

Title: *The Roar of the Lamb*

Text: Revelation 5:1-14

The mood in Jerusalem on that first Easter morning was one of hopelessness and despair.

The emotions must have been a little bit like coming off a month-long cruise with all your family, friends and loved ones to go back to a monotonous, mundane Monday morning routine. The meaning and purpose that people felt when they were with Jesus had evaporated into despair. What do we do now? Where do we turn? The women could at least do one last act of devotion and love to Jesus – they could prepare his body for burial, something they had not been able to do on Good Friday.

All that mundaneness, that despairing, that hopelessness and dread was transformed by the announcement, “He is not here! He is risen!”

The joy and specialness they felt when with Jesus didn’t have to end. The things Jesus taught them were not all for naught. There was a purpose and future for them after all. They didn’t have to go back to just humdrum, mundane, emptiness. Grief was turned to exhilaration.

There was a new sense of purpose, a new sense of meaning that the disciples – whether they were the 12 “D”isciples or the women like Mary Magdalene experienced when they were with Jesus. I don’t like to just talk about “feelings” all the time because our faith is about so much more than just how something or someone may make us feel. I don’t always feel the most spiritual but that doesn’t mean that I’m not in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. There is something about knowing that my life has purpose. My life has direction. I have a relationship that brings joy.

It was great to have Jesus back with them but he was only with them for so long before he ascended back to the father. He told Mary at one point, “Don’t hold on to me because I’ve yet to ascend to the Father.” It was great to have him back, but yet it was different.

They listened to him teach until it was time for him to ascend. He ascended with the promise that he would one day come back. Can you imagine what must have happened in Heaven at that moment when Jesus returned having finished the plan of redemption? Was it a raucous time of celebration like when an Albert Pujols grand slam wins the World Series? Was it just an awed silence, a holy hush that was so thick that you can just cut it with a knife? You can’t speak because you’re just so in awe.

In the book of Revelation, John, who along with Peter had run to the tomb on that first Easter morning is given visions of heaven. It is written in a genre called apocalyptic which uses a lot of symbolic language and images, almost in code, so that an oppressed, persecuted people could understand and receive encouragement.

John, according to church tradition was the only of Jesus’ original 12 disciples to die a natural death. The transformation in the lives of the apostles is one of the surest evidences there is for the resurrection of Christ. He has a vision of the risen Christ in chapter 1 and then he records the messages for the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3. Then in chapters 4 and 5, he sees a

vision into the very throne room of Heaven. What is happening there is a picture of worship.

There's a picture of God on the throne. He was awesome in his appearance. The only way John could describe it that would make any sense to us would be to say that he had the appearance of precious jewels. There were 24 elders around the throne. We don't know who the 24 were. If you take 12 apostles and 12 tribes of Israel, it probably would constitute the perfect assembly of those old and new testament believers.

The spirits of God were there in 7, the number of perfection. There was worship. There was the recognition of God's holiness. There was the "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was, and is, and is to come."

In chapter 4, the sight of God on the throne is awesome with the precious gemstones, the angelic beings, the elders surrounding the throne singing their praise. In Chapter 5, the attention is focused on a scroll in the hand of him who sat on the throne.

In the time of writing the book of Revelation, books were very rare. The vellum or the parchment that would be needed for writing was prohibitively expensive for most people. Those who could afford it would sew it together into scrolls. If the stuff needed for writing and making scrolls was costly, you would try to maximize the scroll and this scroll has writing on both sides of it. This writing signifies God's plan and God's authority and God's control over everything that is about to happen.

There are both Roman and Jewish customs that are very interesting regarding the sealing of scrolls and the unsealing of scrolls. First the Roman practice: The Roman custom of making a will included a ceremony involving a testator and seven witnesses. For each of the seven witnesses there was a seal. In addition, a very reliable friend was selected who would, for a coin, purchase the property for the family. In this way the property would become the property of the reliable friend, however, upon the death of the testator, the very reliable friend would return the property to the rightful heirs. For such a document, a long scroll of parchment was used. The writer of the document would begin writing and after a period, he would stop, roll up the parchment enough to cover his words, and then seal the scroll with wax. He would then resume writing, stop, seal another portion, and so on until the entire scroll was sealed with seven seals. In this way, the scroll would read a section at a time after each seal was broken.

Then there was a Hebrew custom:

if a Jewish family were to lose its property or possessions by some kind of misfortune or distress, their property could not be permanently taken from them (the Old Testament law of jubilee and the kinsman redeemer protected them against this). However, their losses were listed in a scroll and sealed seven times. Then the conditions necessary to purchase back the land and their possessions were written on the outside of the scroll. When a qualified redeemer could be found, who could meet the requirements of reclamation (a kinsman like Boaz as in the story of Ruth), the one who had taken the property was required to return it to the original owner.

The application of these practices is that when we fell, way back in the Garden, what was

rightfully ours was taken from us by our Enemy the devil. God gave dominion to men and women over His creation.

The question that rings through Heaven at the emergence of the scroll is, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” Everything that will go forward from this point on is dependent upon someone being worthy to open the seals – upon there being someone who had the legal right to break the seals and open the scroll. One who could be a kinsman-redeemer who would be able to buy back the property and give it to its rightful owners.

