a man among men. And there was no timidity there, no shrinking diffidence.

As if he had to apologize to everybody around him for brazen. Not at all. I went through a period in my life when because I was weak enough to follow others, I had tried to be godly by self effacement.

When you try to rub yourself out, you always leave a smear. Don't forget that. When you try to erase yourself, you never quite make it.

So don't try to erase yourself. Leave yourself there. God put you there.

And God will take care of the other. Be humble because you should be humble, but don't be any humbler than you need to be. God wants you to be a man, not a mouse.

He never said to you, Be thou a mouse. He simply said, Be a man. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

But he only meant come down to your side. He didn't mean to shrink yourself. Yet I have been among Christians.

They couldn't take a compliment. If you said, That was a nice song, they said, Oh, the Lord did it. And you know, I've talked about that before, and I don't like it.

I like to have people act naturally and courageous and be what they are. Well, but in modern times, we're not like that at all. We have gone off the attack and we're on the defense.

You never saw a lion on the defense. He's always on the attack, always. And so we should be.

We need spirit-filled, praying, courageous, poised, self-assured, in the right sense of the word. Self-assured, I mean not trusting in self, but trusting in the God within us, the face of a lion. I like to read the lives of the great souls.

John Knox, the one whose tomb's stolen, it's written, here lies one who never feared the faith of a man. I'm reading now the life of George Whitefield, that great man of God, that little man who sounded as if he weighed a ton, that mighty little Englishman, probably one of the greatest men that ever lived since Paul. We need men.

We can't have his gifts, and there's no use to try to have another man's gifts. He had a voice, he had a memory, he had everything a man needed to make him the great orator that he was. But if we can't have his gifts, we can have his character.

We can have the character of the man who had a character like Christ. Then there's this third face, the face of a Knox. Now here's one of the strangest things imaginable.

Here's a picture of heaven and wonderful creatures there, but out of the fire, beside God, in the presence of God. One of them has the face of a man, and we can get by with that. We say, all right, because Christ became man.

Another has the face of a lion, and we can allow ourselves, we can say, yes, that figure's all right. There's the courage and poise and confidence. We come to the face of an eagle, and we say, yes, that's for high flight and altitude, that's good.

But what's an ox doing in heaven? Therefore had also the face of an ox. Strange to find an ox in heaven. Now, the reason is there was something in Christ's character that only the ox, as they knew it in Bible times and down the years, could set forth properly.

It was part of his human nature and should be a part of ours. Now what is this that an ox has that a bluebird doesn't have? What is this that an ox has that a lion doesn't have? What is this that an ox has that an eagle doesn't have? It took all of them to set forth, Christ's glory. What is this that an ox has? Well, an ox misses a few things.

I've seen them. I even date back to where I saw them hitched up with yokes on their necks, pulling things. And, of course, we've all seen pictures.

We've all seen cattle. What is it they don't have? Well, they don't have grace, that's sure enough. They don't have grace.

Isn't there one of them on the face of the wide earth, be it home in the lady's sewing circle? They just don't. They're not built for it. And they don't have brains.

Have you ever noticed how their heads are shaped? This little area here where the brains lie, it's been crowded out. There's not room enough in their attic to contain enough hay. And they just don't have it.

And they don't have charm. Now, talking about charm, I understand there are charm schools. I remember what the celebrated artist said about beauty parlors, where you go to parlors to find beauty, but I don't know what you'd do with anybody in a charm school.

But I know an ox doesn't have it, but he has something God wants in it, and it isn't charm. Now, don't say the Lord doesn't want charm, but he doesn't put it here, anyhow. They don't have sparkle.

We're great for sparkle now. Sparkling personality. Kind of tragic, isn't it, how sparkling personalities come up and capture the TV audience for a year, fade away, and are forgotten, and may be in the bread line tomorrow.

Sparkling personality. Wasn't that, what did that southern senator say one time about a certain other senator's sparkling personality? He said it was like rotten mackerel in the moonlight. And there's a lot of sparkle that's just the sheen of rotten mackerel in the moonlight.

They don't have any of that, and they don't have any of that that they have such a load of out on the west coast called glamour, spelled with a U. What do they have? Oh, my brother and sister, here's what an ox has. He has patience, steadfastness, calm, perseverance, and resignation. I never saw an excited ox, and

I never saw a hysterical ox, and I never saw an ox that was trying to get it over with in a big hurry, who's always patient and steadfast.

Now, this is what our Lord had when he lived among men. He endured patiently and quietly all that he had to endure, because in heaven there were those strange mystic creatures sitting forth, Jesus as the one with the faith, also with an ox, the steady, slow, quiet, plodding gate of the ox. Dr. Simpson, one of the highest-flying Christians of his generation, or of this century, wrote a hymn called Plod, P-L-O-D, Plod.

Not a very good hymn, because it doesn't rhyme with anything. But anyway, the idea was all right. Plod.

