

THE LION-LAMB'S STRENGTH - REV. 5:12 #4

Tom could never remember feeling well. Ever since his childhood, Tom complained of various disorders - rheumatism, poor eyesight and hearing, nervousness, neuralgia, myalgia, chronic tonsillitis, liver pains. Tom also seemed to have poor circulation in his hands and feet. They never seemed to be warm enough - and they would swell up from time to time. Now some got so tired of Tom's complaints that they just dismissed them saying that he was just a hypochondriac. But Tom was convinced that he had physical problems and he very likely did. In any case, Tom's constant suffering lead him to behave in some very strange ways.

For instance, Tom grew to believe that one side of his body was heavier than the other side, to he often would walk around with one arm raised over his head so that the blood that ran out of his arm would rebalance his body. Another idiosyncrasy of Tom's was his belief that he could relieve his chronic indigestion by draping damp, cold towels over his stomach while he slept at night. So he slept faithfully every night with cold, wet towels draped over his bare skin. Of course, Tom often caught cold from this bizarre practice, and on one occasion even got pneumonia complicating his physical problems. Tom avoided eating any pepper because he thought pepper made his left leg weak. He always stood upright so that his internal organs would line up properly inside him. In fact, he eventually took out all the chairs in his study so that he wouldn't be tempted to sit at all. Historians today feel that Tom probably had a diaphragmatic hernia. It might not sound like a severe problem, but it can lead to the many different symptoms that

seemed to plague Tom. But even if that diagnosis is correct, it's 100 years too late to help Tom anyway.

What is interesting is the fact that history has forgotten all about Tom's frailties and eccentricities remembering only his strengths. For it was at the battle of Bull Run during the Civil War when Tom only had 17,000 soldiers facing a much larger Union Army of 60,000 that General Bernard Bee saw Tom leading his troops into battle and he remarked, *there stands Jackson like a stonewall*. The nickname stuck and Thomas Jackson will be forever remembered as Stonewall Jackson, one of the strongest generals in the Confederate Army. His troops seemed to somehow derive strength from him for Stonewall Jackson was able to consistently defeat much larger forces with far fewer men.

The outcome of the Civil War might have been different had it not been for a tragic misfortune that befell General Jackson. He had just lead his troops in a stunning upset of the Union army at Chancellorsville, Va. by circling around behind them and catching them completely off-guard. And now in the darkness of the evening, the General himself went out on a personal scouting mission to determine the best strategy for an attack in the morning to finish the job. But as he was returning in the darkness, one of his own men mistook him for an enemy soldier and shot him from his horse. Tom Stonewall Jackson died 8 days later - and the Confederate Army never seemed to be able to recover from that loss.

Throughout the history of the human race, people of every nation and race have always looked for strength in their leaders. Physical strength, mental strength, emotional strength, moral strength - these are essential virtues that have

been recognized in leadership for thousands of years. In fact, many other idiosyncrasies no matter how bizarre they might appear to be are often overlooked if strength of character is seen in a leader. Strength is important because it is a recognized, foundational quality for victory. Without a sufficient level of strength, there is always the insecurity and fear that another more powerful force will subdue and subject its will upon the less strong. And history is filled with examples of strong, willful, self-interested dictators who have forced their wills upon others who were less strong - the Assyrians of the O.T., the Barbarians at the end of the Roman Empire, the Hitlers of the modern era.

One of the most comforting characteristics of Almighty God is his unlimited strength. The Bible presents God as an omnipotent God - one who is infinite in his power or strength. So it should not surprise us in the least that God's strength was immediately evident to the Apostle John when he experienced his vision of heaven.

During these past Sunday mornings, we had begun a series looking at the 7 characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ that are found in the great song of praise recorded in Revelation 5:12. John recorded his vision by writing:

Revelation 5:11-12

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

*We have already seen the **power or authority** of the Lion-Lamb illustrated by the fact that He was the only one who had the ability to take the scroll from the hand of God the Father, executing all of the divine plan for blessing and judgment as found in Revelation 5:1-5:

5 Then 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."

*Then we saw the **wealth** of the Lion-Lamb illustrated by the 24 elders who laid their crowns at His feet acknowledging His position as the creator and sustainer of all things in the last verse of chapter 4.

