

Lion of Judah

The Names of Christ:

Revelation 5:1-14

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Names are so important. They provide self-understanding for the named. They also help others relate appropriately: for example, Governor Pawlenty, President Obama, Mayo Brady, Officer O'Hara, General McChrystal, Pastor, Professor, Judge, or whatever. Sometimes, names define work and sometimes they define family. Consider the titles: Miss America, Quarterback, the Electrician, the plumber, the counselor. As believers in Christ, however, we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and identified and as family with God. This is a matter of relationship and being. It goes beyond a work title or a temporary assignment. We also are given other names like saint and disciple, which speak more of our lifelong activities. These titles are also for our self-understanding and for others to relate to us.

At birth, the Christ was given the name Jesus. As Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, he became aware of the names or titles God had prophesied over him. In his ministry, these names directed his activity and helped him relate to God. They also helped God-seekers relate to Jesus. Last week, we considered Jesus title as the *Sun of righteousness*. It is amazing how responding in faith to Jesus in light of that title can help us experience the will of God.

Another revelation of Jesus is the name *Lion of the tribe of Judah* or *Lion of Judah*. My first response to that name was "huh?" Why would God want Jesus to be known as the Lion of Judah?

Have you ever seen a picture of Solomon's throne? (Show the pictures). In 1 Kings 10 we learn the throne has six steps with a lion on each side. The seat of the throne includes two armrests with a lion beside each. Why would King Solomon build a throne with 14 statues of lions? What is significant about the lion?

When Jacob, otherwise named Israel, blessed or prophesied over his sons, he said of Judah:

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. (Genesis 49:8-10, NIV)

Israeli's prophecy reveals that deliverance and leadership will come from Judah's family. The lion of Judah defeats enemies and tears them apart as prey. Fierce and strong, the lion rules until all the nations obey God their creator.

Recognizing this prophecy, Solomon's throne identified the leader of Israel as the lion from the tribe of Judah and the lion of lions. (Reshow the pictures of Solomon's throne.) Indeed, the twelve lions, on the steps below the seat, remind us of the twelve tribes of Israel who bring God's rule to the nations. God establishes his rule on earth through this people as they themselves are lions led by the lion of lions, the Lion of Judah.

In the temple, where people's sins were removed and where they reconnected with God and his favor, basins held water for purification. Beneath each basin and one gigantic basin called a Sea, were decorations that included lions. People were being purified to live as lions under the authority of the lion. God gives to people the power to overcome their enemies.

Through the lion God gives to people power to change the landscape of our lives and communities. We are part of God's powerful plan to bring the nations to obedience.

In Revelation 5, the Apostle John weeps and weeps over a scroll that cannot be opened and read. The meaning of this scroll with writing on both sides and seven seals is not directly revealed, but as we read further in Revelation, its meaning becomes apparent.

When a Sovereign, a Ruler, issued a written decree, someone with authority in the realm the decree covered had to break the seals, unwind the scroll, and put its directions into effect. The order could not be carried out, regardless of the Ruler's desire, until the qualified authority received and read the scroll. The scroll, over which John cried, is the legal decree that removes death and evil from the earth, and restores humanity and all things to their intended design. It is what all humanity yearns for. It is what we've all prayed for. It is what we all cry for. It is God's answer to creation's cries. John weeps because angels do not have the authority on earth and humans have surrendered theirs. The decree remains written as God's will, but unfulfilled.

As John buried his face in tears, an elder wearing a crown said:

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. (Revelation 5:5, NIV)

The lion triumphed. He won the right to open the scroll. He appeared right then, but not with a fierce roar of triumph. John saw him at the center of the throne looking like a lamb that had been sacrificed. Of this sacrifice, the Apostle Paul writes:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15, NIV)

The Lion of Judah acted for our freedom as a lamb. Now, nothing can prevail against us. Even death will not hold us. The seals will be opened, the scroll unfolded and the orders read. Angels will leap into action. God's holy ones, the saints will rule as lions bringing peace. God's will and salvation will be accomplished.

Given this vision and work of Jesus, what do we do? We enter his kingdom through forgiveness. We hold onto no guilt. We let it go. The law that rightly convicts us has been removed by Christ's blood. We now live in the realm governed by the Lion of Judah. His decrees rule our lives. His commands are our orders.

We refuse to define anyone by their sins. We refuse to beat ourselves up, or anyone else for their deeds. The sins are of no account. They have no power over us. Only our choice to embrace the Lion of Judah matters. When we do so, we tend his business that releases others from the rule of their sins. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

As we share in Holy Communion today, I invite you to linger and pray. Rededicate your life to the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ. Receive the victory meal and the assurance that your sins no longer count. Invite the Spirit of the Lord to renew your joy and flood your heart and mind with peace. If you do not taste that peace, if you are troubled by something, whatever it is, I invite you to remain at the altar. Following the service of communion to others, I and others will be glad to join you in prayer. Today is the day for peace.

No matter how difficult the challenge, no matter how great the guilt or profound the fear, the Lion is here and today is a day for victory. Today is the day of salvation. Let the Lion fill your heart with courage, love and passion. Embrace the Lion, for he was sacrifice as your Lamb. His victory is for you!