

THE LION-LAMB'S POWER - REV. 5:12 #1

Normally, just the sound of Martha's voice brought a smile to the face of Pastor Jim. Aunt Martie, as she was known to all of the young people, was not only one of the oldest members of the church, but she was also one of the sweetest and most faithful as well. But this time, there was an unusual tone to her voice that caused Pastor Jim concern as she made an appointment to see him.

Pastor Jim had just taken his seat across from Aunt Martie when she came right to the point of the meeting. *The Doctor just told me that I have 6 months or less to live.* Pastor Jim swallowed. This was certainly shocking news. But before he could even respond, Martha continued. *The Lord has been good to me. I have lived a long life. I'm ready to go - you know that. But I just wanted to talk with you about my funeral because I have a couple of special requests.*

Pastor Jim and Martha talked for quite a while. They reminisced about good memories. They talked about Martha's favorite hymns and passages of Scripture. They talked about trials that she had endured in her long life. And it was just when the Pastor thought that they had covered about everything that Martha got a twinkle in her eye and said, *I have just one more request. When they put me in the coffin for visitation, I want to have my old Bible in one of my hands and a fork in the other.*

A fork? the Pastor exclaimed. *Why would you want to be buried with a fork in your hand?*

Well, Martha explained. *I have been thinking about all of the church dinners and banquets that I have attended at Central down through the years. They were*

some of my favorite times. And when the best meals were finished and the dirty dishes were collected, they would always say 'you'd better keep your fork'. When they said that we knew that a special dessert was coming. It wasn't Jell-O or pudding or even ice cream because you didn't need a fork for that. It was a delicious chocolate cake or cherry pie. When they said that I could keep my fork, I knew the best part of the meal was yet to come. That's exactly what I want people to be talking about at my funeral. When they walk by my casket and ask 'why does she have a fork in her hand?', you just tell them that she wanted to keep her fork because she knew that the best is yet to come.

In Romans 8:18, the Apostle Paul wrote *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* And that is the glorious hope that every Christian has - that the Lord Jesus Christ is preparing a heavenly home for each of his children, that the best is yet to come.

We would all like to know much more than we do about this heavenly home, but the Bible does not satisfy all of our curiosities. Probably the reason for this is the simple fact that if we were exposed to all of the glories of heaven we would lose any desire at all to continue our lives here on this earth. There are, however, several passages of Scripture in which the curtains of heaven are cracked open and we are allowed to experience vicariously through the visions of others a few of the glories of heaven.

The Apostle John was one who was privileged to enter heaven in a vision.

¹ *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here,*

*and I will show you what must take place after this."*² *At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. Revelation 4:1-2* This begins the major section of Revelation in which the great events of the tribulation are predicted. In the midst of this great vision, John is directed by one of the elders who said *See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David - Rev. 5:5*. John then looks up through his tears and sees a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. He then later hears a glorious angelic chorus singing, *"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Rev. 5:12*. During these fall Sunday mornings, we want to look at this Lion-Lamb that the Apostle John saw; we want to see His power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise as revealed in various parts of this vision that the Apostle John was privileged to have and that we are privileged to have recorded for us.

Now the first word that these angels use in extolling the Lion-Lamb is translated *power*. It is a word that denotes an inherent might, a force that resides in something by virtue of its nature. It is different than the great strength used later in this song. This first attribute describes a powerful being, one who is powerful by virtue of his very nature.

This Greek term *dunamos* that is translated *power* here is the word from which we have derived our English word *dynamite*. When dynamite was first made, the inventors chose this name because of the great power that the little stick inherently had. A small stick of dynamite doesn't look that impressive. But when you light the fuse, it suddenly becomes very impressive because of the force that is

inherent within its being.

The Lion-Lamb has unlimited power. He has unlimited power because of his nature. And this gives to Him all the authority needed to rule over His creation.

We have a dramatic illustration of the power of the Lion-Lamb in the first verses of chapter 5 where a heavenly scene is described.

The one who was seated on the central throne (who obviously is God the Father) had a scroll in his right hand. This scroll had writing on both sides of it. Now this is very significant.