Revelation 4:10-11 10 the twentyfour elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Obviously the one who created and, therefore, owns all that exists is very wealthy indeed.

*Last time we looked at the **wisdom** of the Lion-Lamb illustrated by the 7 eyes in the vision that have the ability to see and know everything that is going on throughout the entire earth.

Revelation 5:6

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven

horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Now this morning we come to a consideration of the **strength** of this Lion-Lamb. We find this illustrated in the beginning of John's vision as he sees the very throne of God himself. And we must remember that the Lion-Lamb was found standing in the center of the throne of God according to Rev. 5:6 signifying his deity, his identification and union with God the Father himself.

It must have been an awesome sight for John to see a vision of the very throne of God himself with a rainbow resembling an emerald encircling it. The 24 elders each sitting on their own smaller thrones dressed in white with golden crowns on their heads just added to the splendor of the entire scene. And the living creatures, of course, resembling a lion and an ox and a man and an eagle press our imaginations to their limit.

But the specific that I would like to draw to your attention is found in the first half of verse 5. John writes: *From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.*

Now before the advent of nuclear power and atomic explosions, lightening was recognized as representing the most awesome power that human beings could know. And rightfully so. For we can hardly imagine the force that is contained in just one bolt of lightning - and they say that there averages 100 lightning bolts per second in the earth's atmosphere.

Now people in Biblical times understood very little about how lightning worked - they only knew of its awesome strength and power. So when John chose to use this symbol, he was expressing the greatest strength that he had at his

disposal to describe the throne of God. Interestingly, even with all of our modern scientific advances today, we still know very little about how lightning actually comes about. We do know that it is an electrical discharge. But what causes lightning is still a mystery. The best guess is that there is friction caused between the lighter drops of water vapor that rise to the top of the cloud and heavier pieces of hail and ice that sink to the bottom of the cloud. It is claimed that the water vapor forms a positive charge while the pieces of ice form a negative charge. This difference in charges precipitates the lightning. But how such a force is brought about by such seemingly normal molecular movement remains a mystery to scientists.

The average bolt of lightning discharges over 100 million volts of electricity. If we could harness all of the power from just one average bolt of lightning and store it in batteries, we would be able to provide all of the electricity needed for the entire Grand Rapids Metropolitan area for more than a decade. Lightning bolts streak up to 9 miles from clouds to the ground. Lightning bolts from cloud to cloud have been measured up to 90 miles. When a lightning bolt flashes between a cloud and the ground, the air in its path is instantaneously heated to over 60,000 degrees Fahrenheit. They say that the heated air expanding is actually what causes the sound of the thunder that we hear. It is almost impossible for us to even imagine this kind of strength or power. And that is undoubtedly why the very throne of God had lightning flashing and thunder resounding from it - for the persons of God the Father and the Lion-Lamb who also stood on the throne have such innate strength that only the most powerful force in all of nature could be

used to begin to picture it. It is almost impossible for us to even begin to imagine this scene that John saw - the throne room of God sparkling with all its gem and jewel-like quality with the blinding flashes of lightning and the deafening sound of thunder. It's no wonder that the angelic chorus that later sang of the worthiness of the lamb included his strength in their list of divine attributes - for nobody could see any vision of God without being overcome by His omnipotent strength.

Even an appearance of God on this earth produced a similar effect. You will recall that scene in the O.T. when the children of Israel stopped at the foot of Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 commandments and the law from God himself. When God's presence descended to the top of Mt. Sinai, the flashes of lightning were so blinding and the roar of thunder so deafening that the Israelites begged Moses not to make them go near to the mountain. They were literally terrified at the sight of God's presence on top of the mountain. In that very chapter that first gives to us the 10 commandments from God, Exodus 20:18-21 records:

Exodus 20:18-21

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

We have not yet truly met the living God of the Bible until we have met a being of infinite strength whose very presence makes us tremble before Him.

One of the very dangerous movements of the day in which we are living is the attempt of many to humanize God. Now we can understand that in many cases, the motives are good. There is a desire to keep God from being so transcendent in our minds that we feel that we can never know him. There is a desire to present God in a personal way so that we can be encouraged to have fellowship with him. But the way that this is being done by many is very dangerous indeed - even to the point of being idolatrous. It can be idolatrous because the true and living God of the Bible is being distorted. He is being robbed of his divine attributes. And in this process, many of us are being robbed of the knowledge of the God that we so desperately need to bring fulfillment to our lives.

