

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Lion And The Lamb

Pastor Scott Dudley

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Scripture: Revelation 5:1-8

"Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out in to all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people."

Transcript:

Well, hello BelPres. Thank you for joining us. Special shout out today to Eloise who is celebrating her 100th birthday, happy birthday, Eloise. We are so glad you have joined us for worship. My name is Scott. I'm the lead pastor here, and we are happy that you are with us.

The scripture today comes from Revelation chapter five, and it says this. Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside of it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Then one of the elders said to me, do not weep. See the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb.

So Holy Spirit use these next few minutes to help us understand the scripture and help it to change our lives. And Jesus help us to use this word of yours to know you better. We pray this in your name, Jesus, amen.

We are doing a sermon series on the different names for God in the Bible. And we've been doing it since January, because there are a lot of different names for God in the Bible. And that actually shouldn't be too surprising, because all of us have a bunch of different names that we all go by. For instance, my kids call me Dad or Old Man, which is what my oldest calls me. Hey, old man. Here at church some of you call me Scott or Pastor. The staff usually calls me Dudley to distinguish me from the other Scott that is on staff. A few of them call me Studley, which is actually the correct name for me. And my wife, what do you think she calls me? So many things. But one of them is Smoochy. And all of those names are correct. I'm all of those names. I'm a pastor. I'm a dad. I'm somebody's Smoochy, just not your smoochy, so don't be calling me smoochy, except I think from now on some of the staff is going to keep calling me Smoochy forever. I'm all of those names.

God is all the names that we've been looking at. He is a consuming fire. He is God Almighty. He is the Good Shepherd. And for every opportunity or problem we face, there is a name of God that answers to it. And in today's text, Jesus, who is God in the flesh, is given two names, Lion and Lamb.

Now the background is that the Apostle John has been given a vision of the end of time and he sees heaven and God is holding a scroll, which represents the future of the world, where God eliminates all evil, renews this earth to be everything he created it to be. But the scroll has seven seals and no one is found worthy enough to open the seven seals. And so John cries, because unless they're open, God's purposes can't go forward.

And then one of the heavenly elders says to him, "Do not weep. See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain. So the elder says, "Look,

the lion of the tribe of Judah," and John looks and sees a lamb. And both are names for Jesus.

Back then priest would symbolically placed the sins of all the people on a lamb and slaughter it as a way of saying the sins had been paid for through the sacrificial, substitutionary death of the lamb. And elsewhere in the Bible Jesus is called the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world because he dies on a cross to pay the price for our sin. So he is the lamb.

And also Israel was divided into 12 tribes and Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. So he is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is both lion and lamb. He's our lamb-lion, if you will, or lamb lion. And back then as now, these two terms, lion and lamb, there's a bit of a contradiction, because back then as now, a lion was a symbol of power and strength and a lamb, especially a slaughtered lamb, was considered a symbol of weakness and defeat. So to refer to Jesus as both lion and lamb is a bit of an oxymoron, right? Which is two contradictory statements shoved together like jumbo shrimp or act naturally or California culture. Two contradictions shoved together. Not only that, but the name lion of the tribe of Judah itself is a contradiction. And I'll get to that in a minute.

And the point of all of these contradictory names is that when we hold them together, it releases the full power of the gospel in our lives. The power to free us from shame, which we all carry, whether you are a kid or a high school student or college or an adult, we all have some sense of shame for things we've done, haven't done, ways we've hurt people. The gospel has the power to free us from that and to transform us to be different people. And the gospel makes us brave. And through us changes our schools and our workplaces in our neighborhoods. And the word gospel means the good news of Jesus, but even the gospel itself is a bit of a contradiction, because as Pastor Tim Keller says, "The good news of Jesus is you are more sinful than you would ever dare believe and more instantly loved than you would ever dare to hope."

In other words, the good news is bad news before it's good news. Confused? And we don't like all these paradoxes. And so we're always leaving one half of the gospel out, right? But then we become people who the Apostle Paul says have the form of godliness, but deny its power.

The full power of Jesus is released when we hold together some contradictory things that these two different names point us to. So first, lamb-lion, lamb lion means that Jesus loves us with a dangerous love. As lamb, Jesus is gentle and full of grace. He says I love you just as you are not as you should be, but he's also a lion. And in the Old Testament, a lion was a symbol of destructive power that tears its prey apart. So as lamb, Jesus says come to me just as you are. I love you. But as lion, he is going to tear

apart your sin, my sin, the sin and evil in the world, not because he doesn't love us, but because he does love us and sin hurts the people he loves. His love is dangerous to our sin and to evil in the world.

