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“Lion and Lamb”

Sermon Series: “Complements,” No. 5

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Revelation 5:1-10

1 Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it.

4 Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. 5 But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

6 Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth. 7 He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. 8 And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. 9 And they sang a new song with these words:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.”

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You know...of all of these **complements**... not so much **these**, [*Peanut Butter and Jelly on pulpit*] ...

but the ideas and concepts that the **Bible surprisingly puts together**...we’ve looked at

faith and works,
shrewdness and innocence,
justice and mercy,
truth and love

...of all of them, **this** one for **today** may be the most...I don’t know...**stark**...maybe **shocking**...of them all.

It’s there in our text this morning...in Revelation 5...in the space of just two verses, Jesus is described as both a **lion and a lamb**.

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Now, we all know that lions and lambs are pretty different from each other.

Lions are big, strong, brave and loud. They're hunters...and they're carnivores; they track and chase and kill for meat.

Lambs, on the other hand, are small, weak, fearful, and comparatively quiet...and they're herbivores – they graze on grass and grain.

On the surface, they're so very different; so how on earth could a lion and a lamb go together? How could they be in the *same pen* with each other, let alone the same *person*?

That's the question this Revelation passage raises.

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About this, Bob Mulholland writes, "It is important to remember that there is no human knowledge and wisdom that can probe the depths of God's purposes."¹ In other words, it should not surprise us that God surprises us with how He works things out, but too often it does.

And here's why: in our information age, it's easy to think that the human mind is capable of knowing all things. We believe that, given enough time, research and experimentation...

given the computer's ability to synthesize data...

given AI's ability to bring seemingly endless resources together...

given all that, it's easy for us to think that *we* can *know* all and *do* all.

But the fact is...we *can't*. We just *can't*."

Mulholland writes, "The *truth* is, John's weeping there in verse 4 is a *far better picture* of the *true* human predicament."

And John wept, you see, because he was brought face to face with humanity's *inability*.

There before John lay the very scroll of God. The key to the future...all of God's purposes and plans...wisdom and knowledge beyond all the very best human and artificial intelligence combined.

All of that, and *more*, than anyone would ever want to know...God held it out for us, but no one could open it!

It was an absolutely tragic situation! God was offering His world His will, His purpose, His secrets, but no one could be found worthy to read it.

That's why John wept...because that is humanity's true condition. We think we know, but we really don't. Deep down, we know that.

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And really, we know this, don't we? Nearly all of us, nearly every day, encounter the unknown about God and His ways. Things happen and we ask, "Why this? Why that? Why now?"

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<sup>1</sup> Mulholland, Robert. Revelation. Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Tyndale House, Carol Stream, IL. 2011.

We simply don't know.

Those times ought to remind us of how powerless we really are to discern the fullness of God's purposes.

The fact is, we usually end up presuming that God's purposes are defined by our **own** plans and desires. We try to squeeze Him into a box that looks a lot like us.

But time and again, God surprises us, doesn't He? He reminds us that He has different ideas than we do.

It's like the old Arabic proverb, "The camel **driver** has his plans, and the camel has **his**."

And the **camel's** plans often take the camel-driver by surprise.

Of course, you can't take that analogy too far, because that makes God a camel and we don't want to do that, but you get what I mean. Just when we think we have God figured out and "under control," He does something totally unexpected.

God's ways are usually surprising to us.

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We see that very sort of surprise right here in this vision of John's.

The animals themselves catch our attention, and they tell the story of the missed Messiah. The animals themselves reveal the absolute otherness of the way God thinks, which caught even Israel by surprise.

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You see, the human way has always been to appeal to mighty beasts and birds of prey for our symbols of power.

There is no nation, no people...not even a sports team, who wants to be known by some **weak** animal...like the hamster or the koala or the turtle.

"And, taking the field now...from Sunny Slope, Iowa...the fighting butterflies!"

That doesn't work for us, does it?

Think of the symbols of nations. For Russia, it's the bear. For Britain, it's the lion. France...the tiger. The United States...the eagle.

