

The Lamb on the Throne

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[0 : 01] Well, good morning. In the book of Job, Eliphaz says man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Imagine sparks rising from a campfire, they always go up. That's their natural order. Eliphaz says just as certain as those sparks will go up, we will run into trouble sooner or later.

We can't avoid it. That's a consequence of living in a sinful fallen world. I should also note that Eliphaz isn't talking about mere inconveniences or little disappointments that we will also inevitably face in this life.

He has real trouble in mind, be it injury or sickness or heartbreak or loss. He's thinking about truly devastating calamities.

Furthermore, no one is exempt. He doesn't say man or a man is born to trouble. Man is born to trouble. Humanity is born to trouble.

[1 : 09] Mankind is born to trouble. We all experience some kind of trouble eventually. Earlier this year, I met with a gentleman who wanted to plan his father's funeral arrangements in advance.

His father had just been moved into a hospice care facility. Just the day before, he had not eaten or drank anything for a couple of days.

And it was relatively clear to all involved that he was in the active stage of dying. Now, my meeting with this man proved to be a little bit strange, though, because obviously, he felt the need to make funeral arrangements.

He set up the appointment with me. He came. He was meeting with me. He was picking out a casket and so on. But throughout the meeting, he tried his best to convince me that the whole thing was really unnecessary.

He did not believe his dad was dying or could not bring himself to believe his dad was dying. Now, what do you do in a situation like that? I didn't want to tell him, well, I'm sure you're right.

[2 : 16] Everything will be fine, knowing that it could very well be that his dad could pass any moment. It may be before he gets back to the hospice facility. So instead, I tried to ease him toward acceptance of the situation.

At one point in the conversation, I quoted Jesus, who said, in the world, you will have tribulation. Granted, Jesus was primarily talking about the world's opposition against his disciples, but I think it's true as a general principle as well.

We will have tribulation as long as we live in this world. Now, can you guess what this man said to me in response? In this world, you will have tribulation.

He responded, not necessarily. Well, you can probably guess what I wanted to say in response to that. I wanted to say, are you kidding?

Really? His dad was actively dying. He was obviously struggling a great deal with this. I mean, I think that constitutes tribulation, don't you?

[3 : 24] According to the dictionary, tribulation is anything that causes great troubling or suffering. Of course, we will have tribulation in this world.

We all know this, and we don't even need the Bible to teach us this. Experience makes it readily evident. So instead, I simply said to him, if that were true, if we could somehow avoid all tribulation in this life, well, I guess I'd be out of a job.

My point was that the very fact someone has to come in and make funeral arrangements makes it loud and clear, or at least it should, that we do have troubles in this world.

Trouble is inescapable. Now, I'm not picking on this gentleman, of course. I realized he was experiencing a measure of denial. He was in shock to some degree.

He was just struggling to cope with the loss of his dad, which is something I completely understood. It is true, though. We cannot altogether avoid suffering.

[4 : 29] It's all around us. Even if we manage to enjoy relatively easy lives, we will lose people we love. We ourselves will eventually face death.

Frankly, for some people, death may be the least of their worries. I've been ministering to a homeless man for the better part of maybe two years now.

He stops by my office for a visit a few times per week. We talk. Sometimes I get him a meal. Mostly, though, I just listen. I've learned a lot about his very troubled life.

His dad was an abusive alcoholic. His mom died because she overdosed on prescription medication that he had stolen for her.

So, of course, he lived with the guilt of that. He had to escape his abusive father when he was 16.

So, for the better part of 30 years, for more than 30 years, this man was homeless.

[5 : 40] And worse yet, he also struggled with some pretty serious drug addiction. He once said something to me that stuck in my memory. He said, why should I worry about dying?

It's got to be better than what I've been through. His name is Michael, by the way. I've earnestly prayed for Michael. I know that some of you have prayed for Michael. Well, a few months ago, I had to literally talk him off of a bridge.

The drug addiction one may experience is kind of like a hell on earth. If you get the drugs you crave, they may very well kill you.

And if you don't, I've known many to think about killing themselves. That's where Michael was.

Thankfully, he had the presence of mind to call me.

And by the time I got to him, he is sitting on the bridge, bawling his eyes out. Not sure what to do.

Now, that was a Friday, or a Saturday, I believe.

[6 : 43] The next Monday, he came to my office to say goodbye. He was finally convinced to enter into a rehab facility that would not charge him a dime to go.

