

Jesus, the Lamb

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was little, I had a recurring nightmare. I would be terrified to see a mean-looking sheep staring into a window of our house. My family teases me about that to this day; after all, who would ever be afraid of a sheep, or of a lamb? Well, biblically it turns out many people may be afraid of a lamb one day. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see why. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now the second of just a little, two-part series on the dual image that emerges from Revelation 5 of Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and that was the program before this, but then no sooner does John see and hear this lion in Revelation 5, when all of a sudden it turns into a lamb; and a lamb that was slain. That is going to be the focus of this program. We can wonder a little bit about that juxtaposition of putting lion and lamb, two opposite images together...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then we will want to think a little about the history of lamb imagery in scripture; but the lion part we get, right?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, lions are strong and fierce, and Jesus is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings; and so, that makes sense; but this lamb image is pretty important in all of scripture, and in most of the book of Revelation.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and probably even more prevalent when it comes to images for Jesus than the lion one; but it is so significant, I think. John...let's just remember here the setting. John has been given a glimpse into the throne room of heaven. He is being shown the nature of ultimate reality, and he is living in the midst of the storms of persecution that have been poured out on the Church now...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is exiled, yes.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is near the end of the first century. We think that is when Revelation was written, when John's career kind of came to its close, and it is not only that he was exiled, but the Church throughout the ancient Roman

world was experiencing its first real intense persecution. So, what is going on here? Are they going to hold firm, and the book of Revelation is all about holding firm, because in the big picture of things...in the real picture of things, God is on the throne.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; that is why the lion image makes sense, because lions are strong and fearsome; in fact, you know, if you were in a field somewhere and you ran into a lion, you would be scared, quite literally, to death, and would want to run away. If you ran across a lamb, I am guessing you would not be scared. A lion might make you run away—a lamb would make you say: Oh, isn't that cute. Let's see if we can pet him. Because, you know, that is why my family used to make fun of that nightmare I used to have. Who is afraid of a lamb? Nobody.

A couple of years ago on *Groundwork*, we did do a series of images that are used for Jesus in the New Testament; and we did do a program on Jesus as the Lamb, and so we will have a little overlap here, but we are going to take it in some different directions, but let's just review a minute, Dave, sort of the history of the image of lamb in scripture.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, the first time maybe of significance that we would note it the Passover lamb. The Passover lamb was mentioned in the book of Exodus—specifically, Exodus 12—where God gives these instructions for here is what you need to do. The people of Israel are in slavery in Egypt and this is the climax of the ten plagues. God is going to set them free, but it is going to be a horrible time because the angel of death is going to pass through the city; and so, God says to the people: Kill a lamb, put its blood on the doorposts; and then you need to eat it at this Passover meal.

So, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ²“This month is to be for you the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of the month, each is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect. They can be a sheep or a goat. ⁶Take them until the fourteenth day of the month...” slaughter them, put the blood on the doorframes, and eat the meat.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then the angel of death would pass over...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The house; so, they were kind of literally saved by the blood of the lamb; the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the doorposts saved them. So, that is Exodus 12; and then, of course, once Israel is established...and we are not going to read any specific passages because there are lots of them...but if you get into the book of Leviticus, where the whole sacrificial system in Israel...how do you atone for your sins? How do you ask God to forgive your sins? Well, something has to die for that to happen; and lambs were a very, very common sacrifice for the Israelites to get their sins forgiven. So again, the blood of a sacrificed lamb is connected to life. In Egypt it was literally life. In the sacrificial system, it was your spiritual life—the forgiveness of sins.

DAVE BAST

And very significantly, too, in that system of sacrifice and atonement, on the Day of Atonement each year, two goats were taken...two young goats...and a lamb could be a sheep or a goat, as we saw in the Exodus passage; and one of those was sacrificed, and the blood was placed on the altar; and the other the priest put his hands on its head, as if to lay the sins of the people, and it was driven away—it took the sins away into the wilderness...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The scapegoat.