The schools around us: the colts, the jaguars, the wildcats, the bengals.

That's just how humanity thinks, and though the Jews should have been different, they were not.

The Jews believed, **correctly**, that the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," the Davidic messiah's title that goes clear back to Jacob's final blessing of his sons...they believed, correctly, that He would come as a conquering presence.

**But**...the Jews believed, **incorrectly**, that He'd come as a warrior to defeat their enemies and reestablish Israel as the world's premier kingdom.

For centuries, they looked for the lion in all his fierce and violent glory.

Which is exactly why, as John looked for a Lion even *here*, he was surprised to find, *instead*, a *lamb*!

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How typical is that of even us...even Christ-followers...today? We hear God is working in some place and some way and so we go looking for lions there...and we walk away disillusioned because we don't find what we're looking for.

Yet those who have more heavenly vision...they see God working in a different way...in even the way of a lamb.

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This whole image reminds us of what John the Baptist said...as He pointed to his rather ordinary looking and seeming cousin...Jesus...and declared,

***“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”***

And everyone who heard him say that started looking around...for a lion. But they saw no lion, and so with eyebrows raised, they asked, “Wait a minute...you mean...*Him?* Well, that's just Jesus. That's just Joseph and Mary's oldest boy. You think He's the...hmmm... -- Oh, wait -- maybe you've been out here in the wilderness too long, John. Maybe the locusts and wild honey have gotten to your brain, because...that's just Jesus.”

He did not seem to be the lion...the conqueror...that everyone thought they were getting.

Now, there were *moments* He was lion-like to them.

- The healings that He did... and nobody could explain that.
- The teaching and the rebuking of the “religious professionals;” the people loved that.
- And then, when Jesus came into Jerusalem and went a little crazy there in the temple – upending the tables and all that...that gave a shot of hope to those who were expecting...a lion.

They started saying, “Well, He's actually been pretty subdued up to now, but, man, you should have seen Him *today*! Maybe this *is* our guy...”

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Just like John...here...they were looking for a lion, but were shocked to find, instead, a lamb; and they weren't sure what to do with a lamb.

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But *then*...if accepting a lamb-like Messiah wasn't hard enough, it got even harder, because the *lamb*, John goes on to describe looked as if it had been *slaughtered*.

There in John's vision, the lamb still bore the marks of the pain and torment and shame and humiliation. The lamb John saw still wore the marks of the cross.

Yet **unlike** on earth, where He'd been abused and insulted...where he seemed powerless and could hardly even walk...where people spit on him and made fun of him...here, in John's vision, things are very different aren't they?

Here, John says the lamb has seven horns and seven eyes.

To get what that means, we have to understand that the horn, in Scripture, always stands for **power** and for **honor**. So, to have **seven** horns...seven being the Biblical number of completion or perfection...that means this slain lamb that John saw now possesses full and complete power, and He commands total honor.

Another word for that is omnipotence – the ability to do anything He chooses.

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And the same is true with the seven eyes. This slain lamb is, now...we use the word, omniscient. He sees all, and He understands all. There is no place, no person, no circumstance that is not under His observation, and that He doesn't know everything about.

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John also sees that this lamb stands in the midst of the glory of Heaven...and not shuffled off to one side. This lamb stands at the very center of the throne of God, and He's commanding the full attention of all the beings that were present. They give him their honor and allegiance and even their worship.

So, you see, there's no other way to read this except that this slain lamb that John sees is somehow God Himself;

- He's occupying God's throne,
- He's exhibiting God's unique characteristics, and,
- He's receiving the worship that is due God alone.

That is not a very lamb-like lamb, to our understanding, is it?

It's actually more like a lion in lamb's clothing.

Or, more accurately, this is the perfect combination of the characteristics of both...the strong and powerful king who chose to become the meek and willing sacrifice that was necessary to pay the price of our sin.

This is Jesus.

It's what He needed to be...for our sake...for the sake of God's love for us.

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You see, these animals...the lion and the lamb...they can only...**only** come together as God brings them together.

