

## Behold the God of Diverse Excellencies

*Behold the Lion Who is a Lamb* (Revelation 5:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on November 1, 2020

### Introduction

- ❖ With the election days away, I know what's on your mind. Now I'm sure many of you have already voted. While others are preparing to vote for one of the two major party candidates or for neither of them. As I talk with some of you about this election, I get the sense that, while many are voting for a major party candidate, they bemoan the fact that these are the two options. **It feels like a vote for either candidate calls for some degree of compromise.**
  - Maybe you align more with one man's policies, but you feel that his character is deficient. Or maybe you think one man is more qualified but he advances policies that you consider dangerous or deadly. **You wish for someone who embodied everything you're looking for. You wish you didn't have to make any compromises when it comes to determining who will lead you, who will govern you.**
  
- ❖ Well, if your hope for peace and prosperity is resting on a human politician, then I'm sorry but you have no choice. There are no perfect candidates who embody everything you're looking for – everything you need. **But this morning, I want to remind you, especially those of you who are Christians, that your hope for peace and prosperity ultimately rests – not on the back of a politician – but on the broad shoulders of your Risen Lord.**
  - And unlike any political candidate – any human being really – Jesus actually does embody all that all of us are looking for. **Every quality, every virtue, every trait you desire in someone who is going to lead and govern you – is found in him.** You want someone who is strong and unwavering? But you also want someone who is tender and sympathetic? You desire a leader who upholds justice and order? But also one who shows mercy and compassion? You want someone invested with power and authority to lead *and* someone who leads through service and sacrifice?
    - All of that is found in Jesus. And, no, he's not a jumble of contradictions. **All these diverse and varied attributes coexist in perfect harmony within the one person of Jesus Christ.**
  
- ❖ **Jonathan Edwards would say that, within the person of Christ, you'll find an array of diverse excellencies.** This summer I led a book club where we read select sermons of Edwards, and one that stood out to me in particular was a sermon called *The Excellency of Christ*. It was on our text, on Revelation 5:5-6 in particular. And in it, he exalts the Lord Jesus as this lion who is also a lamb, and he goes on to show in Scripture how there exists in Jesus, what he calls, "*an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.*"
  - **He means that in the uniqueness of Christ we will find a perfect union (conjunction) of seemingly opposite (diverse) qualities and virtues (excellencies).** And his main application is that everything you're looking for in a Sovereign or a Servant, a King or a Friend, a Lord or a Savior – is found in Jesus. So come to Jesus and receive him – all of him, in all his diverse excellencies – to satisfy all your needs.
    - That's what Edwards' sermon is all about, and it inspired me to craft a sermon series based on that general theme. **So for the next few weeks, we'll study passages centered on the person of Christ, highlighting his diverse excellencies.** How he is able to capture and embody all that we admire.

- ❖ This morning, I want to focus on that Revelation 5 passage. Specifically on vv1-10. Now we've studied bits and pieces of Revelation before, and every time, I've reminded you that Revelation is a book of **apocalyptic literature**. It falls under the category of a recognizable ancient genre with distinct literary features.
  - **And a key distinctive of apocalyptic literature is the heavy usage of imagery and symbolism.** Notably, the use of animals to represent certain persons. And these creatures are often described in fanciful ways. In chapter 4, the Apostle John (who received and recorded this Revelation) sees four living creatures in heaven, each with a distinctive look. One like a lion. Another like an ox. A third like a man. And the fourth like an eagle. And all four had six wings and were full of eyes. And in later chapters, he sees a dragon and a beast, both terrifying and dreadful.
    - **Because we recognize the genre, we know not to interpret these images literally but symbolically.** These creatures symbolize unseen realities – not just set in the future – but which exist in the present, in the here and now.
  
