

Lamb & King

Key Text:

John 19:25-27 (NIV)

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman,^[a] here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Revelation 7:9-17 (NIV)

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and **before the Lamb**. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to **the Lamb**."

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of **the Lamb**." ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Introduction

It's an explosion of color. Disorienting. Dizzying. Your kids have just dumped all the puzzle pieces on the table. You turn them over one by one. Carly is sorting out the straight-edged pieces. Once they are all turned over, you wonder, "Will we ever be able to complete it?" It's such a mess! Various pieces with various colors. But then Jacob **grabs the cover of the box and it gives everyone a picture, a pattern that makes sense of this world.** One piece gets joined to another, and slowly this dizzying explosion of color becomes a mountain landscape in the spring.

Experiences in life can be like that puzzle—an explosion of color that doesn't make sense. Jim and Karen visit Jim's dad in the hospital. They have good news. Great news! Karen is pregnant. They have brought along a t-shirt. "World's Greatest Grandpa" it says. Jim's dad smiles. He is overjoyed, but he will never wear that t-shirt. His cancer is aggressive and it's progressing quickly. He will only be with them two more weeks, at most. Emotions of joy. Emotions of sorrow. Juxtaposed to one another like pieces of a puzzle spread out on a table. **"Why?" you want to ask. "What is happening?"**

Sometimes, our lives look like scattered pieces strewn this way and that. They don't make sense. We try to gather them together in a scrapbook. We sort them out in conversation around a table. We select certain pictures and put them on poster board in preparation for a funeral. How do we order these days? What kind of a story do these pieces tell?

Unfortunately, we don't have the cover of a box with a picture on it. **All we have are the promises of God. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth," God says, "so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).** **Although we cannot make sense of our lives, that doesn't mean the pieces don't make sense. There is one for whom they have meaning— God.**

God has ordered our days (Psalm 139:16).

Psalm 139:16 (NIV)

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

He knows the day you were born and the day you will die and every day in between. He has numbered the hairs on your head

Matthew 10:30 (NIV)

³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

and promises to be with you, working in every experience to bring about his good purposes (Romans 8:28).

Romans 8:28 (NIV)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[a] have been called according to his purpose.

Today, God gives us a glimpse of the big picture—a small view of how all of his work fits together. Like a picture on the cover of a puzzle box, this glimpse can give us hope when it is hard to make sense of our lives.

Getting to the Heart

If you have been reading along in the *Crucified. Glorified.* prayer journal, you will remember how the readings last week gave us scenes from the crucifixion of Jesus. We saw Jesus nailed to the cross. Soldiers cast lots for his clothing. Others walked by and mocked him. We heard Jesus cry out. He cried out to God. He spoke to his mother and to his beloved disciple. He even spoke to a criminal. All these bits and pieces of his crucifixion are hard to take in. “Why?” we want to ask. “What is going on?”

Perhaps it would help to have a picture, a glimpse of the cover of the box. Although we can't see everything, God does show us something. He gives us one picture to meditate on and remember: Jesus is both Lamb and King.

Consider the apostle John. He stood there at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother. He saw everything our Lord went through and I'm sure that he felt like his life was shattered. Later, however, John had a vision. A vision that made sense of these things.

John was exiled on the island of Patmos. Our Lord had risen from the dead and sent his disciples out in mission. But it was not as easy as it

sounds. Persecution arose against the Christians. So, when John was exiled on the island of Patmos, Jesus gave him a vision. It was of a lamb seated on a throne.

John saw a “great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). John heard their song, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen” (Revelation 7:12). And in the midst of this vision, in the midst of this crowd, in the midst of this song, John saw “the Lamb in the midst of the throne” (Revelation 7:17). Jesus revealed to John that he is both Lamb and King.

Like a picture on a puzzle box, this one image helps us make sense of God's work in a cross-shattered world.

The cross shattered everything. It shattered the hopes of the Jewish people. For years, they had waited for a Messiah, who would bring the reign of God to earth. They longed for a leader. A strong one who would deliver them from the Romans. But Jesus didn't do that. He died. And he didn't just die, he died on a cross at the hands of the Romans. That shattered their dreams. No wonder some of the disciples walked away with hearts downcast and sad (Luke 24:17–21).

