

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
Text:	Revelation 5:1-14		Gary L. W. Johnson
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THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST

In 2 Corinthians 11:4, the apostle Paul warns about the danger of embracing *another* Jesus – one very different from the *real* Jesus. Today we are swarming with a plethora of them. We have, just to mention a few, the Jesus of the various cults, i.e., Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, the Health and Wealth crowd on PTL, etc. But we also have a large number of *other* ones within the ranks of contemporary Evangelicalism. There is the Jesus who frequently appears in the lyrics from different songs of Christian recording artist Rebecca St. James. In *Take All of Me*, written by Marty Sampson, the first stanza ends with *Take all of me, yeah/all of me*. She also croons, *Take me I am yours* and *All I want is you*, in *Pray*. In her cover of Rich Mullin's *Hold Me Jesus*, she asks Jesus to, well, *hold her* because her life doesn't make sense, and she's *shaking like a leaf*. She adds in another song that she has fallen for Jesus *harder than the first time*. "All of these songs," as Steve Nichols (one of my former students), writes "focus not on any act of God in history, not on the concrete events of Christ's life and death and resurrection. These songs all lack what John Fischer lamented as a great loss, linking Jesus' love not to anything done in history but to the personal experiences of feeling Jesus near, of feeling him close during those hard times. Like a good boyfriend, Jesus shows up at the right moment, says the right thing and knows how to hug. Take out the name *Jesus* that occurs from time to time and these songs could be sung to a boyfriend."¹ It doesn't stop there. Rob Bell flatly declares in his book *Love Wins* that *his* Jesus is so loving that he would *never* send people to hell for an eternity -- which flies in the face of what Jesus actually declared in texts like Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43-48; and Luke 12:5! Then we have Karl Giberson, of BioLogos, announcing on CNN that *his* Jesus believed in Darwinian evolution -- despite the fact that Jesus declared otherwise in Mark 10:6. We need to stop every now and then and consider the *real* Lord Jesus in His glory as well as in His humiliation. The book of Revelation is particularly suited to this purpose. "Herein no small part of the life of the Christian religion doth consist. The humbling of our souls before the Lord Christ, from an apprehension of his divine excellencies -- the ascription of glory, honour, praise, with thanksgiving unto him, on the great motive of the work of redemption with the blessed effects thereof -- are things wherein the life of faith is continually exercised; nor can we have any evidence of an interest in the blessedness which consists in the external assignation of all glory and praise unto him in heaven, if we are not exercised unto this worship of him here on earth."²

I. THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST REVEALED IN HIS NAMES. "Names in Scripture, especially those given by Divine authority, describe, as a rule, the character of the thing or beings who bear them, and particularly is this the case with the names of God and Messiah."³

A. The Lion. Christ is from the tribe of Judah and this is how Jacob blessed his son (Genesis 49:9). The Lion is a symbol of royal majesty and power.

B. The Lamb. The Lamb is depicted as slain. What is the significance about this transition from Lion to Lamb? "You see, the assurance has been given that the Lion has overcome. But the question that is now answered by the appearance of this Lamb is: how and in what capacity has He overcome? Has He gone forth like a roaring Lion, to conquer the

enemy by His royal power? No, the answer to this question is: the Lion of Judah's tribe has overcome in the capacity of a Lamb. In fact, He has done so in the capacity of a Lamb for the slaughter."⁴

II. THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST IN HIS PERSON. The names revealed the unison of the diverse nature of the Lord Jesus.

- A. ***His Infinite Person and His Lowly Condescension.*** The eternal Son of Son, Creator of all, stoops to become man.
- B. ***Infinite Justice and Infinite Grace.*** Christ is the righteous judge and also the One who takes judgment upon Himself. He is infinite in grace and mercy. He is judge and Savior.
- C. ***Absolute Sovereignty and Entire Reliance Upon God.*** Christ has all power and authority and yet He is the most wonderful example of trust and submission to His Father.

III. THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST IN HIS WORK.

- A. ***In the Incarnation.*** This reveals His condescension (Philippians 2:5-11). He humbled Himself and became a man. Even in this, however, is His true dignity manifested. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).
- B. ***In His Sufferings.*** "Christ's humiliation was never so great as it was from the Garden to the Cross."⁵ He manifested love for *both* God and man. His death manifested divine justice and love. Likewise, His own holiness is obvious and yet He suffers in the place of the guilty.
- C. ***In His Exaltation.*** Notice how He is described as the exalted Lion and Lamb. He is royal in His humility. He is still Lion and Lamb.

