

Text: Genesis 49:8-12

Title: "Praise for the Lion of Judah"

Time: Sunday, Nov 1, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: An exceptional message I remember was preached on Revelation 5 when I was a college student in the 1980's. I attended church during that time at Trinity Bible Church, where a BJU professor was the pastor, Dr. Stewart Custer. As a child he had been struck with rheumatic fever five times, and the fifth episode also brought heart failure. Laid up for 5 years, he did little else but read, and it was during that time that he read the Bible and came to trust Christ as his Savior. Dr. Custer has been a physically frail but brilliantly well-read servant of the Lord (note his book: *Tools for Teaching and Preaching the Bible*).

Dr. Custer's message on Revelation 5 has remained with me because in it he pointed out that as John weeps over the lack of one who is worthy to open the book, the Lion of the tribe of Judah appears. And when John turned to see the Lion, he saw a Lamb standing as if slain. As Dr. Custer pointed this out, his voice cracked and tears began to role down his cheeks. The Lion became the Lamb who was slain for our sins.

We first read of this wonderful Lion of the tribe of Judah in the prophecies of Jacob to his sons in Genesis 49. We have seen the import of the messages to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. And now we come to Judah in verses 8-12. There are two emphases in this prophecy for Judah, which center on the Lion we read about in Revelation 5, and verse 8 provides a nice summary of these themes: the Lion of Judah shall be praised by His brothers; and the Lion of Judah shall be praised by His enemies.

I. The Lion of Judah shall be praised by His brothers (vv. 8, 10).

Application: We have seen at the beginning of the prophecies about each son a unique emphasis. For Reuben, it was that he was Jacob's firstborn (v. 3). For Simeon and Levi, it was that they were brothers (v. 5). For Judah, the emphasis at the beginning of his prophecy is on his name. In the original text, the pronouns *you* and *your* appear three times, but our English translations typically only manage to

get two of these into their translation. Very literally, the prophecy begins “You are Judah; your brothers shall praise you.” Just like the Reuben prophecy began “you are my firstborn,” the Judah prophecy begins “You are Judah.” There is an emphasis on Judah’s name in this prophecy.

Judah got his name back in Genesis 29:35. It means “Praise be to Yahweh.” So with the prophecy before us in chapter 49, Jacob says to his son, “Your name is ‘praise be to Yahweh’; your brothers shall praise you.” The prophecy is telling us that there is a sense in which Judah would be praised just like Yahweh was to be praised. This is a prophecy about the incarnation of Yahweh through the line of Judah. We see evidence of this truth also in the nature of the praise of the brothers. Notice two things about the nature of this praise.

A. The brothers praise the Lion of Judah with their worship, so the Lion is God (“Your father’s sons shall bow down to you”, v. 8; see Ps. 45:6-7 and Heb. 1:8-9).

When we think of brothers bowing to siblings in the lives of the patriarchs, we normally think of Joseph’s dreams. The brothers bowed to Joseph in fulfillment of those dreams, because Joseph was Pharaoh’s assistant and his brothers were showing him respect. This never happens for Judah.

But notice that the prophecy here does not use the word “brother” to describe those who would bow to the Lion of Judah. It calls those who would bow to him “the sons of your father.” This is undoubtedly more than just another way to say “brother.” The Apostle Paul tells us of a special sense in which the sons of Jacob are the sons of promise, not sons of the flesh (Rom. 9:8). He also tells us that the sons of Abraham are those who share the faith of Abraham, not the blood of Abraham (Rom. 4:11-12).

The point Jacob is making here is that we who have believed the promise of God’s salvation in the Lion of the tribe of Judah are sons of the same Father with Him (Rom. 8:29: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”). Jesus Christ is our brother, the unique Son of our Father, and we are to

bow before him in worship because He is God. We are going to read about His scepter, but notice what the Psalmist says about this scepter in Ps. 45:6. The scepter belongs to God, who became a man in the lineage of Judah (Heb. 1:8).