- ❖ And so when we look at chapter 5, we have to be asking ourselves, “What do we see?” What imagery, what symbolism, is being applied here? And then, we have to ask, “What does it mean?” What's the proper interpretation? What's the intended message?
  - So this morning, I'm going to divide this message into two parts based on those two questions. First, **what do we see?** We see (1) a sealed scroll, (2) a conquering Lion, and (3) a slain Lamb. But **what does it mean?** It means (1) the Lord conquers his enemies by means of suffering, (2) the Lord still reigns over us as a lamb, and (3) the Lord embodies all we desire in a Savior.

### What Do We See?

- ❖ Let's consider what we're meant to see in this text. As I said, there are three images that stand out. **First, behold a sealed scroll.** Look at v1, “*Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*”
  - Now back in chapter 4, John receives this heavenly vision. And behold, he saw a throne in heaven, with one seated on the throne. **And this royal figure is none other than the Lord God Almighty.** And John sees God surrounded by those four living creatures, who all day and all night, never cease to proclaim, “*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.*” (4:8)
    - This is not the first reference to these living creatures. They first appear in the book of Ezekiel, where they're identified as cherubim. Angels of the highest order, tasked with guarding the holy things of God. Now also around the throne are twenty-four elders, representing the whole people of God – the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lord.
  
- ❖ Notice in v1 that there's something in God's right hand. It's a scroll with words written on the front and back. It's not legible because it's rolled up and sealed with seven seals. This scroll (as subsequent chapters will reveal) symbolizes the eternal plans of God. **On it is written all that God has decreed to take place with respect to all creation throughout all history.**

- ❖ But notice how the scroll is sealed shut with seven seals. Seven is understood biblically to be the number of completeness. **So this scroll is completely shut.** Now that would suggest that God's plans are unrevealed. Unknowable. But it signifies more than that. A sealed scroll means God's plans are unexecuted. Unrealized.
  - So if the scroll stays sealed, that would mean all of God's purposes, all of his decrees will not be carried out. **This is not just a concern to reveal God's plans but to see them realized in the world.**
  
- ❖ And so in v2, John hears, "*a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"*" He's essentially asking, "Who is worthy enough to carry out the royal decrees of God? To execute his eternal plans?
  - **But as the call goes out, it returns with a deafening silence.** No one is worthy. *"<sup>3</sup>No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, <sup>4</sup>and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it."*
    - No one was found worthy. Not even an angel, a cherubim, one of the four living creatures. Not a king or queen on earth. Not a president or prime minister. No amount of power or money or intellect could make a person worthy. And let's face it, you're not worthy to open the scroll and neither am I.
  
- ❖ John realizes this, and he begins to weep. **Wouldn't you weep? Wouldn't you grieve? To be confronted with the thought that God's glorious, redemptive purposes for this world might not come to pass.** That they might go unfulfilled. A sealed scroll means no blessed hope of a full and final redemption of our bodies or of creation itself. It means no assurance of God's preservation of his people through the trials and tribulations of life as the end draws near. It means no final judgment to ensure perfect justice and to establish perfect peace. It means no new heavens and no new earth – where there is supposed to be no more tears, no more death, no more mourning, crying, nor pain anymore. Those promise will go unrealized if that scroll stays shut.
  - **That sealed scroll symbolizes our worst nightmares. Our greatest fears are wrapped up in there being a rolled up, sealed up scroll.** And the fact that no one is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll is lamentable, depressing news.
  
- ❖ But look, there's more. Listen to v5, "And one of the elders said to me, "*Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.*" This is the second image we see in the text: **Behold a conquering Lion.**
  - One of the twenty-four elders tells John to stop crying and to look. **To behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.** The tribe of Judah was long associated with the lion. Tradition tells us that image of a lion was emblazoned on their battle standard. It goes back to Genesis 49, where Jacob is blessing his sons, and he calls Judah a lion's cub. Crouched like a lion, ready to pounce on his enemies. He prophesies that the scepter (kingship) shall not depart from Judah (49:9-10).

