

Topic	The tale of the lion, the root and the lamb: the true nature of power
Reference	Matthew 2:5
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Morning, First Baptist Church. We are now on 29th of November, four more weeks to Christmas, this period of the church calendar is called The Advent. It is when we prepare for the coming of the Lord. And so what we're going to do is have a series of sermons that actually tell of the coming of the Lord. We usually deal a little bit of prophecies during this particular time. So today topic of the sermon is the tale of the lion, the root and the lamb: the true nature of power. We will look into the three prophecies about the coming of Jesus. So let's start with a word of prayer.

Lord, we ask that you be with us this morning, help us understand the prophecies that talk of the coming of your son. We pray O Lord that these will guide us to understand the nature of true power in our lives, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now let's get started with the Wiseman and Herod, Matthew chapter 2. You remember the wise men were following a star and they were following the star and they came upon Herod and Herod was asking, why are you following the star? Well, because they had a prophecy. And this is the prophecy, Matthew 2:5.

5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

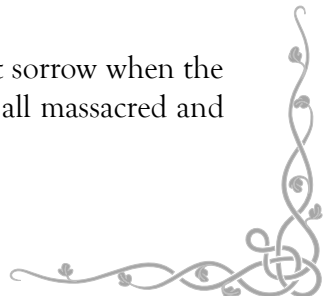
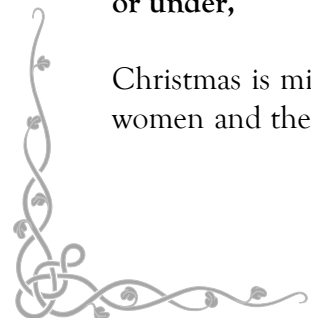
So this is a prophecy, which is told of the coming of a new ruler, a King, which the wisemen were trying to follow. On the other side of the field, far away, there was a bunch of shepherds and when Jesus was born, they shouted out.

Luke 2:10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And here you actually have two scenes. On one hand, the scene of joy. On the other hand, the massacre of the innocents.

Matthew 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under,

Christmas is mixed. On one hand news of a great joy. On the other hand news of great sorrow when the women and the mothers are all crying because their children under the age of two were all massacred and



that's the irony of Christmas, isn't it. And the irony is because of the misunderstanding of power. Herod the great at that time, when he heard there was a new ruler coming, when he heard there was a new King coming, he got afraid. There was a clash of power. And if you actually understood Herod the great, he was a terrible ruler. He had 10 wives and he had children of the three wives actually killed. He was so paranoid about losing power that when his brother-in-law invited the chief priest to come to his swimming pool, he actually was worried that they were planning a coup. So he had his brother-in-law killed. He had his favorite wife, Mariam killed. He had her grandfather killed and this is the kind of person he was and when he realized there was a new ruler coming, there was a King coming on, he immediately felt his power was threatened and therefore he reacted.

Here we have Jesus, coming into Jerusalem and just for the Passover riding a donkey, he was adulated by the crowd. He had the power of the crowd and this actually caused the Roman, the Jewish authorities and Romans actually put him to death not soon after this. Just like Herod, China's leaders, president Xi Zin Pin is terrified of religion, just like President Mao in those days. Religion, he says, represents a threat to his authority, a potential Achilles' heel of the communist infrastructure.

Reinhold Niebuhr, who was basically one of the most foremost theologians in America actually wrote about society. He said, *all life is an expression of power. Human life as other life must have power to exist. The relationship of life to life is therefore a relationship or power to power.*

And it's true, isn't it. If you look in our own society, there are different centers of power, whether it be government, whether it be the rulers, whether it be the courts, family, political powers, even in church. They all exists in power relationships. Each one is trying to vie for power in a struggle, in a competition. We can see how finally after so many years, the government change hand and since then power struggles between these two men. And after that new government comes to the place, power struggle between these two and then current more power struggle. There seems to be a linear characteristic of power. I've got power and you want it, and that's the problem.

We even see this power struggle in families, husband and wives, teenagers rebelling against the authority of their parents.