Do we understand the importance of worshipping the Lion of the tribe of Judah this morning? We are called as sons of His Father to bow before Him, for He is God. When we stand before Him face to face someday, we shall not regret the time we spent bowing before Him while on our pilgrimage here. We will regret the many things that kept us from doing so faithfully. We need to put away those things that keep us from bowing in worship before our Holy God, our elder Brother, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who gave His all for us as the Lamb of God slain for our sins from the foundation of the world. There are three important worship responsibilities that the Scriptures call for from us:

1. Personal worship must be a very high priority (Ps. 63). Christianity is a personal relationship – everything begins here. We may have to miss “Good Morning America” or something else in order to establish this priority in our lives.

2. Family worship must be a very high priority (Ps. 127:1, Eph. 5:26, 6:4).

3. Local church assembled worship must be a very high priority (Heb. 10:21-25). Those who make assembly worship a top priority draw near, hold fast, and find encouragement for good works.

B. The brothers praise the Lion of Judah with their obedience: the Lion is Sovereign (v. 10; the scepter).

Illustration: Francis Rous was a puritan member of Parliament during the turbulent years of English history that saw the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell to the position of Lord Protector after the civil war. Rous was one of the government officials who were tasked with persuading a reluctant Cromwell to take the position he came to hold over the newly established Commonwealth. This new Protestant government established by men like Rous came under criticism because it had resulted from a coup. They had executed

King Charles I. The lawfulness of the new government was also brought into question because of something called “the English Oath of Allegiance,” which bound English citizens to loyalty to the king, his successors, and his heirs. Rous wrote a pamphlet dealing with this objection. He understood the difficulty of transferring the scepter from the line of the previous king to Cromwell.

Application: No such difficulty exists for the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He need not worry about his legitimacy, because the scepter never departs from Him, until Shiloh comes. In order to understand this, we must understand what “Shiloh” refers to. Shiloh was a city in Ephraim that does not factor into the history of Israel in much of a prominent way. For this reason, Bible students believe that the Shiloh of this prophecy must refer to something other than that city. Alexandrian Jews translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek a few hundred years prior to the time of Christ. Their Greek translation of the OT is called the Septuagint. When they came to this word *Shiloh*, the Alexandrian Jews broke the word down into three parts: *Shi* = *He*; *l* = *belongs to*; *oh* = *it*; and they translate *Shiloh* “He to whom it belongs,” referring to the scepter. Understood this way, the right to rule symbolized by the scepter and the promise of the Lawgiver would not depart from Judah, until He to whom the scepter belonged came. When He comes, the peoples shall obey him in a universal sense. The second coming of Christ is in view where the scepter symbol is used in Old Testament theology (note Num. 24:17, star = first coming; scepter = second coming).

So what must be different about you and I given that this is true, that the right to rule and the promised universal Lawgiver or Governor shall not depart from Judah until He comes to whom all this belongs? Very simply, we must be willing by faith in this promise to obey Him now, for He has come. We live in a world that does not think that it needs to do so, a world that assumes that the promise of the scepter and universal Lawgiver from Judah has failed. Psalm 2 calls this line of thinking “imagining a vain thing.” The psalmist mentions the scepter there also (v. 9, “rod” is the same word as “scepter”). How has your willingness to obey the Lion of the tribe of Judah been of late? All He asks of us is to be faithful. We do not have to be successful or influential, only obedient. Understand three

important emphases of Scripture when it comes to obeying the Lord.

1. Obey the Lord's gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-12). This is a decision involving eternal consequences.
2. Obey the Lord's ordinance of baptism (Acts 2:38). This is the very first command communicated to a believer in Jesus Christ.
3. Obey the Lord's commission (Matt. 28:19-20). The mission of the church can be summarized as teaching people to obey all of the Lord's commands.

II. The Lion of Judah shall be praised by His enemies (vv. 8-9, 11-12).

Illustration: When I was growing up, ABC had a show on TV on Saturday afternoon that was dedicated to sports events. It was called the "ABC Wide World of Sports." They claimed on that show to bring their audience the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Those two things go together in competition.

Application: It is in this sense that the enemies of the Lion bring praise to Him. They bring Him the thrill of victory by suffering the agony of defeat. It is in this sense that the Lion of Judah shall be praised by His enemies, and I believe that this prophetic oracle hints at four episodes of victory in the warfare of the Lion against his enemies.

1. The Lion wins the victory through His nativity ("The lion's welp," v. 9). Victory over Satan's enmity.

Illustration: A lion's welp is a very small cub. We have a small dog at home, as you know, named Dixie. Dixie is about 5 months old now, and we can still call her a puppy, but we would not call her a welp. A welp refers to an animal that has not yet been weaned off its mother.