DAVE BAST

And that is going to be important when we come to the New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and indeed, we start getting previews of that in prophecies, particularly, of course, the most famous in Isaiah 53. Isaiah referring to the one who will be the Servant of God, that we believe is the Messiah. ⁷He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers, is silent. So he did not open his mouth.

So there is a prediction now directly...

DAVE BAST

Very clearly, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Putting together the Messiah and lamb.

DAVE BAST

And then, the identification is made explicit in the New Testament by John the Baptist, of all people. In John Chapter 1, the first chapter of the Gospel of John, when John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching, he says: ²⁹ Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. That actually is the only place in scripture where Jesus is explicitly identified as the Lamb of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that particular phrase: Lamb of God; now, as we saw in the previous program, we will see here again, there is a lamb in Revelation, which clearly is Jesus, but Lamb of God, and Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that seems to be something that John the Baptist kind of made up—kind of coined that phrase on the spot; but right, again, we talked in the previous program about picking up all the threads of scripture and braiding them together into a beautiful cord, and that is sort of what John the Baptist does. He reaches back to the Passover lamb...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He reaches back to the sacrificial lambs; he reaches back to Isaiah, of the lamb who was led to the slaughter...this is Jesus.

DAVE BAST

And even the scapegoat, because he takes away the sin of the world...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And our favorite commentator on the Gospel of John, Dale Bruner...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And I noticed...I was checking this book this morning, Scott, that you wrote a blurb for that commentary on John...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I did.

DAVE BAST

Yes, good for you. Dale Bruner points out the importance of the verb tense: He takes away the sin of the world; not he did it in the past, not he is going to do it when he dies on the cross, but he does it now, and it is as if to say: This still happens every time we look to him and embrace him as the Lamb of God, he takes away our sins, too, as well as the sins of the whole world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, in just a moment, we are going to return to the book of Revelation, where we were also in the previous program, about Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but what we want to notice here before we do that is that...well, before we get to that last image-filled book of the Bible, Revelation, there is a long history of this lamb imagery; and it really does kind of come to a climax in Revelation, and we are going to go to that final book of the Bible in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are in the second of a brief, two-part series on two great images for Jesus—the risen Lord Jesus—from the book of Revelation, from Chapter 5, Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but he is also the Lamb who has been slain.

Let's listen to a little bit more of that passage from Revelation 5. John, remember, is given this vision of heaven, which stands for ultimate reality...not necessarily the future, but what is true right now. We read this:

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne (that is to say, God the Father) a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals; ²and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll, or even look inside it. ⁴I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵Then 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."

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶Then 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 into all the earth. ⁷He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne; ⁸and 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. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "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 nation. ¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God; and they will reign on the earth."

DAVE BAST

So there it is. John hears that the Lion is worthy to open the scroll because it has won the victory; but when he turns and looks, he sees this Lamb, and what a Lamb it is! It has seven horns and seven eyes, which might teach us that we should not necessarily try to draw this or paint this. It is kind of a strange looking lamb; but seven, of course, is a symbolic number in Revelation, as throughout the Bible for kind of wholeness or completeness. Horns are an image of power. Eyes are the Spirit who sees and knows all things; so, there is

the trinity here, isn't there; but at the center, the Lamb.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right; and not just a lamb, but the adjective—the descriptor—for this lamb is the key. It is a slain lamb. It is a lamb that looks like it had been killed once. You can still see the scar from the slit clear across its throat, where once upon a time, his very blood gushed out, and so did the lamb's very life. So, this is a lamb that had clearly been dead once; but of course, in a great reversal of the Gospel, this is the only death in history that led to more life and not more death; so, the lamb had been killed—the lamb had been slain, but it is alive again; and that is part of what, I think...we said earlier about that crazy nightmare I had as a child...lamb's do not usually inspire much dread in us. We do not generally think of lambs as being powerful either, right? In fact, we mentioned in the previous segment, and also in that other program we did on the images of Jesus, that when John the Baptist first called Jesus the Lamb of God...and again, it seems to be a phrase he made up...you do wonder what people listening to John that day thought. Maybe it did not sound like a compliment. Today it would be like calling somebody a dumb bunny or a stupid donkey or something, because lambs are...lambs are pretty easy to gang up on. This lamb looked like it had been killed; that is not too difficult to do. I mean, when you come to a lamb holding a knife in your hand, what is the lamb going to do...growl at you? Snarl? Lambs do not do that; and so, we do not associate power with lambs, and yet, this lamb does have power associated with it.