And we see this in the next chapter where the seven seals are opened and God's judgment of sin is unleashed. And it says then the Kings of the earth, the generals, the rich, the mighty called to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the lamb. Wrath of the lamb. That would have been comic then, it's comic now. Lambs aren't exactly the most wrathful of animals, right? Look, run for your lives. It's a lamb. And he's mad. What does an angry lamb even look like? If you had a football team, you would not name them the lambs. The Kirkland Lambs, the Issaquah Lambs. Oh, I'm scared now. Those Kirkland lambs, man, they're a tough team. They might bleed us. I know, a dad joke last week, dad joke this week. Now I'm on a roll.

But that oxymoron is a clue to understanding Jesus' dangerous love. The wrath of God is not different than the love of God. The wrath of God and the love of God are the exact same thing, because he loves us enough to fight the sin inside of us and in our world because it hurts us and it destroys us and it wrecks people around us. You always have to hold the lion and the lamb together. If you only have one, you lose half the gospel and half the gospel does not set us free. And we are forever losing one or the other, aren't we? It's either gentle Jesus, meek and mild, or the God who hates sin and is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. Some churches preach a steady message of you're a sinner, repent, obey. God is mad. Other churches, including me preach a pretty steady message of God loves you. And it's okay. And it's all right, and everything's going to be fine. But we need both.

If God loves us, he will tell us to obey him for our own good. Just as a good parent disciplines their kids in love corrects them so that they don't grow up to be dysfunctional adults. If all you have is the lamb, you have a God who loves you, but is not strong enough to transform you. And if all you have is the lion, you have a God of great power, but terrifying. Jesus is our Lord and our Savior, but he has no right to be our Lord unless he is our savior. I don't want someone telling me what to do if I don't know that they love me. But if I know they love me, I'm more likely to do what they tell me to do, because I know that they have my best interest at heart. He has no right to be our Lord unless he is our Savior, but he cannot save us unless he is our Lord. And we do what he tells us to do.

Which brings me to my second point. Jesus' dangerous love transforms us to be holy sinners, which is another paradox. And this is where the name the lion of the tribe of Judah is itself a contradiction. Israel was divided into 12 tribes, named after the 12 sons of Jacob in the Old Testament who became the patriarchs of Israel. And of all of Jacob's 12 sons, Judah was by far the most sinful. Oh, let us count the ways. Judah convinced all of his other brothers to sell their youngest brother Joseph into slavery.

Let's just start there with Judah. Later, Judah worships false gods rather than the real God. Then he commits incest with his daughter-in-law and then wants to have her burned at the stake for being pregnant by him. That's Judah. And his descendants, the tribe of Judah that followed him, were just as bad. In fact, sometimes they were even worse than Judah.

And yet it is this tribe that produces the holiest people in Israel's history. Like King David. Jesus himself comes from the tribe of Judah. Jesus isn't born into one of the nice tribes, like the Levites where the priests came from. Jesus is born into the most sinful of tribes. And yet in this text, he's the only one worthy to open the scroll. Why? Well, after he opens the scroll, the heavenly choir starts singing and tells us why. It says you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain. And with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nations. The lion of Judah is worthy because he is the lamb who on the cross dies the death we deserve to pay the price for our sins that we know deep down needs to be paid or there's no justice.

And this is amazing paradox of our faith. When sinful people accept Jesus' death and resurrection on their behalf, they become holy people. As long as you admit you need it, which we don't usually like to do. It's one of the reasons I love leading Bible studies with prisoners. They're pretty clear on the whole. I'm a sinner part. That part doesn't confuse them like it does some of us. Good sinners make good Christians. Good sinners make good Christians, as long as they know they're and that they need the grace of Jesus, which is offered freely to anyone who asks. And that's the first step.