CONCLUSION: Notice the expression *weep not*. The old commentator, James Ramsey, wonderfully wrote of this passage. "May we, every one, as we read these things, and gaze upon the slain Lamb, catch more and more of its spirit of joyful adoration, and learn to unite in its new song of praise even here on earth. Meanwhile, let every troubled and afflicted believer listen to the cheering words of the elder to the apostle, and from them, and the infinitely glorious fact on which they are based, gather comfort and strength. *Weep not. Weep not* in view of the vast difficulties in working out your own salvation. Your strength is small, indeed, yea, it is nothing; your enemies are mighty; your corruptions are strong, and you may seem to be making little or no progress; so that, perhaps, in the fierce assaults of temptation, and the conscious instability of your own heart, you may sometimes be tempted to regard the issue of the conflict as doubtful. But the question is not one of the comparative strength of yourself and your enemies; it is only whether you are in Christ, and so resting solely on His blood, and righteousness, and Spirit. If you have committed your poor helpless soul to Him, then remember that in that roll the whole conduct of your case is put into His hands, is entrusted to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is not your helper, but your *Saviour*. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. He will be faithful to the trust reposed in Him. *Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. Weep not* in comfortless, heart-broken sorrow under the afflictions which may be pressing so heavily upon you. These are all in covenant; every one of them is recorded in that book in the right hand of Him that sitteth on the throne, as part of the process needed for your purification; and every one of them is administered by the Lamb that was slain for you. The same hand that was nailed to the cross unfolds your whole life's daily history, and does it with unerring wisdom, so as to secure the result promised in the everlasting covenant. *Weep not* in view of the church's sad imperfections, impurities, and backslidings, or of her calamities, and the power and hostility of the world, and the darkness of those dispensations of Providence which seem to remove far distant the period of anticipated triumph. All these apostacies and calamities, all opposition and conflicts, are written in that sealed book; they are, as the succeeding revelations fully prove, part of that vast and wonderful plan which He has chosen, in

order to show to all the universe the dreadful malignity of sin, and the infinite glory of redemption in triumphing over it, and saving the church. The power and love of the slain Lamb presides over the whole. Not only *weep not*, because no created power can be found to give success to the gospel, but rejoice that it is according to the divine plan, in carrying forward this kingdom, to make instrumentalities, contemptible in human eyes, mighty to the pulling down of strong holds. In the confidence of this, go forward daily, in humble, earnest, ceaseless efforts to advance its interests. Let us remember that it is the power of those seven spirits sent forth into all the earth, the almighty, and all-wise, exhaustless influences of the Holy Ghost, which the ascended Redeemer is always sending forth into all the earth to carry on His work, and that their chosen channel is the weak and despised things of the world. How very often that power has made the feeblest efforts produce mighty and glorious spiritual results, when put forth in humble dependence on it alone, the whole history of the church testifies.”⁶

Finally, pay close attention to the centrality of the Lamb as slain (v. 9 and v. 12). Rightly did Herman Bavinck point out, “Scripture regards the entire work of Christ as a fulfillment of God’s law and a satisfaction of his demand. As prophet, priest, and king, in his birth and in his death, in his words and in his deeds, he always did God’s will. He came into the world to do his will. The law of God is within his heart [Ps. 40:8]. His entire life was a life of complete obedience, a perfect sacrifice, a sweet odor to God. That will of God was one, as was the obedience with which Christ submitted to it and the righteousness he accomplished in it. Still, with reference to the obedience he showed, one can distinguish a passive and an active side. For the demand posed by God to fallen humanity was twofold: one, that humans would keep the law perfectly, and two, that they would redress the violation of it by punishment. Twofold also are the benefits that Christ obtained for us, namely, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The two are not identical; justification cannot be automatically equated with heavenly blessedness. Though before his disobedience Adam was righteous, he still had to secure eternal life in the way of works. To bear a punishment is absolutely not as such identical with the observance of the law . . . secure by his obedience. He delivered us from guilt and punishment and placed us at the end of the road that Adam had to walk, not at the beginning. He gives us much more than we lost in Adam, not only the forgiveness of sins and release from punishment but also and immediately – in faith – the not-being-able to sin and not-being-able to die. Those who believe in him are not condemned and have eternal life (John 3:16, 18). The two kinds of benefits, though *in concreto* they can never be separated, are still often mentioned separately side by side (Dan. 9:24; John 3:36; Acts 26:18; Rom. 5:17-18; Gal. 4:5; Rev. 1:5-6). And this is how it is also with Christ’s active and passive obedience. Though distinguishable, concretely they always coincide in the life and death of Christ. Christ’s active obedience is not an external appendage to his passive obedience, nor vice versa. Not a single act nor any single incident in the life or suffering of Christ is exclusively reducible to one or the other. Just as Christ is always and in everything simultaneously prophet, priest, and king, so he is also consistently active in the interest of atoning for the guilt of sin and securing eternal life. It is not even accurate to say that the forgiveness of sins is secured only by his passive obedience and that eternal life is obtained only by his active obedience. For his suffering was not just a matter of bearing the punishment but also an act of fulfilling the law; and his work was not only a matter of fulfilling the law but also an act of bearing its punishment. His activity was suffering and his suffering an action. It was one single work that Christ accomplished, but one so rich, so valuable in the eyes of God, that the righteousness of God was completely satisfied by it, all the demands of the law were fully met by it, and the whole of [our] eternal salvation was secured by it. The satisfactory nature of Christ’s obedience, accordingly, does not consist in that Christ by his blood satisfied a vengeful deity and stilled his hatred and spite by a quantity of suffering; it consists in that, from the beginning to the end of his life, he submitted his will to the complete, perfect, holy, and loving will of God and consecrated himself, with body and soul and all his powers, to being a perfect offering to God. But, according to the teaching of Scripture, that will of God encompassed not only the life but also the suffering of Christ; and that offering consisted not only in his *moral vocation* but also in his death on the cross. Dying, he completed his obedience and consummated his sanctification.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Stephen J. Nichols, *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History From The Puritans To the Passion of the Christ* (IVP, 2008), p. 140.

² *The Works of John Owen* I (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 110.

³ David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory* (rpt. Alpha, 1979), p. 153.

⁴ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh!* (Reformed Free, 1969), p. 173.

⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 1 (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 683.

⁶ J. B. Ramsey, *Revelation: An Exposition of the First II Chapters* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 292.

⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* III (Baker Academic, 2006), p. 394.