Why can't we forgive each other? We have a discussion on with the word comes to life, why can't we forgive each other? Because when you actually hurt someone else, we have diminished their power. We cannot forgive because we have lost the power and we want it back.

Look at Jesus's own disciples, John 15,

Perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him King, Jesus withdrew again into the mountains by himself.

See, even with the people, when they saw that Jesus did miracles, Jesus fed the 5,000, immediately they recognize this is a center of power. The dynamics of the nation will change and suddenly they want to make him King and overthrow the government of the Romans. What about Jesus' own disciples?
James and John, Matthew 10:37.

And they said to him, “Grant us to sit one on your right hand and one on your left, in your glory.

What about Peter? When they came to arrest Jesus,

John 18:10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.

Jesus, thankfully put it back. So this misunderstanding of power even bleeds into the church where a lot of churches will relish having spiritual power. Why do we want spiritual gifts? Because spiritual gifts represent spiritual power, power which we can weal and change the dynamics between relationships.

Christmas unveils the true nature of power. We misunderstand power. True power comes from God and we cannot understand it apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ that we understand the true nature of power. So today we're going to look at three passages. One is Genesis 49. We're going to look at the lion. We're going to look at the shoot or the root of Jesse, Isaiah 11, a very famous prophecy about the coming of Jesus and we're looking to look at the lamb, which is Revelations 5:8. We're going to learn that from the metaphor of the lion in Jesus when God reveals the lion nature of power is to serve. The shoot: the aim of power is righteousness. And lastly, the lamb, the effect of power is transformation. Therefore we learn from the lion, the root and the lamb. Let's look at the nature of power.

Now we go back to Genesis 49 and here is the time where Jacob is about to pass on. He gathered his 12 sons together and he is starting to distribute power, starting to prophesize and tell of their future. Genesis 49,

1 Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. 2 “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father.

So here is a somber period of time, and I suppose Jacob understands this more than most because he's the one who tricked his father to give him the blessing when that time came. Now each son comes forward and there is a defining characteristic of each son, which then determines the prophecy about his future. And here we have Reuben, the number one son, and this is what he says,

3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

Here's the guy who is number one, bristling with power. If is anybody a workout with biceps that was him. He's the first born. His might, firstfruits of his strength, preeminent, indignity, but

4 Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!

You know what happened? Reuben had sex with Jacob's concubine and it's really demeaning and loss of face. So what happened to Reuben. Reuben was the one who was most powerful, but he used his power for self-advancement and that was his defining characteristic. The next prophecy comes to Simeon and Levi. And Simeon and Levi he says,

5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen.

So what they did was because of the rape of the sister, Diana, they went into the men of Shechem and they killed many many men in retaliation for that one sin against sister. They had the power and they used their power to dominate others. That was their defining characters. And because of that, Jacob cursed them.

7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

He finally comes to the fourth brother Judah. The tune changes, instead of cursing he describes a blessing and he says to Judah,

8 “Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you.

This is, he is destined for glory. For everybody else this is the one that got the blessing, which everybody wants. And as an illustration of this blessing,

9 Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

Which is a picture of power, he describes the metaphor illustration of his power is like a lion. And if you look at the ancient near East, the lion is the metaphor image of great power. You can see these on the walls of Babylon, statues and murals. There'll be a blessing of royalty.

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute (Shiloh which means Messiah) comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Which means people will be ruled by his descendant and to illustrate how great this is

11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

So here is the illustration of how beautiful he is, illustration of how rich he will be, because you don't take your donkey, you don't take your donkeys colt you tie him to the vine because the vine is so precious and he's going to eat up the vine. Right and he washes his garments in wine, which is the same thing as if you win in a race, you take a champagne and you pour all over the place, right? So that's a picture of abundance.

Now why if all the brothers, even Joseph, he doesn't get this. What is the defining characteristic of Judah for him to get this blessing and not Joseph and not anybody else? What's so special about him after all. This is a guy attempted murderer of his brother. This is a guy who sold his brother into slavery. This the guy who deprived his daughter-in-law of marrying his sons. And so therefore he also had sex with his daughter-in-law, nobody else has done.

