

Jesus, the Lion

DAVE BAST

Once when Jesus and his disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, a sudden storm blew up and the disciples were terrified; but Jesus calmly got up, rebuked the wind and the waves, and the storm went away. Life can be frightening. We worry about storms that may come, or maybe we are in the midst of them right now. Who is this Jesus? Can he really calm the storms? Is he really in control? Does he have that kind of power? Let's think about that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, today we are beginning a brief, two-part series. We are going to look at the book of Revelation, which has often been puzzling to many readers—to many who seek to understand its message; but the message really comes through loud and clear; it just comes through in a different way, doesn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Revelation...yes, some people even think it is a scary book. It has lots of weird and sometimes frightening apocalyptic imagery in it; but really, the bottom line of Revelation, and the multiple images that it uses for Jesus, is comfort. It is meant to be comforting to us to know what you were just saying a minute ago, Dave, about the disciples in the boat: Who is this Jesus? Is he really in charge? Indeed, that is a key theme. In this program and the next, we will bring in quite a few other passages as well, but we will be centered particularly in a dual image for Jesus that emerges early in the book of Revelation; a dual, and seemingly opposite image: Jesus as the lion, which is what we are going to talk about in this program; and Jesus as the lamb, which we will talk about more in the next program.

DAVE BAST

Right; and I think it is important to note something about the nature of the book of Revelation. Obviously, if you are all familiar with it...if you have ever read it, you know that it has these wild scenes. It is almost dreamlike; in fact, it is described as a vision...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a dream, yes.

DAVE BAST

So, it is a dream. I mean, we have been talking about dreams, just amongst ourselves before beginning this program, and how strange they can be, and how they can interact with real life. So, does life cause the dream or do the dreams cause life; but in these dreams, without necessarily trying to understand every detail, we are meant to get the big picture; and the big picture of Revelation is just about who Jesus is now. You know, there are a lot of pictures of Jesus...literal pictures of Jesus that are floating about. You maybe have seen them in a Christian bookstore or they are hanging in your church, and some of them are gentle Jesus and some of them are laughing Jesus and some of them are good shepherd Jesus, you know, carrying a sheep; but

Revelation actually opens in Chapter 1 with a picture of the risen Jesus, and it is rather awe inspiring.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this is the way it goes. When John begins this vision, he sees this figure; he sees the risen Christ, and he says: ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand, he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun, shining in all its brilliance.

DAVE BAST

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. ¹⁸I am the living one. I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever; and I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

And you just say: Wow, that is a mind-blowing picture!

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; and it is so different from the rather humble, itinerant rabbi that we encounter in the Gospels, because indeed, a sword coming out of his mouth, like that is his tongue...fire coming out of his eyes...his feet glowing like hot metal; almost a frightening picture, but certainly a powerful and awe-inspiring picture. Small wonder that John said that when he saw it he fell as though he was dead...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He kind of fainted dead away.

DAVE BAST

And you know, Jesus uses language here that is only appropriate for God. He is the first and the last. He is the Alpha and Omega. He is the living one; and yet, he is still the same man who died...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Who died, but has risen again; and you know, Jesus did not just defeat death, he says: I took the keys with me when I broke the power of death and hell, and here I stand. So, John is awestruck at this vision of the power of Jesus, and there is no humility left in Jesus whatsoever. Humility is no longer appropriate. That was appropriate during the days of his flesh on earth; but where is John when he sees this vision? That is an interesting point, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and that is what is interesting. Near as we can tell, John has been exiled on the island of Patmos, which is a small island off the coast of what today we would call the country of Turkey. So, he is in exile. He has been persecuted for his faith. He is maybe one of the last living disciples or apostles. Everyone else seems to have been killed and martyred by now, but he has been exiled; and so, there he is all by himself on an island he cannot get off of. It is like Tom Hanks in *Castaway* or something. He is on this island; he cannot get off; maybe he is despairing; maybe he wonders, you know, who is really in charge here, the people who put me here, or what? And then he gets this vision...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he sees his friend, Jesus, as this all-powerful one, who even now, although it is hidden from the eyes of most people in this world, he gets this vision; and that is one of the things to remember, too, Dave, about the visions in Revelation. We are going to get to more of them in this program and the next one. These were not visions of the future. This was God peeling back the curtain and showing John what is going on right now...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just beyond the line of vision for most people in this world. This is not the future, this is now.