In John's day, scrolls were made out from the papyrus plant. When we were in Egypt a decade or so ago, we visited a papyrus factory and saw how these scrolls were made. The papyrus plant is a long plant which grows in a triangular shape. Thousands of years ago, it was discovered that writing material could be made from this plant. In order to make a scroll, strips of the papyrus are peeled off with a small knife - the papyrus plant easily peels like celery or an onion. These strips of papyrus are soaked in water and then laid side by side until a square sheet was formed. Then a second layer of papyrus is soaked in water and laid across on top of the first layer. The second layer is pressed down into the first layer. A natural glue like substance bonds the two layers together and they become one. Then the papyrus sheet is laid out to dry. When dried, the papyrus becomes a very durable substance that can be written on like paper - we have today papyri dating back thousands of years. In the olden days, the dried papyrus square was then sewn onto a series of other squares making a long scroll which could be used for writing. For convenience, the ends of the scroll were wrapped around sticks so

that they could be rolled up. This made the long scroll very easy to use - it could just be rolled out to the place where the scribe wanted to write his material or later read what had been written.

Now the normal pattern was that the scroll would only be written on one side. And there was a very practical reason for this. The papyrus strips that were laid horizontally would be much easier to write on than the ones laid out vertically because they would form natural lines that could be followed. The papyrus strips that were laid vertically were much more difficult to write on because the path of the writing would be bumpy going from strip to strip. So whether it was a language like Hebrew that was written from right to left or a language like Greek or Latin or English that was written from left to right, it was the normal pattern to only write on the horizontal side of the papyrus and then roll it up with the sticks protecting what had been written from the outside elements. So the fact that this scroll that God is holding in his right hand has writing on both sides of it is very significant because of its unusual nature.

There were two cases when a scribe would write on both sides of the scroll. If the person were very poor, he might use both sides of the scroll in spite of the hardship of writing on the one side just to save money. It is inconceivable that this would be the reason for God having a scroll with writing on both sides. After all, this scene is in heaven. The streets are gold; the gates are giant pearls; jewels are encircling God's throne; I'm sure that God could afford another scroll if He needed one.

The second reason why a scroll might have writing on both sides is if there

were some necessity of keeping all the material together for some reason. We have examples of long, legal documents, for instance, that were written on both sides of a scroll because of the fear that one part would be lost or separated from the other. This is the likely reason why this scroll has writing on both sides. The symbolism is likely indicating that this scroll that God holds in his hand contains all of his plans for the future; it is the blueprint of his program that is going to be outlined in the rest of the book of Revelation. It is written on both sides of the scroll to indicate its completeness - this is it - the culmination of God's redemptive program; all of his purposes for judgment and blessing.

This would explain why there was such eager expectation by all the heavenly hosts surrounding the throne. This scroll contained the totality of God's redemptive programs - there was great curiosity and eagerness to find out what was contained within it.

The problem was that the scroll was sealed with 7 seals signifying the completeness or perfection of its closure. Now this is also very significant. For it was a very common experience for a king or ruler to write his will or decree in a scroll and then seal it up. The seal would only be broken when the scroll was ready to be executed. It would only be after the king had died that the seal would be broken and the will executed or when the decree were to be put into effect that the seal would be broken. So the fact that the scroll was sealed meant that God's final program had not been put into effect yet. The seal had to be broken first. Once the seals were broken, the final totality of God's judgments of blessing and the culmination of God's redemptive program would be set in motion.

Who was going to break these seals? That was the big question. So a mighty angel - probably the chief of all the angelic hosts - steps forward and asks the question, *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scrolls?* The one who was worthy to take the scroll and break the seal would have the power, the authority to set God's final programs into motion. Who is worthy to do this?

But there is complete silence in heaven. Nobody is stepping forward to take the scroll out of God's hand. Nobody in heaven or on earth had the power to break the seals, open the scroll and look into it.

It is at this point that the Apostle John begins to weep - and we can clearly understand why he is so filled with sorrow and grief. John has just come from a Christian world that was suffering great persecution. According to traditions that we have, he himself had been thrown into a large pot of boiling oil by the Emperor Domitian in an attempt to deep fry him to death, but God had miraculously spared his servant. Like the 3 Hebrew men in the fiery furnace, the intense heat had no effect on John. So Domitian had exiled John to the island of Patmos. This was where John was living when he had this vision. But John knew what it was like to be persecuted for his faith. And he knew many others who were suffering greatly. They all were suffering so that the Kingdom of God could be built. They all were suffering so that God's programs might go forward. They all were suffering because of their love for the Lord and their dedication to His cause. But now the scroll containing God's blueprint for the culmination of His programs remained sealed with no one to open it. Could it be that God's program might fail? Could it be that all of the suffering of God's people might be in vain?