And that if you look back at each of the patriarchs, book of Genesis, each of them have their own defining characteristics;

- Abraham faith,
- Isaac obedience,
- Jacob struggling with God and submission to him,
- Joseph obedience through all the difficulties in life.

But what was the defining characteristic of Judah that made him deserve as it were this particular blessing? Well, it's sacrifice. Here was a situation where Benjamin, the youngest brother would have been trapped as the hostage because of a setup when they were in Egypt. Joseph had placed treasures in his bag and he was caught with it and he would have been under the threat of being held as a slave in Egypt. It is through this dire situation where Judah stepped up and he said,

Genesis 44:32... 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' 33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.

What was Judah doing? This is a chap who sold Joseph. This is the chap who had sex with his daughter in law. This is the chap when the moment came when his brother's life was again on the threat, he had changed, he had transformed. He offered himself to be a slave and here we can see that true power, the nature of true power is to be expended sacrificially in the service of others. Genesis 43:8, when he talks to his father, he tells his father I will be a pledge for Benjamin's safety. So here we have in Genesis 49, a comparison Judah versus his three other brothers. Reuben power for self, Simeon and Levi power used to dominate others, Judah, power used to serve and to sacrifice. That is the nature of true power, the power to serve.

The second thing is that we understand that the aim of power is righteousness.

Let's look at Isaiah that famous prophecy in Isaiah about the coming of Jesus. We all know this.

There shall come forth a from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots and it shall bear fruit.

So it's a stump from Jesse, a shoot or a root at a brunch from his root that shall back fruit. Look at the prophecy,

Isaiah 11:2 And the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of God.

So here we actually have spiritual wisdom and might. So when Jesus comes, he will be a person. This Messiah would be the one where the Spirit will rest on him, that who has a spirit of wisdom and understanding and of might and knowledge and then in Isaiah 11:3

3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

What's Isaiah saying? When this Messiah comes, he will provide righteousness. People will be put into right relationship with each other, all the wrongs in the world, all the pain in the world, relationship will be put right.

and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

And last thing is actual justice. He will bring godly wisdom, righteousness and justice, and the results of this, if you have godly wisdom, you got righteousness and you've got justice,

6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

What righteousness achieves is perfect peace and flourishing among God's creation, which has now been torn apart. What righteousness will achieve is peace.

9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all of my Holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,

The power will come. And that right relationship requires accountability and Jesus will bring that. And so when Jesus comes Matthew chapter 1:17, all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations from David to deportation to Babylon 14 generations and from the deportation of Babylon to Christ 14 generations, there's a link that Isaiah prophecy comes through from the lion of Judah to the shoot of Jesse right down to Jesus Christ. If you see recently in the United States, elections, all elections are interactions of power and even though you win an election, like Joe Biden did, the net result is still a power struggle. Half the country thinks he is a liar and he stole the election, half the country supports him. The net result is still disunity. The lion is not going to lie down with the lamb. It is not the idealized setting or the result which the Messiah will bring.

Look at the recent conflict in Armenia versus Azerbaijan. They are fighting over a small piece of real estate called the Nagorno Karabakh. This is a place where ethnic Armenians are. In 1980 to 1994 they had a great war there and thousands and thousands of people were killed. In the end, this area became semi-autonomous and ruled by the Armenians. And then now in the recent fight, Azerbaijan comes in and it then attacks this area and then ownership passes to Azerbaijan and Russia supports Armenia, Turkey supports Azerbaijan. Again, the tussle of power never results in peace. It's just changing the furniture.

Look at Scarborough Shoal. An ideal island in the middle of the South China sea, fighting over by China and Philippines. The world tribunal court of justice has ruled that this belongs the Philippines. China doesn't accept it. So, you can actually have righteousness, but you could be on right side of law, but if you don't have the power to enforce it, you can't do anything.

I remember this, very interesting movie called Bruce Almighty, where Jim Carrey acting as Bruce was given the power of God and people emailing prayers to him. And what he did was because he wanted to be a good God he answered all the emails in the affirmative. He answered everything in affirmative because he is a good God and he thought that's the way I will rule the world, I am not like the current God and in the end it was great disaster because everybody's desires actually were in conflict with each other. The aim of righteousness is not to be used for yourself but used to be serve. But the aim of power is to actually achieve righteousness. Right relationship with each other.