DAVE BAST

Yes; one of the misconceptions, really, about the book of Revelation is that it is all about the end times—it is for some distant...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Some distant, remote future, and are we there yet; and so people obsess over the signs of the times, as they say, and are we here in the book of Revelation? Are we near the end? Is Jesus going to come back tomorrow or tonight? And actually, this is a book that is meant to sustain the Church when it is facing storms—when it is, as we said about Jesus and the disciples. John is in the middle of a big storm. He is in prison. He is living in a cave—living in a hole in the ground; and the Lord gives him this vision to pass on to the Church, so it begins with John being told: Write what you see in a book and give it to the churches; and immediately after this opening vision of the power of the risen Christ and his glory and his authority, he writes seven letters to the churches that John was familiar with in the western part of Turkey; and then in Chapter 4, John is invited to come up to heaven and take a look at what he sees. Now, it is important also to note that in the book of Revelation heaven is not just the place where believers go when they die, heaven represents ultimate reality; heaven is the world that we cannot see behind this world. As you said, Scott, a moment ago; the curtain is drawn aside and John is given a glimpse into the actual workings of the universe; and what he sees is God on a throne.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and he sees this figure...and we won't read all of it now, but if you are familiar with, or if you want to have your Bible open while you listen to this program, of Revelation 4 and 5, he sees this figure; and then there is this scroll with writing all over it, and it...we are not told *exactly* what is all in the scroll, but it must be the message of salvation...the message of God's final judgment over sin and triumph over sin...

DAVE BAST

I always think of the scroll as the place where the answers are...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The answers to all our questions: What is going to happen? What does it mean?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is all rolled up and it is sealed shut with seven wax seals. It is so important that only the most worthy person or being in the universe can open it, and nobody was worthy; and so, John weeps and weeps that nobody is found worthy; except finally they do—finally that figure seated on the throne is found worthy.

DAVE BAST

So, we read these verses...and these verses are really going to key this program, and the next program, with their images of the risen Christ. It is Revelation 5:5, 6: Then one of the elders (one of the figures who were around the throne) 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." ⁶And then 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We will save most of the stuff on the Lamb for the next program, but there he is. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He has been found worthy; and so we see the mystery of the identity of Christ, but that he alone is the Worthy One, and he alone now has all the power in the universe; and we want to dig a little more deeply into that lion image and its history in the Bible, and we will do that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are just in a two-part series, this being the first part, of Jesus as the Lion and Jesus as the Lamb; and that imagery emerges throughout scripture, but it really comes together in that Revelation 5 passage we read at the end of the previous segment of this program. So, here we want to talk about Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

DAVE BAST

And here is a point, I think, that is significant. I have learned a lot about the meaning and message of Revelation from a New Testament scholar named Richard Bauckham, and I want to kind of pay tribute to him right now. He has a little book called *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, which is very illuminating; but he points out that what happens in this passage is that John* is told that the Lion is the one who can take the scroll and open it up. He is the one in control of history, I guess we could say. He is the one who can make it all happen, and effect all of the purposes of God, and complete the plan of God for all time and all people. So, he hears lion, but when he turns and looks in his vision, he sees lamb; and that is very dreamlike in a way, isn't it? I mean, things change quickly in a dream.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Things change, yes.

DAVE BAST

You suddenly think you are at one point and it shifts and you see something else. So, as we begin to think about this and dig a little deeper, we think: Okay, lion...the Lion of the tribe of Judah...the root of David...two things that describe the risen and reigning Lord Jesus; and they seem appropriate, don't they, because those are power images...those are...you know, a lion... Sports teams do not choose lambs for their mascot...they are called the Lions or the Tigers or the Hawks or the Eagles...these alpha predators. That is what you want...that is the image you want to convey; and that is the image that we begin with with Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; yes, king of the forest—the lion.