Could it be that John himself had gone through the terrifying experience of the boiling oil and the isolation of exile for nothing? We can see why John began to weep because nobody was worthy to open the seal on the scroll.

But suddenly as John's eyes were blinded by his tears, he heard one of the elders introduce the Lion of the tribe of Judah. *Do not weep, John. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its 7 seals.* John looks up through his tears and sees a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne. This Lion-lamb is not hesitant in approaching the throne of God - in fact, he is standing right in the center of the throne with God the Father himself. He has the triumphant power of a lion, and it is obvious that he has triumphed over his own death for he appears like a lamb who has been slain. This Lion-lamb has 7 horns signifying his perfect power - the horn being the symbol of ruling; and he has 7 eyes symbolizing the perfection of his knowledge. This Lion-lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of God and opens its seals setting into motion the culmination of God's great redemptive program and all of the angelic beings and elders immediately begin to sing, proclaiming the Lamb's great power and worthiness to take the scroll and open the seals. For He alone out of all of the creatures in heaven and on earth is worthy to execute God's redemptive program here on the earth - He alone has the inherent power to do so, He alone has the divine authority to do so, He alone is worthy.

We will never have confidence in our Christian lives and faith to attempt the seemingly impossible tasks that God calls us to do unless we see and experience

the power of the Lion-Lamb of God. Jesus Christ is not just powerful because he is able to do mighty deeds like speaking the worlds into existence, but He is powerful just because of who He is. He throbs with power. Power is in His very nature. It was inconceivable that Satan could ever defeat Him because He is omnipotent in power. He alone is worthy of approaching the throne of God and taking the scroll from the right hand of the Father and breaking the seals executing all of God's programs because He being equal with God the Father has divine power. I don't believe that any of us realize the full practical ramifications of this truth in our lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colossae that their hope in this world was the Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn't in the strength of the Roman Empire. It wasn't in the wisdom of Plato's philosophy. It was in the indwelling Christ. *Christ in you, the hope of glory* he wrote in Colossians 1:27. And Paul exemplified his faith in the power of the living Christ in his epistle to the Philippians. As the Apostle sat in his jail cell, he wrote *for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* Phil. 4:11-13.

At first, a person might think it to be delusional for a person sitting in a jail cell to be speaking of being contented and powerful. It might be thought to be somewhat of a fantasy for a person who is being detained against his will to speak of being able to have the power to do everything through the one who gives his

strength. But Paul was never more realistic then when he wrote those words. Paul was more in touch with reality than the Roman soldiers who were guarding him.

You see, the Apostle Paul was one of the few who had been privileged to have a premature Heavenly visit like the Apostle John. Paul had seen the glories of heaven. And Paul had seen firsthand the power of the Lion-lamb of God. Paul had experienced that power when he had been knocked to his knees by the overpowering light on the road to Damascus, and he had seen that power firsthand when he had been welcomed in a vision into heaven. And Paul knew that if Christ were in him, he had unlimited power available in his life so that there was nothing that he couldn't do in the will of God. He could do everything through the Lord Jesus Christ who gave him the strength.

We are living in some very disillusioning days. We are in the middle of a war that often seems to be unwinnable, we have a political situation in the Middle East that seems to be unsolvable, we are continually being told that our planet is headed towards an environmental disaster that is unstoppable, our country is in a moral spiral downward that appears to have no end in sight, we live under the threat of a terrorist attack that we are told will come – it's just a matter of when and where. It is so easy today to become discouraged and depressed, to lose hope for a better future tomorrow. We must continually be reminded that while it is natural for us to love our nation, our faith is not in the United States of America, our faith is not in democracy, but our faith as Christians is in the Lord Jesus Christ who is our true namesake. He alone is worthy because He alone has the power to execute God's redemptive program. God's program is not missing a beat. God's

program is right on schedule. For God alone has the power to execute his will and nothing or nobody can stop it. When the time is right in God's schedule for the scroll to be opened and the culmination of God's plan to be put into motion, the Lion-Lamb will do it. He will do it because he has already triumphed over death, depravity and the Devil. He will do it because he alone is worthy to do it. He will do it because he alone has all-power to execute his will and plan. And if the Lord Jesus Christ is living within us, then we also have the power every day to endure any circumstance victoriously.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power . . .