Now, brethren, here is what we need in Avenue Road Church. We need some people you can count on. Some people, if they just can't work up charm and sparkle, they can at least be there when the church is open.

If they aren't beautiful, they can at least be faithful. And if they can't sing like Beverly Shays, they can at least rumble bass in the choir every Friday night and twice on Sunday. They'd be patient and can do it.

If they haven't got all the gifts and the beauty and the sparkle and the charm that they'd like to have and that we put such a premium upon, they can at least do what they can do steadily and with resignation and calm determination. I will serve God. I will do this.

I will continue to do this. And then there's the face of the eagle, exactly opposite to the face of the ox, because it took both, it took all, and it took a thousand more to set forth the wonders that belong to Jesus Christ. But we have these four.

These creatures don't contradict each other. They complement each other. They fill out each other.

And by looking at the four pictures, you see a little more of what Christ was like and what we ought to be like. What were the aquiline characteristics, the characteristics of the eagle? Ah, aspiration and altitude and the high peaks and the eerie and the sunshine and the windspread. This is the characteristic of the eagle.

Now, we see Jesus Christ our Lord walking as calmly and as steadfastly among men as the plodding ox walks in the furrow, walking with all the courage and poise of the lamb, walking with the simple, relaxed dignity of a man. And yet there was an area in the life of Christ far out of sight. There was a whole area in the character and nature of Christ that never touched earth at all.

It roamed high and banked and turned and screamed in the sun. And so they get an eagle here to set forth another side of the character of Jesus Christ our Lord. He was among men, he said, the son of man who is in the bosom of the Father.

We say he left the bosom of the Father, but when he was walking on earth he said he is in the bosom of the Father. And he said, I know thou hearest me always. Jesus Christ never left the Father's bosom when he came to the womb of the Virgin.

Something in his nature still held tight and was like a trolley wheel on a trolley. It was in touch with all the infinite power that is God. And he never allowed himself to settle down into the dust.

Though he walked among men and got dust on his holy feet, still, like the eagle, he soared out of sight. Out in the western part of Canada and the United States they say that there are eagles and they're what

they call eagle territory. And yet men can live a lifetime and not see them.

They go in there and say we're hunting eagles and some old fellow will say I don't think there are any around here. I've never seen any. He'd never seen any because he didn't know they were there and wasn't looking for them.

They're all right, but they soar high and stay high. And when they build their nests they do not build them under the eaves of your house. They build them on some tall gut of rock somewhere so they can soar easily upward.

That's the eagle. And it's said of us that we shall mount up with wings as eagles. God means his children to live another kind of life.

There should be overtones of heaven upon the Christian heart always. Now Christ our Lord lived like that. We're too much contented with visible things, too much contented with visible services.

I've said before and I repeat that if we're all in touch with God when we come in here we would find our services stepped up by several hundred percent in one day's time. But only a few are in touch with God, maybe, and the rest more or less loosely in touch with God and some not at all. And the result is that the total climate of the service is not very beautiful because there are so few that have come in in touch with God.

Now brethren, as Christians we ought to try to be holy men and holy women. Not ashamed of our humanity but grateful for it. I wouldn't trade being a human being for anything in all the wide world.

I would rather be a redeemed man, I repeat, than to be a seraph. I would rather be a redeemed man than to be these creatures because these creatures are only there, there to set forth Christ. And you and I can have all that Christ has and had of holy characteristics and beautiful characters.

We can have it if we will. And it far transcends that of any other creature. So the Christian dwells in the secret place and he sees everything from the height.

It's amazing how much better things look from upstairs. When you look down on anything, it's wonderful how much better it looks. The bird that soars and circles must be, have a different view of the world than men who trudge along on the earth or the ox for that matter.

But it takes both. The eagle that soars younger could never plow the furrow. And if Christ had lived only in the high peaks, he never could have walked among men and allowed his hands to be tied in front of him and his finger to be nailed on a cross.

Never. He had to come down and live the patient life of the ox among men. He had had only the high flying characteristics of the eagle.

He never could have faced up to Judas and Peter and Pilate and Herod and the rest of them. But because he had the courage of all iron, he stood and calmly took it. But if he had only had the characteristics of the faithful ox, he never could have said, For I see I speak unto you, the Son of man, which came down from heaven.

I utter the things which I saw and I say to you. These things to you. You don't understand because you're of the earth, earthy.

Is that too much ox in you? Too much earth in you. There must be something else in you too. That is the mystical side, the spiritual side, the high flying side at which it's filled with aspiration and yearning after the things of God.

Well, that seems to about cover it briefly. There's material here for much more. But I know better than to say what one of my preacher friends says, says, Go home now and think this over.

I'm not such an optimist. But at least you're thinking about it now. God has given us these examples.

And he has given us all these examples in his Son. And it's our business to be as much like Jesus Christ in as many ways as possible as soon as we can. Looking forward with expectations of the day when we shall see him as he is and shall be like him.

Glad day. Amen.

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