

Sermon Title: "The Lion & The Lamb" Series: "Reconciled. Meditations on the Life & Death of Jesus"
Dave Sattler March 22, 2015 Text: Revelation 4-5 Sources: NIV Life Application Bible; Commentaries: Keener, Lucado, & Tenney; Elwell's "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology"; Athanasius of Alexandria (4th Century Church Father); Tolkien.

Review & Introduction:

- Good morning, I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- And so we've come to Easter -- that great time in the year when we meditate a bit more deeply on the life and death of our Saviour, Jesus.
- **<Slide>** ILL - Have you ever felt the sting of alienation?
 - Have you ever found yourself alienated from a person -- or a group of people?
 - Maybe you've recently moved to Canada, or you're new to the North Shore, and not quite settled here yet -- still feeling like a stranger in a foreign land.
 - Or, perhaps you've been embroiled in conflict, or at odds with a loved one -- trapped in the mess of a relationship gone sideways. Broken. This could be your reality even now.
 - You've been 'cut out' -- un-'friendied', made not to feel part of things -- at school, church, in your job, or on your team -- maybe even in your own family.
 - Or, because of something you've done, maybe you've felt far from God; or you've even 'walled yourself off' from God to keep from hurting more.
 - Alienation is such an awful thing, isn't it?
- **<Series Slide>** The term "reconciliation" has several meanings: 1) the restoration of friendly relationship between two parties formerly at odds with each other; 2) the action of two different systems being made compatible; and 3) the practice of harmonizing or balancing financial accounts.
- The Easter Narrative, the passion of Christ deals with all of humanity's need for reconciliation.
- Romans 5:10-11 announces, Q: "... we were reconciled to [God] through the death of His Son ... through whom we have now received reconciliation."
- 4th Century Church Father Athanasius of Alexandria said, Q: "The incarnation is reconciliation."
- **<Slide>** We turn to Revelation 4-5 today, pg.1917-1919 in the blue Bibles or on your electronic device. Some of you will be very excited for a sermon in Revelation.
- But I have to say upfront, it likely won't be what you're hoping for! There will be no predicting end times or explaining events in the Middle East today. Sorry to disappoint.
- It's important to note that Revelation is scholars call, 'apocalyptic panorama.' Some of its verses contain clear spiritual teachings, but others reach far beyond our ability to comprehend.
- Chapters 4 & 5 describe a vision the Apostle John had that, years later, gave him a "door" (4:1) into the Easter events he had previously witnessed with his own eyes, but now saw from a heavenly viewpoint.
- ILL - And John's account reads a bit like a Broadway musical, an Italian opera or 'Les Mis,' if you will.
 - Apparently in the ancient world, a Greek chorus would explain in music the actions happening on stage in the drama. And it's the same here. We mustn't miss the lyrics.
 - For the songs recorded in Revelation provide true commentary on the events.
- This vision was meant to help John better interpret Jesus' life and death: what was actually going on when "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood" (cf. John 1:14, MSG).
- [Not sure about George & Ringo], but many of the writings of John & Paul explain not just that Jesus came to earth, died and rose again, but importantly what that now means for humanity.
- These verses illuminate what had previously been considered a profound mystery: the absolute greatness of our God and His remarkable plan to rescue us.
- And, no less than at their first reading in the church in Ephesus on the West Coast of modern-day Turkey nearly 2000 years ago, Revelation 4 & 5 invite us to worship today just as they did that day.
- **<READ Revelation 4 & 5>** Prayer: "God, control me by Your Spirit and move me out of the way."

Sermon Outline:

1. The Throne in Heaven (4:1-7)

- ILL - When my sons were younger and playing Lynn Valley Soccer ...
 - At the end of every season the Club would rent out Cap University's Theatre.

- And invite all the boys and parents to attend the Awards' Night.
- The evening's penultimate moment was always when the curtain was ceremoniously pulled back to reveal **<Slide>** the 'gleaming gold' of the seemingly vast amount of medals & trophies displayed on stage! And, loud gasps could be heard throughout the auditorium.
- Of course, every boy [and coach] longed for their turn to be called up to receive their 'gold.'
- John is shown a glimpse of the most-magnificent throne room, gleaming with a "sea of glass, clear as crystal" (6b).
- This is no mere human vision dreamed up in the sub-conscious; it's clear it comes from God.
- Not drinking or napping, John is "in the Spirit" (2) when this is revealed.
- And there's tons of symbolism: "24 elders" (4); elders are/were leaders chosen to represent the people, so this number, 2 times 12, is likely meant to represent "all believers."
- "Four living creatures" surround the throne (6) probably symbolizing God's attributes: the lion, power; the ox, faithfulness; the man, intelligence; the eagle, God's sovereignty over all things.
- "Lightning and thunder" (5) accompany the proceedings.
- Jews reading this would have been taken back to Mt Sinai, where God handed down the Law to Moses; in history, a memorable event also accompanied by "thunder and lightning" (Ex 19:16).
- This throne-room scene is also a legal proceeding of sorts, involving the 'balancing of accounts.'
- For it's about the Law, given by God, but then broken by humanity's rebellion & sin.
- And thankfully, the Story doesn't end there: now via God's Son, the Law has been perfectly fulfilled.
- The life, death, & resurrection of Jesus, our Saviour made it possible for us to be reconciled.
- Back to friendly relationship with God, our Creator!