Only God could make happen what happened in Jesus.

Only God could provide the sacrifice needed to open His secrets to the world.

Only God could think of a plan like that. We should not be surprised that His plan is surprising.

What should surprise us is that He did it at all!

The surprising thing...the shocking thing...is that, as miserable and unworthy of His love as we are, still...He loves us enough to do all this...

to work with such precision and care all through history...

and then to suffer Himself so greatly...

so that anyone who will repent and believe might have a share in His Kingdom.

Only God could bring the lion and the lamb together, and He did that for you and for me.

That's why, in the end, those around the throne there sang...verse 8,

“You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it, for you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You’ve caused them to become a Kingdom of priests...and they will reign on the earth.”

They sang in praise because the solution to the corrupted creation has come!

God's redemption is underway.

And once again, all will be made right in His world.

That is the ***future***.

Now, ***how*** that future, specifically, comes to be, the lamb will now reveal, since He is able to unlock the scrolls of God.

But you know, whatever the details...however, exactly, the plan works out...that doesn't so much matter. What ***matters*** is ***knowing what happens in the end***.

What ***matters*** is knowing that the ***end*** is ***sure***.

That's why, back in verse 5, one of the elders comes to John and says,

“Hey, don’t cry. There is no need for tears...no need for despair, because even now...even before you know exactly how it will all work out, it’s enough to know that it will...all because of Jesus.”

You see, that's really all we need to know to live joyful, victorious lives.

It's hard because we humans, ...we want ***all the details***, ...we think we ***need*** to know ***all the details***. But really, we ***don't***.

All we ***need*** to know is that ***Jesus*** knows...He knows the details...and that's enough.

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Jesus tried to tell His disciples that even while He was on earth.

How many times did He tell people, “Don't cry. Don't mourn. Don't fret. Don't fear. Don't worry?”

Every time He did, what He was really trying to tell them was,

***“I’m the lion and the lamb. I can open the scroll. I have the keys to the future...to your future, and I’ll work it out for you beautifully...if you’ll let me.”***  
***... if you’ll let me.***

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You know, a lot of people spend a lot of time weeping needlessly...worrying about something...being anxious about something...because they don’t know what tomorrow holds.

Years ago, Cambridge professor Henry Swete wrote,

“Human grief that springs from insufficient knowledge is so needless. If we merely had the patience to wait and trust, we would see that God has His own solutions for the situations that bring us to tears.”

It’s really true. And God’s solution is, in a word, Jesus.

He’s the one who unlocked God’s secrets;

He reveals them to us as we need to know them, ...as we can bear them,
and He presides over our futures.

He is the one with the strength of a lion, who gave Himself as a lamb...slain in sacrifice for us.

That’s why He’s worthy of our praise.

That’s why those who see Him for who He is, like John there, never need to weep for fear or worry.

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So...do you know this Lion?

Do you know this Lamb...this all-powerful and all-knowing Jesus...who gave His life for you?

Would you trust Him with your eternity?

Would you trust Him for that specific unknown of your future...that part of your life that...you just don’t know how it’s going to work out? Would you trust Him for that

Let me assure you...it’s not unknown to Him. He’s opened the scrolls, and from the very throne of Heaven, He’s working to bring good to the days...and to the eternity...of all who’ll trust and follow Him.

So let’s give Him our burdens...let’s give Him our futures.

Let’s give all our praise to Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb ... for us ...for us.

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### **Prayer:**

Lord, how we thank you for who you are...for all you have done for us...and for all that you have yet to do in our lives.

We thank you, and we praise you with the Kingdom of God, with all the inhabitants of heaven.  
We praise you for the King that you are. In Jesus' name. Amen

**Closing Song:** "Crown Him With Many Crowns"

**Closing Word and Benediction:**

May God give us the grace and power to trust Jesus as our lamb, to submit to Him as our Lion,  
and to join with all those in heaven in worshiping Him as the King of Kings and the Lord of  
Lords that He is.

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Thank you for coming to worship this morning. The Lord bless and keep you today. Amen

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