I had connected him with a pastor who had set up transportation, and he was ready. He needed it.

And he was away for maybe two months or so. And we stayed in touch.

He called every week or two. And every time he called, he sounded a little better. He always sounded a little more optimistic, which was encouraging. And then after a couple of months, this was just two weeks ago, he surprised me by showing up at the office again.

He had come home from rehab. His stint there was finished. He sounded good. He looked good. He had filled out from eating a lot better. He seemed happier.

He seemed clear-headed when we spoke. He was really excited about a new cell phone somebody helped him get. And so I was praising God all week. And then Friday came of the same week.

[7 : 54] And I was just about to lock the door and go home when I see Michael standing outside the door. He's just sort of swaying back and forth. He's reaching for the door handle.

He's trying to open the door, I think, but he can't seem to figure out how a door handle works. And he's just got this white foam coming out of his mouth.

I don't know exactly what happened, but it's readily apparent that drugs were involved. It looked like a zombie. So I opened the door and I said, Michael, what's going on?

And he could barely talk. All he could say was, poisoned, poisoned. So I called 911 and soon enough I saw the paramedics come and they loaded him into an ambulance.

Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Eliphaz was right about that. More than 30 times the Bible uses the word groan or groaning.

[9 : 05] Paul uses it, for example, in 2 Corinthians 5 when he writes, For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan being burdened.

In Romans 8, Paul says, All of creation is groaning in its current state. And I like that word groaning. I don't like groaning, of course, and I don't like that we have reasons to groan.

But I like that word because it's so relatable, isn't it? It suggests that we can't even put into words our profound dissatisfaction with this broken, fallen world in which we live and the sin that has caused it all.

All we can do is groan because we just don't have the words to clearly express our frustrations and our heartache at times. Last weekend, Danae and I went to see that movie Sound of Freedom, which is about the trafficking and slavery of children all over the world, including the United States. [10:25] In fact, I was surprised to learn that the United States is the number one buyer of these children. Danae and I, we both cried during the movie.

People have asked me, was it a good movie? Should I go to see it? I don't know how to answer that. I'm at a loss for words thinking about it. It made me sad. It made me angry.

It made me disgusted. One moment, I was literally clenching my fist because I was so indignant at what people do to children. Next moment, I'm weeping.

Now, later that night, I tried to pray. I tried to pray for all of those children, and then I started thinking about everyone else who may be suffering in this world. My mom, who recently found out she's got breast cancer.

Those persecuted Christians that are dying for no other reason than their faith all over the world. I read about them every week. All of these families I meet through the funeral home who are grieving.

[11:25] By the end of my prayer, I kind of overwhelmed myself, and I didn't know what to say anymore. You ever had that experience? Just don't know what to say. It kind of turns into an inaudible groaning.

It's all we can muster sometimes. A deep and profound longing for the Lord's return when He will make all things new and bring an end to the suffering once and for all.

In Romans 8, Paul says, For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. We're content in Christ, and yet we're simultaneously dissatisfied with the state of the world. I think that's possible. We long for the Lord's return, recognizing that this is not the way things are supposed to be.

We often pray, Lord, come quickly. And perhaps sometimes we find ourselves praying, Lord, where are you? And this is not a new dilemma.

[12:43] Even the early church desperately craved to see the Lord's return, even soon after He was gone. Consequently, scoffers use this against the church.

Consider 2 Peter 3, where Peter writes, This is now the second letter I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them, I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

They will say, Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.

The scoffers questioned the legitimacy of Christ's promise to return. Where is He, they asked. Where is He? Even in the first century, they said, Look around.

After all these years, nothing has changed. You keep waiting for the Lord to come back and make everything right, but nothing has changed. The world just keeps on spinning as it always has.

[13:59] It's an effective strategy on the devil's part because we all feel a measure of dissatisfaction. As believers, we're anxiously anticipating the Lord's return, but after more than 2,000 years, He still hasn't come.

Well, Peter provides an answer to the doubters, but let's go instead to the book of Revelation. As we look at a few passages in Revelation, I want you to keep the historical context in mind.

Through the prophets and the apostles, God made a lot of big promises to His church, to His people. He promised salvation.

He promised victory over all of our enemies. He promised a new heaven and a new earth. He promised the return of the King of kings who would reign over His kingdom forever. But nearing the end of the first century, the church is examining her situation, and she's thinking, we seem to be going backward here.