DAVE BAST

King of the beasts, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

King of the beasts; and some of that imagery goes way back. You can go all the way back to Genesis, the story of Jacob and his children, who, of course, become the nation of Israel; and then, in Genesis 49, right near the very, very end, as Jacob is dying he calls his sons together, and some of his grandsons, and so forth, and he says this. This is kind of a prophecy from Jacob; from Genesis 49, addressing his son Judah, he says to his son named Judah: ⁸Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. ⁹You are a lion's cub, Judah. You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down; like a lioness, who dares to rouse him? ¹⁰The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come, and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Now, to whom is Jacob pointing here? It is not just his son Judah.

DAVE BAST

Yes, isn't that a really interesting prophecy way back in the book of Genesis? So, the Lion of Judah is something that goes almost to the beginnings of the people of Israel; and it is rather odd in a way for Jacob to say this because Jacob's favorites among all his descendents were the sons of Joseph, his favorite son; and Judah is kind of this guy that Jacob has a bit of a bad relationship with; and yet, God causes Jacob to single out Judah, because Judah is going to be the dominant tribe. Judah will be the tribe that survives the exile when the other tribes have all kind of been dispersed and dissolved in history; and this amazing prophecy of an eternal ruler, the one to whom the scepter belongs.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and indeed, four centuries later or so after Israel gets out of Egypt and establishes itself in the Promised Land eventually, then Samuel chooses...well, first we had King Saul, but that did not work out, so then the archetype of all Israelite kings was David; and of course, he is from Jesse, from the tribe of Judah.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then God promises David that he will always have a descendent on the throne, from the tribe of Judah, until that time when the actual Messiah comes; and so, Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the fulfillment of what Jacob foresaw; he is the ongoing king of Israel; and now, the new Israel, which is the Church.

DAVE BAST

Right; and incidentally, some of us think back lovingly on reading the Narnia stories of C. S. Lewis...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We read them maybe for ourselves when we were younger...read them to our children...and of course, that is the reason why Lewis chose a lion to be Aslan, his Christ figure, in these stories, because he is the one who reigns, and Jesus is the Lion; but there is another phrase, interestingly, that is used in Revelation 5 for Jesus. He is called the *root* of David. That is kind of an allusion to a later prophecy in the book of Isaiah, because the fact is, historically the line of David petered out. I mean, at the end when the Babylonians came and conquered Jerusalem, they took the last Davidic king and brought him off into exile, and no son of David ever literally ruled as a king in Jerusalem again. So, what became of the promises of God? Well, this is what Isaiah says in Isaiah 11: A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit (and then it goes on into that beautiful prophecy about shalom, where the wolf will lie down with the lamb and all of that) ^{9b}and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea... And then Isaiah 11:10: In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will

rally to him; and his resting place will be glorious.

So, Jesus is also this root or branch...you could say both...of Jesse...of David.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, I was having a conversation with somebody just the other day, and it was noted that a lot of Christians in relatively recent times—the last century or so—have sort of lost sight of the big picture and the big story of the Bible. We have kind of chopped it up and segmented it...we will study the book of Ruth in Bible study this year, and next year we will do a psalm or two, but the Bible is one story, and when you see passages like this, where Isaiah now is picking up some threads from earlier in scripture—that whole image of the lion of the tribe of Judah, and now the root of Jesse—all of those threads from Genesis and from Samuel and through the life of David, all of it, Isaiah picks up these various threads and weaves them into this beautiful cord—this majestic cord of scripture, in which it all comes together in the Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, the other thing I think we need to emphasize here is that God fulfills his prophecies and his promises in the most universal way. These are not primarily about who is sitting on a literal throne in the city of Jerusalem in the land of Israel or Palestine. They are ultimately about who rules over the universe, and whose reign is forever and ever.

