

Sermon – 18/03/2007 pm

Lion or Lamb

Study Text: Revelation 5:1-7

Do you have any rich relatives? Are you expecting them to leave you something in their will? Are you waiting for the day when that will, will be opened? What a wonderful future you can look forward to if this relative leaves you lots of money or property in their will. The lawyer will take out that will and ask the executor to declare its contents. You and the rest of the family will be so excited.

‘Mr Charles, could you please come and open this will’. Where is Mr Charles? He is not to be found. He is listed as a missing person. The lawyer insists that Mr Charles is the only person legally allowed to open the will. You and your relatives will be very disappointed.

Scroll

John wept much *because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll* (5:4). The voice of a mighty angel echoed throughout the entire universe – *who is worthy to open the scroll?* No one was found. John wept. Why? What was so important about this scroll?

The scroll was in the right hand of him who sat on the throne in heaven. The scroll was in the hand of the eternal and almighty God, the creator of the universe. The scroll was written on both sides; it was filled with the words of God. What was this writing about? John earnestly wanted to know. They were the words of God regarding the future of this world, of all mankind and of the entire universe.

What if no one was found worthy to open the scroll? God’s eternal plan and purposes would not be revealed or executed. The one who opens the scroll is the one at the centre of this very plan revealed in the scroll. If no one was found worthy the scroll remained sealed and the future of universe would remain hidden.

The people in the seven churches would continue to suffer for their faith in Jesus. There would be no message of comfort and hope for them. There would be no prospect of justice for those who died because they refused to worship idols or the Emperor of Rome. The people of Athens would continue worshipping the unknown god. In the darkness people will continue to consult their horoscopes and look to politicians to bring them peace and prosperity.

The people to whom John was sending this letter, like John, were eager to know the future, not just for interest but because they faced death. Already Antipas had been martyred and others could expect the same if they refused to worship the Roman emperor and his idols. ‘Worship only God’ they were told.

Some were compromising and worshipping the idols, but Jesus said ‘be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life’ (2:10). What was going on? What was happening? The scroll would reveal all – if someone qualified was found to open it. Who would be worthy?

Lion

An elder, one of the 24 around the throne in heaven told John not to weep. *'See' he said 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has prevailed/triumphed/conquered to open the scroll and its seven seals'* (5:5). We have to go back to Genesis 49 to find a reference to Judah and a lion.

When Jacob was blessing his 12 sons he said to Judah *you are a lion's cub, and the sceptre will not depart from Judah*. Judah would rule over his brothers and his enemies. This reference is clearly Messianic. Moreover a lion is a symbol of power, royal power. Britain among other nations had the lion as its national symbol.

The root of David is another Messianic reference as Paul makes clear in Romans 1 – *Jesus Christ our Lord was born of the seed of David according to the flesh*. David was Israel's greatest king but one even greater would come according to the covenant the Lord made with David. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a branch that would come from the root of Jesse (David's father – Isaiah 11). This one would judge righteously, slaying the wicked and gathering the people of God unto himself.

'See the mighty ruler; see the king who defeated all his enemies', the elder told John. See the Lion, see the Son of David. The Jews longed for another David to restore their kingdom. Some Christian's long for mighty armies to deliver them from their enemies. *'Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war'* they sing with gusto! They trust in their own strength, or in human rulers, rather than the Lord (Psalm 118:8-9). Did John see a mighty warrior when he looked up?

Before we answer this question look carefully at what Messiah has done. He has prevailed! Note that there is not object for this verb. Prevailed over what or who? We might take the answer to be the absolute. He had prevailed or triumphed over everything, over whatever exists in heaven, earth or under the earth.

Secondly notice the tense of the verb. It is aorist indicating completed action. The great battle of God is not in the future but in the past; it has been fought and won. Right here in Revelation 5 we find that the battle against the powers of darkness that the church was experiencing had actually been won. The focus is not upon Armageddon but upon the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Lamb

When John looked, what he see? Not a lion but a lamb! In the middle of the heavenly throne scene stood a lamb, as though it had been slain. Here is the great mystery, the great paradox of divine salvation and judgment. Not with the mighty roar of a lion, the clang of steel upon steel, or the boom of a great bomb will evil be defeated; it has happened by the sacrifice of a lamb. John saw a slain lamb upon the heavenly throne. *Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord* (Zechariah 4:6).

The lamb is the same figure of the preceding verse – the Messiah or Christ. This lamb is none other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth; Jesus, who died on the Cross some 2000 years ago outside Jerusalem. He died bearing our sin. *He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only ours but the sins of the whole world* (I John 2:2).

Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven where John now sees him. He defeated death. Death was the immediate prospect for many in the church at that time. The slain Lamb on the throne opened their eyes to the reality about death. Jesus had won the victory over death. Hence he could call upon them to be faithful unto death (2:10). The question for them was not life or death but whom they worshipped.

Which question is more important to you? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 – *not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of my Father in heaven*. And then in Matthew 10:33 – *whoever denies me before men him I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*. Are you ready to face the choice that Christians in Smyrna and Pergamum faced?

By his death and resurrection Jesus cast out the ruler of this world (John 12:31). He triumphed over sin, death and the devil. Jesus became a man *that through his death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil* (Hebrews 2:14). Is this what you believe? Jesus reigns because of the Cross and resurrection. Even though Satan is allowed to deceive many in this fallen world, even though he is allowed to harass and persecute the people of God, he is actually the defeated foe.

The lamb had seven horns symbolising complete power. He had seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the world (5:6). Nothing in all the world will escape the perfect gaze of this all seeing Lamb. He sees into the darkest places, he sees in the depths of your heart. All is seen by the Lamb who reigns in heaven. He is on the throne ready to return at any moment to judge the secrets of men according to this glorious gospel (Romans 2:16, Matthew 25:31). Are you ready for his return?

He came and took the scroll out of the hand of him who sat on the throne. True reality is about to be revealed in a world oppressed by lies. Judgment is about to begin in a world filled with injustice.

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