Unlike the Jews prior to AD 70 anyhow, the Christians, they didn't have a nation to call their own. They didn't have a physical kingdom. They had no land. They had no rulers.

[15 : 18] They had no benefits under Roman authority. Instead, the Romans were forcing them to scatter all over the known world. Most, if not all of them, were meeting in secret, fearing for their lives.

Fellow Christians were being imprisoned and beaten and killed. So as they waited for an altogether positive climax, at the end of human history, the circumstances seemed to be going the opposite direction, getting darker and darker.

And it's in that context the book of Revelation was written. The church is relatively small. They're struggling. They're suffering.

The devil appears to be winning. He, the nation, still rule the earth. And worse yet, Christ is nowhere to be seen. Right? Not physically, not with tangible means.

They're waiting for Him. But there's no tangible evidence of His imminent return. So, I think it suffices to say, they could use some encouragement.

[16 : 24] And so could we, for that matter. The Apostle John himself probably needed some encouragement. After all, he had been exiled from Ephesus to the land of Patmos.

He likely faced the same discouragements and uncertainties as everyone else. It's not hard to imagine him sitting on that island praying, Lord, what's the plan?

I'm the last living apostle. What do I tell your church? What do I tell your people? And that's when the revelation comes.

The book opens this way. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that soon must take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ even to all that he saw.

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. And blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it for the time is near. Then in verse 9, John writes, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[17 : 45] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches. Where did this loud voice come from?

Verse 12, Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters and it goes on from there.

A fantastic description. It's Christ himself in all his glory. Now why has he revealed himself to John? Well what he's doing here is he's preparing to pull back the curtain.

He intends to show John this great plan of redemption that is unfolding. Things may seem very dark at the moment but big things are really happening behind the scenes wonderful things.

[18 : 55] So if John is discouraged at all it's a bit like it's a bit like John the Baptist in prison if you remember. When John the Baptist let doubts and uncertainty creep into his mind Jesus responded by redirecting his focus to some of those miracles that were taking place.

It was kind of like the Lord's way of saying look again right now you know you're staring at prison walls but don't forget what's happening here. Pull back.

Step away from your immediate circumstance. As grim as everything may seem look again at what's happening here. Turn over to Revelation chapter 4.

Revelation 4 begins After this I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven and the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the spirit and behold a throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne. So as the Lord pulls back the curtain here what does John see?

[20 : 11] He sees God on the throne. Things are already looking much better than they did down on earth. Now skipping ahead to chapter 5 verse 1 John sees in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back sealed with seven seals.

Now things are getting really exciting now. John undoubtedly anticipates here that God's decrees are in this scroll. An important word is in this scroll and in just a moment the Lord will open that scroll and he will reveal his will to John and finally John will know the plan he'll know what's happening and I'm sure it will be great but look at verse 2.

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? and no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

And John is immediately devastated. He began to weep loudly. Now to be clear he's not upset merely because he doesn't get to know God's plan now.

The breaking of these seals represents historical progress. The plan depends on these seals being broken and that scroll being unrolled.

[21 : 46] In other words if no one is worthy to break the seals redemptive history stops where it is. Salvation doesn't come and all of the suffering of this world all of its sin continues on unabated.

The church loses all hope which is why John weeps loudly here. He's gone from excited sitting anxiously on the edge of his seat to utterly defeated in an instant.

There's no one to break the seals. But then verse 5 one of the elders said to me weep no more behold the lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.

Let me go ahead and read some more of this. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns and with seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne and when he had taken the scroll the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints and they sang a new song saying worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth weep no more John weep no more there is one who is worthy after all he's the lion of the tribe of Judah he's the root of David who would that be well perhaps you remember the Old Testament prophecies we read together just a few weeks ago and we talked about Christ the conquering king the king of kings this is none other than Jesus of Nazareth that unexpected perhaps king of kings but something kind of surprising happens here

[24 : 06] I mean when you read Revelation you want to read it slowly and just kind of watch it unfold in your mind's eye right you can imagine John's renewed excitement as he's trying to peer through the four living creatures and the elders and he's trying to catch a glimpse of his Lord waiting to see him holding that scroll in his hand and breaking those seals and so on but what does he see and he catches a glimpse how does he describe his Lord and Savior it's not quite the radiant glory of a conquering king you know sitting on a white steed sword in hand or whatever you might expect no he sees a lamb a lamb as though it had been slain he doesn't see a lion he's a lamb a slain lamb now do you think that troubled John well obviously we don't have any indication of that and I would seriously doubt it for at least two reasons first of all he already knew the