- ❖ Now the scepter first came to Judah through King David who was of the same tribe. And God reinforced this prophecy by promising to David an eternal throne (2 Sam 7:16). **He said he would preserve a king within the line of David.** And even during the Babylonian exile, when there was no king, no throne, no Jerusalem! – yet still in **Isaiah 11:1**, God promises that, *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse (David’s father), and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”* And that’s why this Lion of the tribe of Judah is also described as the Root of David.
  
- ❖ Now just think about this imagery of a lion. **No doubt it’s meant to convey royalty, dignity, authority, and power.** Lions are no pushovers. They are apex predators. On top of the food chain. They are the king of the beasts. They are conquerors.
  - **Well, this Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered all his enemies. Be it sin or Satan or death.** He’s defeated them all. Notice the *“so that”* in v5. It’s because he has conquered – that’s why he is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals. He is worthy to reign as the Sovereign King in accordance with God’s eternal plans.
    - So coming out of v4, where John is so depressed and full of tears, now he’s hopeful and confident. He rises up. Dries his eyes. And looks to where the elder is pointing.
  
- ❖ And what does he see? Obviously, he’s expecting a lion. **He’s expecting to see a roaring lion tear onto the scene. But what does he see? A bloody, bleeding lamb.** *“<sup>6</sup>And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.”* This is the third image that stands out: **Behold a slain Lamb.**
  
- ❖ Let’s take a moment to take this all in. What happens right here in v6 changes everything. It confronts all stereotypes and challenges every expectation. **It just goes to show that whatever you think about God – whatever assumptions you’ve made – get ready to drop them the moment you behold the real thing.** The Lord will not fit cleanly within your box.
  - When you think God is a lion, he shows up as a lamb. And not just a lamb – but a slain, slaughtered lamb. That immediately brings to mind the Passover lamb of Exodus and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who looked, *“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.”* (53:7)
  
- ❖ What a contrast! Just think about it. **A lion’s job is to rule and conquer. A lamb’s job is to be slain and eaten.** They couldn’t be further apart. And yet here they are in one person. These two images in Revelation 5 convey that admirable conjunction that Edwards spoke of – that perfect union – of two diverse excellencies. **The royalty, dignity, and authority captured in the image of a conquering lion is laid in perfect juxtaposition with the gentleness, submissiveness, and humility of a slain lamb.**

- ❖ Keep reading in v6 and listen to the way this Lamb is described. He has, "*seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*" The horns communicate power, and seven horns communicate complete power. The seven eyes communicate his omniscience – his complete wisdom and foreknowledge.
  - So this is a lamb. But not your ordinary lamb. **Sheep are often described as weak, defenseless, and foolish.** They'll follow each other off a cliff. If they see green grass on the other side of a creek, they'll jump in. But they can't swim and end up drowning. They have no means of defense against predators but to bleat and cry.
    - **But *this* lamb is a gentle lamb but one who possesses complete power and complete wisdom.** He is lamb who is a lion. A lion who is a lamb.
  
- ❖ If you want an illustration of this, **consider Aslan** in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In most scenes, Aslan is depicted as a mighty, ferocious lion who makes your palms sweaty and knees shake. But then there's a scene where he's playing with Lucy and Susan, tossing them up and catching them, laughing and rolling over together on a hilltop. What a contrast!
  - And there's another scene where Aslan has gathered his army of Narnians at the Stone Table, and the children look up at him in speechless awe. Lewis writes, "*People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now.*"
  
- ❖ Aslan is both good and terrible. Majestic and kind. Great and gentle. And the same could be said of our Lord Jesus. **Within himself you'll find all the noble traits of a mighty lion and all the admirable qualities of a gentle lamb.** An array of diverse excellencies.