And then the next step is to let Jesus change you and make amends to the people that maybe you've hurt. But the first step is admitting we need Jesus' grace, because we are sinful people. And in order to be able to admit the first part of the gospel, that I am more sinful than I think I am, I have to believe the second part of the gospel, which is that I am infinitely loved more than I would ever dare to hope. Everyone says, "I'm not a gossip. I'm not a racist. I'm not greedy. I'm not a liar. I'm not self-centered." But yet those things exist, so what's the problem? Well, if you don't believe that you are more loved than you can ever imagine, you can't admit that you're more sinful than you would ever dare to believe.

So then you have to justify yourself and deny true things about yourself, right? And that's why you have people saying, "Well, I'm not a liar. I'm not a racist. I'm not greedy. I'm not a gossip. I'm not self-centered." You can't admit that you're more sinful than you'd ever dare believe, unless you are sure that you are more infinitely loved than you would ever dare to hope. But when you get that as the Bible says, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, you can admit your sin, which is the first step between getting beyond it. You can't change what you won't

admit. But see, once you know the lamb, you're not afraid of the lion, because you know the lion is on your side.

And what that means, and here's the good news, what that means is the past is not prologue. Our past does not determine our future. A lot of times we feel inadequate or disqualified because of something in our past. Maybe it's some past sin or a way we've hurt people. Maybe it's messages you get from fellow students or teachers or peers, or comparing yourself to other people. And the message is you're not smart enough, good-looking enough, popular enough. And there's always someone or something there to remind us that we're not all that and a bag of chips, always right?

On Christmas Eve, my family and I watched the service together at home. And these sermons on Sunday are live. This is happening live right now. But that one, the Christmas Eve one, was prerecorded. And I preached it from my living room. So I was watching myself preach, sitting in the room where I preached the sermon from, a truly strange and out of body experience I've never had before. And my kids were making all these comments while I'm preaching. some of them kind of sarcastic. They're like, "Oh, good one, dad. That was a real zinger. Oh yeah." Is this what's happening when I'm preaching normally? Then afterwards, I got all these emails commenting on the Christmas decorations in our house, the painting that was behind me. Is that the [Paloose 00:14:36]? Is that a painting of the Paloose? Yes.

So this is what's going on while I'm preaching every single Sunday? None of you are paying any attention to a thing I say, right? This is all going on in your head. There's always someone or something there to remind us we're not all that we think we are sometimes. And the devil is always there to remind us of our sin and our shame. Look at this. Don't you feel terrible? Don't you feel awful? The devil's always there to do that.

But the story of Judah and the tribe that came from him shows that when Jesus enters our lives, past is not prologue. Old patterns can be left behind. There is new life in Jesus. And we see that in Judah's story, the founder of this tribe. When Judah is confronted with his sin of incest, with his daughter-in-law, he confesses it and he says she is more righteous than I. In other words, it is all my fault, not hers. He admits it. And that's the first step to breaking free from old patterns.

And then the next time we see Judah is at the very end of Genesis, where he and his brothers are reunited with Joseph, who has now become Prime Minister of Egypt. And their youngest brother Benjamin has been falsely accused of stealing something. And they're going to throw them in jail. And Judah says, "You can't do that. It'll break our father's heart. Put me in jail instead." He is willing to take his brother's punishment in his brother's place. Does that remind you of anyone? Here in church? The right answer is almost always Jesus. Judah becomes a changed man through God's power, not only

confessing his sin, but doing everything he possibly can to make it as right as he can for the people that he's hurt. Without Jesus, Judah's story is sad, sorry, sinful, sordid. But with Jesus, his past did not determine his future.

In spite of the sin, Judah becomes Jesus' ancestor and his sin and the sin of the tribe that followed him does not corrupt Jesus' goodness and holiness. It's the other way around. Jesus' grace is so strong, it cleanses Judah's sins, showing that Jesus can overcome anything and bring us from mess to Messiah. The lamb-lion loves us with a dangerous love that makes us holy sinners, and finally also makes us victorious losers, which is another contradiction.

Because not only was the tribe of Judah sinful, they were also losers. They were big losers. Judah was always getting picked on by the other 11 tribes. Then the Babylonians conquered them and took them into exile for 75 years. And then the Persians conquered them. And then the Greeks conquered them. And finally the Romans conquered them. They were losers with a capital L. It'd be like being the only baseball team in baseball never to have gone to the World Series. Imagine how sad and sorry, Rich laughed at that. Imagine how sad and sorry that would be.