Application: The text says that Judah is a lion's welp, and it does so in a context that focuses on the victory and power of the lion. Now

if we remember that Judah is a symbol of Yahweh incarnate in the line of Judah in this oracle, we will see the significance of His being a welp. This clearly speaks of the victory accomplished by the lion through His nativity.

The birth of Christ was a great victory. For this understanding, perhaps it is best to go back to Genesis 3:15, where the promise of Christ's birth first appears. That Christ should be born meant that the enmity of the serpent had failed to stop His birth. It was a great victory that had the emissaries of the serpent trembling in Christ's day. They sought to kill Him shortly after He was born (Matt. 2:11-18). Christ was victorious over the enmity of the serpent, and we shall be too. The promise of Hebrews 13:5-6 is ours: "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'"

2. The Lion wins the victory through His death and resurrection ("from the prey you shall go up," v. 9). Victory over the grave.

Application: The phrase "from the prey you shall go up" is a striking one. We do not normally think of lions going up from the prey; we think of them devouring the prey and then perhaps getting up from it after consuming it, and that is the sense in which most commentators understand this phrase. I found that understanding a bit unsatisfying, because I wondered why going up from the prey is emphasized rather than devouring the prey. The only other passages I could find that described a lion as "going up" are Jer. 49:19 and 50:44, which speak of a lion springing forth from thick underbrush growing along the River Jordan.

I believe that we have here a symbolical prophecy of the victory of the resurrection of Christ, the Lion's "upgoing from prey." If we think of the prey as death and the going up as the resurrection from this enemy, then we see that this is a victory we all need. Paul taunts this defeated foe in the great resurrection chapter of the New Testament, 1 Cor. 15:51-57. Death is defeated because the Lion of the tribe of Judah has gone up from His prey. Sickness has lost its sting; cancer has lost its sting; death has lost its victory; the grave has lost its victory.

3. The Lion wins the victory through His exaltation ("he crouches and lies down; who shall raise him up?" v. 9).

After going up from his prey, the lion is described as crouching and lying down. It is as though there is a period of inactivity that ensues before we get to the coming of Shiloh in v. 10, He to whom the scepter belongs. This is a time in which the enemies of the Lion must be careful not to wake Him.

Illustration: I read a news article dating back to October 2003 about the gruesome Tiger attack on Roy Horn of Siegfried and Roy. Mr. Horn was critically injured after being latched on to by the Tiger in the neck and then being dragged off a Las Vegas stage. The news article described how no one in the audience thought that anything was wrong when this happened, thinking that it was just part of the show. The audience had somehow forgotten that they were watching men who were dealing with an animal with truly destructive power.

Application: We live in a world that has forgotten that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has truly destructive power. He is ascended, and so people imagine that he is gone for good, that He need not be taken seriously anymore. Ps. 110 describes the ascension as a time of waiting before final victory. Ps. 2 speaks of this mindset of the powerful in the earth who taunt the Lion as though He were powerless, simply because he has laid down for a little while. To fail to see the victory of Him who sits in heaven today at the right hand of God the Father is to imagine a vain thing. We need to be ready for His coming, thankful that His judgment tarries, busy about the work He has given us to do.

4. The Lion wins the victory through establishing His kingdom (the foal tied to the vine; the washing with grapes, v. 11-12). Victory over the present suffering.

These are verses that describe the final victory of the kingdom of the Lion of Judah. You will be able to tie your donkey to a vine of grapes and not worry about the loss of grapes. You will be able to wash your clothes in liquid normally reserved for nourishment and sustenance. The mortal shall have put on immortality, so that eyes will have a healthy gleam like the redness of wine, and teeth will be

whiter than milk. There will be no dentists in that day. No cataract surgery or dentures. The streets will be paved with gold.

Conclusion: Paul understood that this truth of the future of Judah's Lion ought to encourage us now: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." This Lion is our Lamb, slain for our sins from the foundation of the world. He is worthy to take the scroll of the title deed of the universe, to open it in final judgments, and to make His claim.

This truth challenges our lives to praise the Lion now in a world that believes He no longer matters. May we be faithful brothers of this unique and glorious Son of our Father.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*