Luke 24:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ “What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

Has God shattered any hopes in your life? Are there any dreams that God hasn't fulfilled?

Sometimes we have the misconception that things will go smoothly once we become a Christian. I don't know where we get this idea. But it wreaks havoc in our lives. We think that once we become a Christian, our struggle with anger will go away. Our bouts with depression will lessen. Our relationship with our kids will get better. Our job will be rewarding. Our dreams will be fulfilled.

Yet, once we become a Christian, life doesn't turn out that way. Instead of God pouring blessings into our lives, it often seems like God is trying to remove blessings. He leads us to situations of heartache where he asks us to share a comforting word. Our marriage needs help. Our kids need guidance. We find ourselves in arguments with friends over the things we believe. We go to a hospital to visit a sick co-worker and spend most of the evening there instead of relaxing at home. Our dreams of a carefree life are not working out, and we wonder, "Is God really at work in all of this mess?"

"Yes," John says. Yes! Why? Because Jesus is both Lamb and King. Jesus rules over all things in love, even in the midst of suffering. Love and power. That's what we find in Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus has a love that suffers and dies for you. And Jesus is the King, the Lord, who rules over all things. Jesus' power is at work in all things. Love that dies for you and power that rules over all things for you—that's what we find in Jesus. No matter how shattered life looks, no matter how confusing the pieces are, these two things will always be true: Jesus loves and Jesus rules—for you.

John knew this when he wrote his Gospel. In the first chapter, when Jesus appears, John the Baptist points to him and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The very first thing that the disciples hear about Jesus is that he loves. He will die to take away sin. He does what no one else could do. He offers his perfect, sinless life as a sacrifice for you.

But the Lamb who dies is also the King who rules. Throughout the Gospel, John gives us glimpses of the power of Jesus. He turns water into wine. He feeds more than five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. He walks on water. He opens the eyes of the blind. He raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus is king over all creation and has power over death.

Now, it would be easy to separate these two things. It would be easy to focus only on Jesus as King. We could look at his miracles and see his compassion and think, "This is the God for me. If I believe in Jesus, if I follow Jesus, then he will do great miracles for me."

But John wants you to know that Jesus is both Lamb and King. He is Lord of all, but he is also Servant of all. Right now, he doesn't come to take away suffering as much as he comes to work in its midst. He rules with dying love. Jesus sends his people into situations of suffering to share the powerful sacrificial love of God.

Yes, there will come a day when Jesus will return in great power. He will open the heavens, raise the dead, punish the wicked, put an end to evil, and bring about a new creation for the faithful. But until that day, Jesus will rule this world in dying love. That's how this Lamb is King. He enters into a place of dying and rules in sacrificial love.

And, today, he calls you to follow him, to live in his dying love.

Taking It Home

What does it mean to live in Jesus' dying love?

First, it means that we confess our sins to God our Father, trusting that, because of Jesus, God forgives you. Jesus makes you right with God.

Have you ever seen parents who realize that their child has wandered off in the grocery store? They leave their cart in the middle of the aisle and start looking around. One has the manager make an announcement. The other runs out into the parking lot. Their love will not stop until they find their child and bring him home. God's love is even greater than this! God the Father sent his Son into this world to find you, lost in your sin, and to bring you home. When Jesus was crucified, we heard this mission.

Remember what he said? He cried out to God: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Yes, Jesus was dying, but he was also bringing us life. Life with our heavenly Father. So, to live in his dying love means to come before him now and confess your sin. God, your Father, forgives your sin because of Jesus' dying love.

Second, it means that we live with hope amidst this cross-shattered world. Life does not suddenly become easier just because you are a Christian. Peter tells us, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a

roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Suffering will come. And it is so easy to feel defeated. We think that we must be doing something wrong, that God has abandoned us or, worse yet, is punishing us.

But God has not abandoned us, and he is not punishing us. Jesus has come as the Lamb and has borne the punishment of our sin. He now rules as the King. For that reason, we live in hope.

The One who loves us so much that he gave his life for us now rules over all things and works through them. He works *through* suffering, not apart from it. As Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NIV)

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

Jesus is King and rules over all things for us. But Jesus is also the Lamb and sends us forth into the world to live in his dying love.