DAVE BAST

Well, you mentioned the great reversal here. The lamb that was slain is now alive, and not only alive, but alive forevermore, and worthy—worthy to open the scroll. So all power, all authority belongs to this lamb; but there is also the great paradox of the whole Gospel, and that is that lambs are the epitome of weakness, as you said, Scott, just now. Lambs are not frightening. What can a lamb do? I actually...as you were talking I was thinking of a scene that I witnessed myself in India. I was visiting a temple—a Hindu temple—and a priest there was sacrificing a lamb, and I had never...all of a sudden I thought, wow, this is like going into the Old Testament Temple and seeing...but not only was it small and weak and helpless, they had tied its legs, you know, so it could not even move, and it just laid there sort of shivering, and the priest very expertly and swiftly took a knife and cut its throat. So, the lamb is the epitome of weakness. It is nothing but a sacrifice; and yet, when the lamb was Jesus, and he surrendered his life on the cross—helpless, seemingly—nailed there, unable to resist his enemies, that was the moment of victory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and, that God validated that victory by raising him from the dead. So, John sees a lamb that had been slain, but is alive again; and that is why, if we go to the next chapter, in Revelation 6, we read this amazing passage, which has a very arresting, striking phrase in it. This is what John writes in Revelation 6:

¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us. Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

DAVE BAST

Yes, wow!

SCOTT HOEZEE

The wrath of the Lamb...now, that is almost what you would call an oxymoron, right?

DAVE BAST

It seems like it, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is like talking about the revenge of the butterfly or the terror of the mouse. You do not associate a lamb with wrath; but here, because of all the power that has come to Jesus on account of his death and resurrection,

he is a fearsome figure; as it turns out, even as a lamb.

DAVE BAST

Yes; here the context is of the return; the one sitting on the throne, the Lord Jesus, has begun to open the seals on the scroll and with each broken seal...this is Revelation 6 now...more and more disaster seems to be coming; and again, it is kind of the story of history...of all these terrible things that happen: war and pestilence and famine; and finally we get to the very end, when Christ returns, and people who are unprepared, people who are indifferent, people who have scoffed maybe or have laughed off God, suddenly they are calling out for the rocks to cover them and the hills to fall on them because they cannot stand the sight of the one who is coming, and it is the wrath of the Lamb. So, yes, lamb, gentle, helpless, sacrificed; but powerful, triumphant, victorious, and not to be trifled with...that is the point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that is because everything we just traced earlier, in the first part of this program, that long history of associating lamb with life, lamb with forgiveness... So, everything God has been up to has climaxed in Jesus; and so, yes, he is a lamb, but he is a powerful and a fierce lamb. So, all of those things come together now in Christ, and they climax in a very powerful figure after all.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, I think one of the commonest attitudes people take is sort of flippancy almost. There is a line from an old cynic who once said: I like to sin; God likes to forgive; everything is admirably arranged. If the Bible wants to say one thing, it wants to reassure us that the Lamb has died; he has laid down his life; he has paid the price; he has made the sacrifice; but this is not to be taken lightly, as though it is an automatic thing for everybody, because the Lamb, too, has wrath; and what arouses his wrath is the injustice—the terrible things that people do to one another, and do to the earth; and one day...what the day of judgment means is he will set all things to rights. So, just because he is a lamb, do not think that you can sort of treat him lightly; and that truth has great implications for our lives, so we will think about that next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, Dave, we are finishing up a short, two-part series on Jesus as the Lion and Jesus as the Lamb, and we have been looking at Jesus as the Lamb in this program; and you know, as people who love digging into scripture, as we do on *Groundwork* here, all of this is interesting—all of these biblical backgrounds—this is all great Bible study stuff, and it does all come together and climaxes in Revelation; so just sort of from a Bible study/Bible knowledge standpoint, that is all interesting, but practically speaking, we want to think a little bit about what does this image of this powerful, conquering lamb...what has that to do with us today?