Lastly, the effect of power is transformation.

You look at the scene in heaven, painted by the apostle John and what John hears is that there is a lion. And one of the elders said to me, weep no more. Why the people in heaven are not actually weeping, the elders are weeping and the angels are weeping, is because they have to open the scroll. There is this scroll that when you open it, it actually is the plan of God for salvation for the whole entire world is unfolded when the seals are broken, nobody could actually touch it. Nobody could actually open it, nobody could take this scroll for the right hand of God and they say who is going to do it.

And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; (John was weeping because nobody was qualified to take that scroll). Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has conquered, so he can open the scroll and in its seven seals,

That is what he hears and what he sees is and between the throne and the four living creatures among the elders, I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain. What John hears is a lion. What John sees is actually a lamb. And so therefore this mixed metaphor tells us the power of the lion resides in the lamb. It's paradoxical and it's the most important paradox in the whole Christian experience of the power the lion resides in the lamb. That's real power, real power for transformation.

Mao Zedong said years ago, all political power comes from the barrel of a gun. Herod believed it that is why he massacred the all the children under two. And if we look at the history of the world where every dictator comes on, they use power to subjugate but it all ends up badly. Look at Mao Zedong, the great leap forward. He forced took away farms from all the Chinese villages and made them into collectives to

improve output. He wanted to double the output of steel in his country in just one year. Double it in one year. So he made them, everybody had a backyard home made furnace and they burned. They used wood, they used furniture, they used trees, when they got no more furniture, they use their houses to burn and to make very poor quality pig iron, which ended in disaster and what happened was the great Chinese famine where 18 to 45 million people lost their lives in famine because of this exercise of power.

He wanted revolution, but you can't achieve a revolution without transformation. Here is Polpot 1975 to 1978. He thought all the evils of society are the rich people, the educated people, the people who subjugate the poor. So therefore he started killing everybody who wore glasses, everybody who was educated, everybody was rich. All the teachers, all the nurses, he killed them all. And he marched everybody back into the villages to start over again, reboot call year zero. It didn't work out because you cannot transform men's hearts.

What about Mahatma Gandhi? Mahatma Gandhi took a page from Jesus Christ, revolutionary nonviolence. He stood against the British colonial powers, and he said at first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you and then you win. He actually won using nonviolent peaceful means against the British Empire. He overthrew them. Did it result in the lion, lying down the lamb and peace and righteousness in the world. It didn't because despite his efforts or using the Jesus life principle, if you look at Kashmir, you look at a Bangladesh, you look at Punjab. It is a cauldron of seeding, animosity, and conflict even to this day, you cannot achieve it.

The crusaders thought all you have to do is put on the cross. The KKK says put on the cross and you can use power for yourself. The roots of evangelical political fervor is a retro report that came out recently. They actually tracked how come 80% of white evangelicals in America support Donald Trump. Who's clearly got character issues. Why is that? Actually you trace it from the retro report, it traces all the way back to Jimmy Carter who called himself a Christian and then it was, who took on the mental of the champion for the Christian cause. Then it was Ronald Reagan. Then it was George Bush and each of them sided with the Christians, Christian sided with them to gain political power to ensure righteousness in the land. However, it turned out badly. This is Cal Thomas, one of them who is a member of the moral majority. And he writes.

The evangelicals are missing a greater point. If you're not careful, the political activism overwhelms the primary message, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only thing that is able to really truly change your life and by extension change a nation. And no politician can fill that role.

What he is saying is after a while the evangelicals was so obsessed with going near the proximity to power that they forgot that their primary message is actually one in which you transform lives. Only Jesus Christ, only the gospel can transform lives, legislation cannot. And so therefore we come back to Christmas where the angels say,

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord.