### What Does It Mean?

- ❖ So we've seen and considered three key images in this text. Now let's ask: *What does it mean?* What are we to glean from these symbolic images? There are three implications we can draw. **First, the image of a Lion who is a Lamb suggests that the Lord conquers his enemies by means of suffering.** In other words, he doesn't fight and win battles like you would expect. He doesn't use the instruments of war. **He doesn't conquer his enemies with an overwhelming display of force – but rather with a disarming display of sacrifice.**
  
- ❖ Look at v9 and notice how this Lion of the tribe of Judah is counted worthy as a conqueror – worthy to open the scroll and execute the plans of God – by virtue of being slain. It's because he sacrificed himself. "*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for (because) you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."*"
  - **This Lion conquers not by brute force but by a bloody cross.** He conquered sin by becoming sin for us. He conquered Satan by not fighting back. He conquered death by his own death. Bruce Metzger, a NT scholar, noted the counterintuitive nature of Christ. He says, "*Instead of a ferocious lion that hurts others, the Messiah is a sacrificial Lamb that takes into himself the hurts of others.*"

- ❖ That is the overarching message written throughout that scroll. That expresses the heart of God's eternal, redemptive plans. **Christ is a Lion but not a ferocious lion that hurts others. He is a Lion who is a sacrificial Lamb that takes into himself the hurts of others.**
  - He did that by the blood of the cross, which paid a ransom. Not to the devil, as if we were in his debt. No, the ransom was paid to God. For we owed God our very lives and our obedience, and yet in our sin and rebellion, we rejected him and fell short.
    - **But Christ, in going to the cross, took our debt upon himself.** He took into himself our hurts – that is, both our sin (in those times we hurt others) and our shame (in those times we were hurt by others). He bore all of that on the cross and received all the indignity that we deserved.
  
- ❖ **In that Edwards sermon, he explained that, on the cross, we behold Christ in the greatest degree of his humiliation, and yet, on the cross, we see the greatest demonstration of his glory.**
  - Listen to how he explains it, “[Christ] *never was so dealt with, as unworthy, as in his last sufferings, and yet it is chiefly on account of them that is he accounted worthy. . . . And in nothing has Christ appeared so much as a lion, in glorious strength destroying his enemies, as when he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter. In his greatest weakness he was most strong; and when he suffered most from his enemies, he brought the greatest confusion on his enemies. Thus this admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies was manifest in Christ, in his offering up himself to God in his last sufferings.*”
  
- ❖ **Friends, if any of you are still bearing your sins and shame on your shoulders, this is the day to repent.** To turn away from sin and shame and to trust in Christ – the sacrificial Lamb who took all that hurt into himself and died in your place. Behold the Lamb who was slain.
  - But notice in v6 – notice how it says that John saw a “*Lamb standing.*” **Dead lambs don’t stand.** They lay flat on the ground dead. But this slain Lamb is standing. That means he’s not dead. He is risen! **Jesus is victorious – but his victory came by means of suffering and sacrifice.**
  
- ❖ Do you have a category for this kind of victory? **Think about this election. What kind of victory are you hoping for?** A victory where one candidate proves to be more liked, to have more followers? A victory that comes by means of winning and beating your opponent?
  - Friends, if you put your hope in these electoral contests, you’ll never be satisfied. They’ll never bring you peace. Because they never end. In another four years, we’ll be back at it again. **The one victory that will truly satisfy and sustain your peace into eternity – is the victory that Jesus achieved.** Which came by means of losing and sacrificing himself to his enemies. That he might reconcile his enemies to God and make them his friends.

- ❖ So that's one implication of these images. But what else does it mean? **Second, this imagery suggests that the Lord still reigns over us as a Lamb.** In other words, Jesus' humility and gentleness was not reserved to his earthly ministry. It's not as if he put aside his lamb-like qualities when he rose from the dead and ascended on high to reign over us purely as a lion.
  - **No, he forever remains as a Lion who is a Lamb.** Remember, this is a vision of heavenly realities. In heaven, right now, there is a slain Lamb who rules over us.
  