DAVE BAST

Right; and we want to say three things here, I think, and the first and maybe most significant is that it gives us hope. Here is a truth that...in the last program we mentioned the scholar Richard Bauckham and his little book on Revelation...but here is another insight that he offers in that book: In heaven, Christ is reigning as the Lion, but on earth, he is present as the Lamb who has been slain—present in weakness—present in his people as they suffer; and it does seem often like the Church is getting kicked around. The Lord is getting abused still here on earth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Does this look like a world where Jesus is ruling?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Does the Church look like it... You know, I mean, sometimes I think churches do try to bring to themselves the trappings of power and glitz and...

DAVE BAST

They want to be lion-like.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, I saw a survey a while back that the average church in North America has one hundred members. Most churches are quite small. We look very ineffective in the Church as opposed to all the power centers in Washington or Ottawa or London or whatever; but you know what? That is okay.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If the Church is lamb-like in this world, it is because we are following one who is lamb-like, but who has all the power. He is also the Lion, and the one who the wrath of the Lamb can even inspire fear in people. So, we have hope—we properly have hope as a church; although we look weak, we know we are following one who also looked weak, but he is not.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; we do well when we live like lambs rather than try to be lions; but here is the second point. It can give us joy, too, I think, because what it really means is that the Lord Jesus identifies with people who are poor and weak and seemingly powerless...maybe insignificant. He loves people like that. It is the high and mighty and the rich and famous who often go their way without ever meeting him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, near the middle of May 2018, the world tuned into the royal wedding of Prince Harry of England and Meghan Markle, and it was a big affair, and there were some of the most rich and famous people in the world there: Oprah and George Clooney and Elton John and Serena Williams; lots of rich and powerful people. Those are the people that the world notices and takes pictures of and plasters pictures on magazine covers. Most of us are not like that. We are just regular folk; and you know what? Our joy is the fact that Jesus was regular folk, and when he was on this earth, he was always able to spy the lonely person in the room; he was always able to see the person on the margin, and that is where he went first; and as the Lamb of God, he still does, and that should inspire great joy in us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and I think for myself knowing him is what life is really all about...developing intimacy with him, trying to serve him, trying to be the same sort of thing he was...not throwing my power around, not trying to dominate other people like a lion, or terrify or order about, but through the act of gentle surrender. I mean, the whole point of a lamb is to be a sacrifice...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And I think the Lord still calls us and his Church to be sacrificial in our living for others, in our serving the world. So, that is a kind of way of life that we can all follow and find joy through that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we get hope and joy; and last of all, the third thing we can note as we close the program is that Jesus as the Lamb gives us peace. The world is a brutal place, and it seems lately to have gotten worse. Politics in most countries has gotten to be a blood sport. Nations are raging against each other, threatening each other. The world seems to be going to hell in a hand basket, some people will say; well, but, yes, it is a dangerous world, and it is a tough world; but even as John had God peel back the curtain of history to show him what is going on right now in the heavenly throne room, that Lamb...that Lion and Lamb...is on the throne and he is reigning, and the world is not going to end up in flames. It is not going to end with a bang or a whimper; it is going to end with the *Hallelujah Chorus*.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that gives us great peace.

DAVE BAST

Well, just go to this book of Revelation. That is why it was written. It was meant to give us peace, even in the midst of the chaos of life, and all the threatening stuff...and there is scary stuff in the book of Revelation. There are dragons and there are beasts and there are anti-Christ's and all sorts of things, but through it all, God reigns; and Jesus is coming, and he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, even though he is still the Lamb here in this world. So, lift up your heads and rejoice and let the peace that comes from knowing God is in control fill your heart.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What a great combination, that dual images that we have looked at in these two programs, Lion and Lamb; and indeed, it properly gives us hope, it properly gives us joy, and it properly gives us peace in our lives; and the last word is indeed shalom to all; thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us on our website, groundworkonline.com. There, you can let us know passages and topics you would like to hear on *Groundwork*.

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