We need a savior and when the lion becomes a lamb, he becomes a savior. Transformation occurs when the lion is the lamb. When Jesus says come to me all you who are burdened because I'm gentle. He didn't come to be served, but to serve. He didn't come to take her arms, but to take up a cross. He lays his life as an atonement of sin for all these people and precisely he is the most powerful when he is most powerless. The most powerful moment in Jesus' life was when he was lying on the cross. When the lion becomes the lamb power causes transformation.

Christmas is not about giving. If you think it's all about giving, it's not, it's about dying. It's about giving up power. What about husband and wife? Bible tells you, Paul tells you, women are to submit, they don't like that. Men at the sacrifice, they don't like that either. And so there is a gap between submission because if I submit but he doesn't sacrifice. I sacrifice and she doesn't submit there's a gap. You know what happens? The gap is filled by God's power and God's spirit.

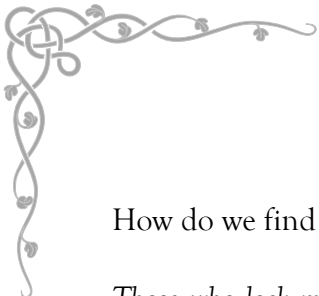
What about the victim and offender? How do we find forgiveness? How can I forgive that person who has hurt me so badly, who may have raped somebody in my family or hurt someone or murdered someone. How do I fill this gap? Well, Christ's death fills the gap between victim and offender. How could Jacob submit to his brother, Esau, Joseph, forgive his brothers. How can Jacob hang on to God instead of trying to overpower it, each of them have understood that the center of power is when you actually give up power and you trust God to fill the gap in your life.

Look at Abraham and Sarah, promised to have a child and they waited 20 years, In these 20 years, they tried to fill the gap. She tried to fill the gap with Hagar to give birth to Ishmael, it didn't work. He tried to fill the gap by saying, hey Lord, I've waited this long time. So why don't you take my servant Eliezer? We see, we all try to fill the gap because we believe power is linear. And so therefore who fill the gap, God filled the gap. God filled the gap with a son, Isaac, ultimately, because God fills in the gap. We can be others-centered and community driven. We can be instead of upwardly mobile we can be downwardly mobile because we're trying to serve. We can attend to people's emotional and physical needs as well as the spiritual needs and we don't have to be flashy but we have to be enduring. You know why God fills in the gap.

I was watching a video recently of Joseph Stonewall, who was giving talks on the seven churches of Asia Minor. And he had received information from Chinese Christian leaders who were being persecuted. And then when he asked for their prayer points, he would expect them to ask him to pray in America that God will lift away all the persecution. Actually, the Chinese leaders did not do that. You know, what they asked. They asked that they pray that they endure, they find endurance during this time of persecution. You know why? Because they believe God fills in the gap.

Pastor Wang Yi in December last year jailed for inciting subversion, which is what the communist party will do to you when you don't want to obey them. And this is what he wrote before he was thrown into prison. He says,

If this regime is one day overthrown by God, it will be for no other reason than God's righteous punishment and revenge for this evil. For on earth, there is only ever been a thousand-year church. There has never been a thousand-year government. There's only eternal faith. There is no eternal power.



How do we find endurance? Because God fills in the gap.

Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels. Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ. When I think of this, the Lord fills me with a natural compassion and grief towards those who are attempting to an actively imprisoning me.

You see, how do we find forgiveness? Because God fills in the gap. Here we have a picture of Jesus Christ. I want to give you a couple of pictures to end this sermon of Jesus Christ riding into Jerusalem for Passover. He rides on a donkey instead of a stallion, and it has got children. You will notice every picture that I show you that will have Jesus riding a donkey and how the artists have depicted him. Children always welcoming him. Again, here, we can see the donkey with children before him and this last one. And it's a perfect picture of power. Kingdom power is unleashed by humility, vulnerability and gentleness. The authorities crucify him not long after this. Do you know why? Because they assume he is after their power. You see, but when we look at the lion, the root and the lamb. How do you make a triumphal entrance? You ride on a donkey, not on a horse. How do you accomplish God's purpose? You die on a cross.

Humility and gentleness is how you change the world. Being a servant of all unleashes the power of the kingdom. That is the message of Christmas. May God bless all of you as we meditate on the true nature of power in the lion, the root and the lamb.