2. Endless Worship (4:8-11)

- They never rest.
- "Day and night" (8), Q: "The twenty-four elders fall down ... and worship Him" (10). **<Slide>**
- ILL - 6 times in the book of Daniel Ch 3, this exact language is used as a summons, Q: "You must
 - Fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up." (Dan 3:5).
 - History tells that many Roman Emperors saw themselves as 'dominus et deus' ['lord and god'] and expected the worship of the people.
 - Rulers demand punishment for all who refused to "fall down" and worship them.
 - There are even unconfirmed reports of the Apostle John facing extreme persecution.
 - An attempt was apparently made to boil him alive -- with the emperor finally giving up and shipping John to prison on the island of Patmos. Where God gave him this Revelation.
- **<Slide>** One timeless application of this text is the massive truth: **God is still in charge.**
- This is the primary purpose of the Book of Revelation:
 - To infuse us with hope -- both now, and for the future.
- John reminds us that God's grandeur dwarfs the emperor's majesty.
- That in the face of our suffering, God remains in control. Even when it doesn't feel like it.
- He's taken care of things. We've been reconciled. We've been redeemed. And, there will come a day when we will be fully restored! When there'll be "No more tears, no more pain" (Rev 21:4).
- Our faith will be vindicated. Justice will be served. Our broken bodies will be made new again!
- Perhaps in the darkness of your present circumstances you've lost sight of this great hope.
- Today's seemingly 'unshakable pain' clouds your vision of Jesus.
- Or, you've pinned your hopes to some thing: your career, your success, your wealth, your fame; or you've oriented your life around a person: your spouse, your boss, your hero, you & your charm.
- Not to be trite about your pain or life-pursuits, but remember this morning:
 - The God Who made it all is also the God Who still sustains it all. And sustains you.
 - And, He always offers hope -- even in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps 23:4).
 - God is the only worthy thing or worthy person on which to pin our hopes.
- **<Slide>** The concluding scene of Revelation 4 reinforces God's sovereignty as true "Lord and God."
- In stark contrast to the 'pomp and pageantry' of earthly rulers, we don't see this God demanding anything. Instead, all of God's creatures in heaven and earth choose to "fall down before Him" (10)

- Q: "For from You are all things. And to You are all things. You deserve the glory." - Brymer/Hall
- Endless worship! Because He is Creator and Sustainer of everything. They can't stop.
- And, our best response? Worship too! One commentator I read this week says aptly,
 - Q: "Only in the depths of worship, as we stand in awe of God's majestic glory, do all other competing claims for affection and attention recede into their rightful place. God alone is God, and He alone merits first place -- beyond every other love, every other anxiety, every other fear that consumes us." - Craig Keener, p 182

3. <Slide> The Lion and the Lamb (5:1-8)

- Revelation 5 opens with a huge issue: there is no one worthy to "open the scroll" (2).
- Caught up in the vision, feeling hopeless, John "weeps and weeps" (4) over the problem.
- The universe appears to lack a champion. Until the Lion appears.
- And, this Lion has "triumphed" (5) in a most unlikely manner.
- Here the central paradox of the Christian Story is illustrated yet again. An old friend used to say,
 - Q: "That's the problem with a pair-a-docks! You never know where to park your boat?!!"
 - Our wonderful paradox? Jesus conquered death not by force or violence, but by martyrdom:
 - The powerful ferocious Lion becomes a humble sacrificial Lamb!
 - What in the world was God thinking?!!
- ILL - Do you know of any sports' teams called "The Lambs?!" I don't.
 - 'Rams' yes, but never 'Lambs.'
 - Lambs are the most vulnerable of sheep; and, sheep are among the feeblest of all creatures.
 - Especially when faced with a predator: top heavy with those spindly legs, they're easy prey!
- Humanity is found in rebellion against God -- a sin that leads to imminent death, and God comes to earth as a Lamb? To be slain.
- The victim becomes the unexpected hero. And I love it! And, you do too!
- ILL - This incredible irony is what the great author J.R.R. Tolkien coined a "eucatastrophe."
 - **<Slide>** Def'n, Q: "a sudden turn of events at the end of the story which ensures that the protagonist does not meet terrible doom."
 - It's why [for us old folks], we're drawn to the story of Rudy, the Bad News Bears, and Disney underdogs like a guy called Kristoff with his reindeer, Sven and the Hunchback of Notre Dame. And, of course, that little hobbit named Frodo.
 - Tolkien called God's coming to earth, Q: "The eucatastrophe of human history."
 - We are the protagonist and the Lamb is the unexpected hero.
 - And we're 'parking our boats' and 'hitching our wagons' to Him!
- This Lamb Jesus, because He "had been slain" (6) would now be able to protect all of God's people during the coming judgments about to be outlined in the scroll.
- As a side note, I want to say that empires and leaders who act exclusively as 'lions' tend to corrupt, destruct, and often alienate everyone around them.
- Sometimes best leadership means assuming the posture of a 'lamb.'