- ❖ **A Lamb is not just a fitting image to describe his earthly ministry. It's an essential quality, a divine excellency.** In the very last chapter in Revelation, in the new Jerusalem, there will be "*the throne of God and of the Lamb.*" (Rev 22:1, 3) That tells us that Jesus, the Lion of Judah, still reigns over us today as a Lamb.
  - He rules – not by lording his authority over you – but by serving you. He governs – not by coercion – but by persuasion. Leading us by his Spirit. Wooing us by his love.
  
- ❖ **I know many people chafe at the lordship of Christ.** They don't like the idea of Jesus having the authority to tell them what to do or how to live their lives. Now much of that resistance can be attributed to our stubbornness. **But could it be that we resist Jesus' lordship because we have a mistaken view of his authority?**
  - We assume his authority is exercised like a ferocious lion overpowering his prey. Crushing us and forcing us into submission. Because that's our experience when dealing with earthly authorities. So we project that view of authority onto the Lord.
  
- ❖ But the authority of Christ is quite different. It's still royal and absolute like a Lion. But it's kindly and benevolent like a Lamb. When King Jesus tells you how to live your life – he's not trying to ruin your fun or to stop you from being happy.
  - **He's trying to stop you from ruining your life – and your eternity – by chasing after the fleeting pleasures of sin.** Which, in the end, bring nothing but dissatisfaction and destruction, ruin and regret. Jesus wants better for you. His authority is a kindly and good authority aimed at doing you good.
  
- ❖ **And, friends, that should shape the way we exercise our authority on this earth.** Notice in v10 how the various peoples of the earth will be ransomed by the blood and made into, "*a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.*" So just as one day we will reign with Christ on a new Earth, even now the way a Christian exercises authority should be shaped by the Lamb of God who reigns on high.
  - **His cross is not just the foundation of our salvation. It's the pattern for the saved life.** It's the example for us to imitate. Whatever authority you've been entrusted with, you use it – not to suppress or to strong arm others to do *you* good – but to serve and to sacrifice for the good of others.
    - **And what that means in a self-governed nation like ours is that – in an election – you are using your authority.** So use it well. Use it like a Lamb.

- ❖ There's one more implication to draw. I'll close with this, which is the point I made in the very beginning. **Third, the image of a Lion who is a Lamb suggests that the Lord embodies all that we desire in a Savior.** In other words, every quality, every virtue, every trait you desire in someone who is going to lead and govern you – someone who will serve as your Lord and King – everything you desire is found in Jesus.
  - **Unlike every election we'll ever face, when it comes to Jesus, there's no need to compromise.** There's no need to hold your nose when choosing him. He's everything you desire. Just think about a Savior – someone you're going to give your life to.
  
- ❖ **Do you desire that Savior to be great and noble?** An imposing figure. Someone rightly to be feared and revered. Do you expect that Savior to be someone worthy enough for you to bow in submission?
  - Is that not Christ? Is he not high and honorable enough for you?
  
- ❖ **Do you desire an honorable Savior who is still willing to come down to your level?** Someone who is familiar with suffering. Someone who can sympathize with you in your weakness. Do you want a Savior who is like you in every respect?
  - Is that not Christ? Is he not humble and sympathetic enough for you?
  
- ❖ **Do you desire a Savior who has gone before you and paved the way?** Who is near to God and able to speak to him on your behalf? But do you also desire a Savior who is not so far ahead and in heaven – but is near to you and close by your side whenever you need him?
  - Is that not Christ? Is he not both at the Father's side and at your own? And has he not made himself available to you – if you would only turn to him, trust in him, and put your life in his hands?
  
- ❖ **Friends, I know that anxious days lie before us.** I know you might lose sleep this week. You'll probably be distracted by what's going on in the news. It's going to be a restless week.
  - But keep this in mind: **The importance of who sits in that chair in the Oval Office pales in comparison to who sits on that Throne in heaven.** We don't know right now who will be sitting in that chair come Inauguration Day next January. But we already know who sits on the throne of God and of the Lamb. So don't be anxious. Rest in that truth and you'll get some rest this week.