A good buddy might be comforting to put his arm around us in our time of need. But if a situation is too big for us to handle, it probably is too big for our good buddy to handle as well. So it is that when God is presented as our heavenly good buddy, while it might bring immediate feelings of warmth and closeness to our hearts, when the going really gets tough, when life seems to be completely out of control, that kind of God doesn't bring a lot of security to our hearts.

We need to realize that the God of the Bible is not our heavenly good buddy. He never will be our heavenly good buddy. The God of the Bible's strength is so far beyond our imagination that the most powerful natural forces that we know of must be used to describe Him, and they just begin to picture the infinite strength that He has. This God is a God who has controlled the course of human history

just by a snap of His fingers.

*the most powerful army in the world was tracking down a disheveled group of several million slaves, most of whom were women and children. Nobody would have ever given any chance for these slaves to survive. But God snapped his fingers, and the waters of the Red Sea opened so that his slaves could have an escape route. And when they were safely to the other side, God snapped his fingers again, and the waters closed over the mighty Egyptian Army drowning them helplessly in the Sea.

*The city of Jerusalem was hopelessly surrounded by Sennacherib and his mighty Assyrian army. They had already routed city after city as they became the first true world empire. But one godly king named Hezekiah trusted in a God of infinite strength and prayed to Him for help. God sent an angel and with a snap of his fingers in one night 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were killed. In the morning, Sennacherib had no choice but to turn around and run back to Nineveh with his tail between his legs. And this king Sennacherib who appeared to be the controller of human history was assassinated within a short period of time - and the entire Assyrian empire fell in just a few short years to the Babylonians.

*The Apostle Peter was imprisoned by the mighty King Herod and awaited certain death in the morning. Herod had already beheaded James and received so much praise from the Jewish religious leaders that he decided to kill another early church leader to bolster his Gallup poll approval rating. Peter was locked in stocks and chains, surrounded by Roman soldiers in the most secure prison available. But God sent an angel and with a snap of his fingers the locks fell off Peter's wrists

and ankles, the doors swung freely open, and Peter just walked out of that Roman jail a free man.

The God of the Bible is an infinite being who is unlimited in His strength. There is nothing that is too hard for Him. There is no one who can oppose His will. And that is seen most clearly in human history when Satan exercised all the power at his disposal to thwart the redemptive plan of God. He turned the hearts of the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers against the very son of God, the Lion-Lamb himself. They arrested him, lead him through a mock trial and condemned him to be executed by hanging upon a cross. But after the sins of that human race had been completely paid for and when there was no doubt that breath had indeed left his earthly body and the decay of rigor mortis had set in to Jesus Christ's deceased earthly body, God snapped his fingers and the Lord Jesus Christ came back to life from the grave as the conqueror of the Devil and Death forever.

Now, we will never have the confidence and strength that we need to live life victoriously until we know and worship and have fellowship with this true and living God of the Bible - the God from whose throne flashes lightning and rumbles thunder. For this God has invited each of his children to be channels of His strength in this world.

The prophet Isaiah said these words as recorded in Isaiah 40:28- 31: *28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young*

men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Dr. Howard Kelly had a unique way of illustrating the need for every Christian to live his or her life drawing from the hidden resources of God's strength. Every Sunday when he preached he would wear a lovely rose. In fact, nobody could ever remember seeing him in public in a suit without a rose attached to his lapel. Whenever anyone would comment on his rose, Dr. Kelly would always respond *Actually, this is a Christian rose.* When they expressed surprise that Dr. Kelly would call his rose a Christian rose, the pastor would pull back his lapel and reveal a tiny water bottle that held the stem of his flower that went through a hole in his lapel - a tiny bottle of water that kept the rose fresh and sweet.

God desires for each of His children to have their roots founded deeply in Him. God desires for each of His children to find their strength in His limitless omnipotence. Whatever your specific need today, God is the resource that you need - for the God of the Bible is a God of unlimited strength.

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength. . .