4. <Slide> A New Song (5:9-14)

- We all know music is wired to the human soul; and the role of music in worship here is paramount.
- It is clearly not my forte, but music has always helped me express myself, particularly to God.
- The worship in Revelation 5 is definitely amped up: innumerable angels, "10,000 times 10,000" (11).
- All of heaven. All of creation. "And they sang a new song" (9). It's as if they're singing to Jesus,
 - Q: "You gave us life and breath. And now You've given it back to us by willingly sacrificing your life for us as the Lamb who was slain. Jesus, You are worthy. You alone are God."
- Astonishing for John's Jewish audience would have been the very fact that this Lamb, Jesus was now receiving the highest worship in God's heaven. Sacrilege.
- Now, it does make sense to see the historical Jesus a 'great teacher' or a 'wise prophet.'
- Most world religions espouse some form of this belief.
 - When you recognize God as Creator, you might admire Him.
 - When you see God's wisdom, you can learn from Him.

- When you discover God's strength, you can rely on Him. Maybe even as your 'Higher Power.'
 - But, only when you embrace the reality **that God saves you**, will you ever truly worship Him -- or be transformed.
- And this is the difference in sentiment from Revelation 4 to Revelation 5: God is not merely a distant deity to admire, He is Jesus, the Saviour of the World -- your Saviour.
 - With His blood, Jesus "purchased" (9b) you and all creation back to God.
 - And this is history's 'game-changer.' Brings all creation to its knees.
 - Max Lucado says, Q: "When God is merely a creator or teacher, He can easily be kept at a distance. God can be comfortably dismissed or neatly shelved in favour of other pursuits. But, when we open up our hearts to receive God's salvation, that changes everything. We cannot help but become worshipers. Nothing else matters more."
 - I wonder how many of us in this room this morning need a fresh encounter with our Saviour Jesus.
 - Perhaps your heart - like mine - has hardened over time. Yes you still believe, but you've lost a bit of the wonder of your salvation; kept God distant. Held back from relationship with Jesus.
 - **<Slide>** Like David cries in Psalm 51:12, Q: Lord, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."
 - Those first reading John's revelation would have been struck by the fact that God's new act of redemption now encompassed people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (9b) -- a phrase repeated 7 times in the book of Revelation.
 - And this is another reason the Christian Story is so amazing. The best story.
 - It is precisely our suffering-marginalized-'non-elitist' Jesus that makes the salvation He offers so 'earthy,' so identifiable, and entirely accessible to all people.
 - ILL - And that's what I love about having people like Big Rick in my church.
 - He and I are different in so many ways.
 - God's heart is so huge, there's room for all of us.
 - And it's so beautiful to see God's work in him. And I am challenged and blessed by God's saving work through friends like Rick on down to me!
 - ILL - And, this is also what I appreciate about the life and legacy of Christine Harada.
 - Born out of this conviction that Jesus came to save all people, Christine devoted much of her life -- and it wasn't easy -- to God's mission to reach remote 'tribes' of people in the Northern Philippines with the life-changing message of Jesus.
 - ILL - A few months back Joanne and I received an entirely unexpected financial gift.
 - Though, given our situation we would have been crazy not to accept it, it was actually hard to receive; we would have preferred to get out of debt by our own means. Impossible.
 - But I tell you, the day that we were finally able 'reconcile' our line of credit down to zero and balance our accounts, that felt amazing!
 - In other religions, people are supposed to do things to appease the gods.
 - But Christianity declares, 'in Christ we have "received reconciliation.'"
 - Because the sin that alienates us from God is ours, not His, only God could do the reconciling.
 - And through His Son, Jesus, the Lion who becomes a Lamb and exchanges the throne for a cross, God has made this incredible gift of restored relationship with Him available to all. Even you.
 - This is amazing grace. Receive it in Jesus. Amen.
 - And, reason to worship. I invite the team to come. Let's stand to worship the Lamb together.