So, getting back to the book of Revelation, in Chapter 5 we get the first outburst, kind of, of what we might call the *Hallelujah Chorus* that is going to run... You are worthy and you are reigning and your reign will be forever and ever. It is not about earthly events; it is about...perhaps not *primarily* about earthly events...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is about the reality behind those things—the reality that heaven represents; and that is the place where Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, is reigning forever.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that has a lot of implications for our lives on this earth for now; and we are going to think about that as we close the program in just a minute.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at the wonderful picture...several of the pictures of the book of Revelation, but especially the one in Chapter 5 that depicts Jesus as both the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb that was slain; and we have been focusing on the first part of that vision, the lion part, which is all about power and authority and the eternal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, in Revelation we have this key truth that is being proclaimed to us, and that is, as we like to say sometimes, God is still on the throne...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

God *is* on the throne, and it is the triune God; it is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, who are all there, in control, exercising their rule over the sometimes turbulent events of the earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what John sees again and again...and you mentioned it, Dave, at the end of the last segment...is kind of this perpetual, what you called the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Most people, I think, know the *Hallelujah Chorus*

from Handel's *Messiah*. In fact, people who never go to church know the *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah*. It even gets used in advertising, of all things; but, it happens again and again in Revelation; and really, you know, kind of crescendos near the end of the book in Chapter 19. You have all these elders and all these creatures, and they just keep falling down on their faces, crying: Hallelujah! The living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne—that is in Revelation 19. The familiar line from the *Hallelujah Chorus* a little earlier in Revelation 11: The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever...you can hear the music in your head...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But again, that has already started now. It is not the future. He *is* reigning and he *will* reign forever. So it is about the future, but as we said in the first part of this program, Dave; it is about what is right now. God just pulled back the curtain for John to show him what is going on. By reading John, we get to peek behind the curtain, too...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this provides tremendous comfort. You mentioned in the beginning of the program, Dave, storms come in life. Maybe some who are hearing this program right now are in the middle of a really bad storm in their life, and they wonder, like the disciples in the boat, who is in charge? Is anybody in charge? Can anybody bring me through this storm? And the answer of Revelation is: Yes, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed, and is triumphing; and he is with you.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and the other thing...the great thing proclaimed in this book is, he is coming back, and he is going to win the final victory. So, the whole book of Revelation kind of builds up to this climax in the closing chapters, where in Chapter 19 we are shown another image of the Lion, although this time he is not described as a lion, he is described as a warrior on a horse and a sword again is coming out of his mouth, but it is the sword of God's Word. It is not a literal battle that he will fight to defeat his enemies. He is going to overthrow them by the power of God's Word. You know, God is so sovereign that he does not have to really *do* anything except speak a word, and his will comes to pass.

And then, in Revelation 20 the final destruction of Satan and evil and death itself, and the coming of the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, and the renewed creation. So, that is where we are headed, and we can be sure... Sometimes when I...I love to read spy thrillers and detective stories, and sometimes when the hero is in a really tight spot I get nervous, so I go ahead and read the last chapter to make sure I know that things turn out all right; and that is what the book of Revelation is meant to be for us. We can read the last chapter of my life story, your life story, the story of the world, and know that it is going to turn out right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I love the image, too, from Revelation 19. Again, John is seeing this powerful warrior. It talks about he treads the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty—the grapes of wrath; but then this great line: ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS; LORD OF LORDS.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. See, there are kings on this earth; there are lords on this earth; there are prime ministers and presidents and queens and potentates of all kinds, but Jesus is the ultimate ruler of all of them; and indeed,

that should be comforting to us, not only because when he comes again everything will be made right again... Yes, we take great comfort in that, but in the storms of our lives even right now, we take great comfort in the fact that he is on that throne right now; nobody can displace him; and he is with us at all times; and that is our hallelujah.

DAVE BAST

Amen! Hallelujah to that, too. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time, as we explore Christ's identity now as the Lamb of God, the second image in John's vision.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program mistakenly says *Jesus*, when in fact it should say *John* is told in Revelation 5:5,6 that the Lion can take and open the scroll.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/jesus-the-lion>

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