And yet in this text they're made to sound so majestic. The lion of the tribe of Judah can open the scroll. At the end of all time. It is the lion from this loser tribe that overcomes everything. They're victorious losers, not because of who they are, but because of whose they are. The lion of their tribe is with them and for them, so in spite of all of their failures and all of their disasters, Jesus, the lion of Judah, pulls victory out of their defeats, which brings us back to the lamb.

In this passage, John says, then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne. That's another oxymoron. The Israelites were used to seeing slaughtered animals on an altar, but not on a throne, a symbol of victory. A slaughtered animal is a symbol of defeat, not victory. But for the lamb of God, it is a victory, because you see the cross is the biggest paradox of them all, the biggest oxymoron there is, because on the one hand, it is God's greatest defeat where he himself in the person of Jesus is killed by his own creation. God's seemingly helpless. God seemingly powerless. God seemingly defeated. A helpless slaughtered lamb.

And yet it is also his greatest victory, where he paid the price for our sins and conquered shame and conquered death by rising again. The defeat led to victory. The lamb led to the lion. And what all of this means is you have power on your side. You have power on your side. The line is power and the lamb reminds us that he is on our side. He is a lion for us and a lamb with us. A lion for us and a lamb with us.

There's a woman I know who by her own admission was obsessed with her career. She was a doctor in a prestigious hospital, worked long hours every single day of the week, racked up award after award, showered with praise. But then her marriage started to crumble. And she and her husband started to fight a lot, because of both of them. They're both at fault in it. And they tried counseling, but it didn't work. And finally her husband said, "I think I need to leave. We need a divorce." She was devastated, but not necessarily for the right reasons, not because of her husband that was going to leave, but because she'd never failed at anything before. And this was really embarrassing to her.

Well, she was a nominal Christian, occasionally went to church, but this was a wake up call that doing things her way, wasn't working. So she decided to turn herself and her marriage over to Jesus, which for her meant a lot of prayer and a lot of soul searching and a lot of praying Psalm 139, search me O God and know my heart and see if there is any wicked way within me. That takes a lot of courage to pray that prayer and start to confront your own sin. And after months of praying in earnest, she one time got a picture in her head of a puzzle piece. And she realized that she was treating her husband as just one puzzle piece of her life and not a very important one at that.

Well, meanwhile, the husband began to recognize that he wasn't being a great husband either. He was impatient, emotionally distant, also a workaholic. And he wasn't a Christian at all. But in desperation, he started to read the Bible. And over the course of several months, began to think if I treated my wife the way Jesus treated people we'd have an amazing marriage. And then he thought, well, if I'm going to try to act like Jesus than I probably should know Jesus. And so after a couple of months of this, he became a follower of Christ. And then they started praying together about their marriage. And they started talking about Jesus together and ways that they could make each other more of a priority and how sorry they were for how they had treated each other. Neither of them quit their job, but they did scale it back a little bit. And they did a better job of supporting each other. And their marriage was completely transformed. And now it's full of mutual support and closeness and love and just way more fun than it used to be.

But maybe the most significant thing of all is they like to tell their story to other couples. They both used to be really embarrassed about the failures in their marriage, but now they tell their story to give hope to other people that yes, Jesus can really transform your marriage. They experienced the lamb who was with them, but also the dangerous love and power of the lion who tore their sin apart. And in their failures, they found victory. And now their failures help other people find victory when they tell their story to give hope to others. Redeemed.

So where do you need the lion and where do you need the lamb in your life? And as we've said throughout this sermon series, your homework this week is to start every

prayer you pray with these two names of God. Just start out praying lamb of God and lion of Judah, and then pray. And turn whatever challenge you face over to him, school, friends, career, whatever it is and the opportunities you have and ask to experience the presence of the lamb who is with us and the power of the lion who is for us, to bring us from mess to Messiah and make us holy sinners, victorious losers, child of the most high King.

So lamb of God and lion of Judah help us to know your love that is for us and with us and help us to know your power that can transform us, and through us begin to change the world. Lord, we need you to be both. So this week, lamb of God, lion of Judah, show us your love and your power and help us to live out of it. We pray this in your name., Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Revelation 5:1-8

Opening Questions:

- Icebreaker: What are you grateful for today?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why is the "Lamb" (Jesus) worthy to open the scroll (see also John 1:29)?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus is both Lion and Lamb? Which aspect of his character do you relate to more? Explain.

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?

Mar 14, 2021