The sad answer came back, “No one is worthy. No one in heaven or on earth could open the scroll or even look inside of it. What’s the reaction going to be when you find that there is no one who is worthy to unveil God’s plan for history moving forward? It is weeping and mourning. So John says, “I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy.

Why would there be such weeping? Because if no one can open the scroll, the message of the scroll will go unheeded and unopened. There is a plan and a scope to the unfolding of God’s plans and God’s intentions that depends on someone being worthy to open the scroll. The question I have is, “What will happen if no one is found worthy?”

There would be no one to whom we could entrust the future of the world. The scroll contains the unfolding of God’s judgment against sin and evil. It depends on someone being worthy to open the scroll. The scroll tells about the completion of God’s plan of salvation. It depends on someone being worthy to open the scroll.

Then the plan began to come into focus as one of the elders said 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.

Only 12-years-old, and in a moment one Ethiopian girl's world turned into a nightmare. Seven violent men abducted the pre-teen, intending to force her into marriage. The men held the girl for seven days, beating her repeatedly.

Such incidents are common in Ethiopia, as several men band together to abduct young girls for the purpose of securing a bride. The girls are typically beaten into submission and raped. In this particular instance, there was not a human being within earshot to hear the cries of this girl. But her cries were heard.

The unlikely heroes were three majestic Ethiopian lions. Famous for their large black manes, these lions are the national symbol of the country. In response to the girl's cries for help, three large lions leapt from the brush and chased her captors away. Perhaps the child thought she had traded one danger for another, but remarkably, her heroes formed a protective perimeter around her. A half-day later, when the police arrived, the guardian lions simply stood up and walked away. Sgt. Wondimu Wedajo said, “They stood guard until we found her, and then they just left her like a gift and went back into the forest.”

Among the explanations for the lions' unusual behavior, one wildlife expert suggested the girl's whimpering could have sounded like a lion cub. For whatever reason, the predator served as protector. The carnivore became a sentinel. “Everyone thinks this is some kind of miracle,”

Wondimu commented.

This 12-year-old girl was helpless, powerless to change her horrific circumstances. Her deliverance had to come from a power greater than, and outside of, herself. In the same way, we are powerless to save ourselves from sin and death. Our only hope is in Christ, the Lion of Judah.

In the same way, the Lion has triumphed. He is worthy to open the scrolls. What is interesting though is the description of this lion that has triumphed. You expect to see someone like Aslan from the Chronicles of Narnia, standing up and roaring strong, but instead we see a lamb looking as if it had been slain. John Piper said something interesting about qualities in people that we find admirable. He points out someone who is too much one way, we may have pity on them if we see their attributes as being weak or we may respect them, and cower before them if we view their attributes as unrestrained, uninhibited strength, but we would not admire them. We admire strong men but if they're too brutish and too tough without any tenderness thrown into the mix, we don't find that admirable.

To oversimplify greatly and run the risk of perpetuating sexual stereotypes, we would say that characteristics we view as masculine are usually tough and feminine as usually tender. What we find most admirable is the right combination of toughness and tenderness. Some of you know Judy Wright who runs GRACE, the charitable organization here in Rolla that helps the church minister to the poor and needy. People know that she's tough and plain-spoken and doesn't have any problem saying no to people who are trying to pull the wool over her eyes. As one who has served on the Grace Board for the last couple of years, I've come to see Judy's tender side as one who really does care and has shed a lot of tears over some of the situations that she has come across. I remember my scoutmaster when I was in the Boy Scouts. He was a tough and tender Marine Corps Major who could chew us up one side and back down the other, but at the same time, he continued working with the boy scouts 10-15 years after his own son left the troop because he loved kids and really did care about us. We were afraid of him, but we knew he cared about us. Tough and tender.

When Jesus says blessed are the meek, he's saying blessed are those whose strength is under control.

Jesus is the Lion of Judah, he is the one with all power in his hands but when John sees the vision of his dear friend who was his Lord in heaven, he saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain. A lion in all of its fierceness and ferociousness displaying the signs and marks of his own weakness. Think about it. The thing that qualifies this lamb to open the scrolls of history is his weakness. He displayed his weakness and he was not afraid to show it because that is his badge of honor.

He also had all of the divine attributes as well – the seven horns showing his perfect strength and the seven eyes showing his perfect, all-seeing vision. And when he takes the scroll and begins to open it, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before him. They had a harp and they were holding golden bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints.

The bowls contain the prayers of the saints throughout all the ages. All of the prayers for

the day of God's justice to come. For His kingdom to come in all of its fullness and these beings and they sang a new song: : "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Then as the living beings and the elders sang their praise, the angels joined in the chorus as well. "Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Everyone in heaven joined in the chorus, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!" The four creatures said, "Amen" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

John sees the one who had walked with him and loved him and the one who had died on that tree, now seated on the throne in heaven. He was the lamb of God who was slain but now he is the lion of Judah being worshiped in heaven because he is the one who can open the scroll of history. As one who can open the scroll, he is also one who can give purpose and meaning to your life as well. All wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise belong to him. He is raised from the dead and is worthy of every high honor and acclamation that we can give him. He can give you wisdom and power and direction as well.

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