Messiah was supposed to be a sacrificial lamb he knew this at the very beginning of Jesus his ministry John the Baptist announced behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world the creatures and the elders here they're saying the same thing they're singing by your blood by your blood you ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation the the savior was of course foreshadowed by sacrificial lambs all throughout the Old Testament in their book Begg and Ferguson write we cannot be absolutely certain how well John first readers knew the Old Testament but some of them must have been quite familiar with much of its teaching so when this picture of the lamb was placed front and center their minds would quickly have gone to the events of the Passover recorded in Exodus 12 they knew that God's exodus deliverance came through the sacrificed Passover lamb they must have also thought of

Isaiah 53 with its description of the suffering servant who was like a lamb that was led to the slaughter this is the lamb whom John seized the lamb standing as though it had been slain interestingly Revelation 5 really contains the only mention in the book of Revelation as Christ as a lion he's the lion of the tribe of Judah yet most of the imagery in Revelation depicts him as very powerful certainly victorious and yet instead of lion Revelation prefers to refer to him as a lamb

nearly 30 times let me highlight one more interesting detail here obviously Jesus appears to John as a slain lamb that would imply John saw some sort of physical evidence that Jesus had been wounded he saw that he had been slain yet the slain wounded lamb is standing according to verse 6 in other words the lamb was slain he was killed but he stood back up he rose again this is a powerful albeit subtle reminder to John and to the rest of us that the story of Christ did not end with his crucifixion and death it's a reminder that Jesus rose from the grave the grave could not contain him he proved victorious over death itself not long ago I was at a cemetery and I was speaking with a gentleman who said to me as we're looking out over all of the headstones he says it's kind of depressing isn't it even if you live a long full life it all comes down to this you waste away under the dirt and I was very quick to reply that would be depressing if that's what it all came down to the lamb is standing don't miss that the lamb is standing you know what that means it means Christ conquered the greatest threat we could have death itself he defeated the grave our lesser enemies don't stand a chance and furthermore he's only the first the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15 Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep for as by a man came death by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead for as in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive but each in his own order Christ the first fruits then at his coming those who belong to Christ then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet the last enemy to be destroyed is death now I can't speak for all of you but I need frequent reminders of this I need to regularly meditate on this because we do live in a world full of confusion full of suffering full of death [29 : 57] I can only imagine how John felt in light of his exile and the persecution that the church was facing at the time when he hears that no one in all of earth or in heaven could be found to advance the cause of salvation by breaking those seals and opening the scroll he begins weeping bitterly but then one of the elders comes along and says weep no more John behold the lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David has conquered that's the final word not death not suffering not all of that other stuff that's the final word the lamb has conquered now some of you know we had a woman a young woman at our funeral home this week she was only 26 years old her husband brutally beat her to death her parents like many families we serve stressed to me that they were not religious at all were not religious so when it came time for their daughter's burial they did not want anything religious

I'll admit to you that sometimes I just want to shake people and I want to say if only you knew Christ if only you knew what he has accomplished on our behalf if only you knew what he has promised to accomplish it changes everything the world won't be like this forever soon enough suffering death will be no more and justice it will prevail how do we know John saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain and to further emphasize the point he notes that this lamb had seven horns and seven eyes now we want to be careful here because a detail this strange has a way of distracting us as Beggin Ferguson write it would be a great pity to have been shown this vivid picture of the father seated on the throne the son and all his redeeming grace and glory and the holy spirit and all the fullness of his saving ministry but see only horns eyes and numbers that would be to obscure what is plain and clear and to marginalize what is central yes that is often our tendency though we read the book of revelation and we kind of get stuck on those little details don't we the symbolism and the numbers and we may not be altogether clear about what these horns and these eyes represent but this symbolism is not meant to send us down rabbit holes of speculation we're not trying to solve mysteries here the book is meant to encourage us that's what stated in the very beginning instead we need to take a step back and look at the imagery as a whole beg and Ferguson say no god is much simpler than all that the horns speak of power and majesty the eyes remind us that christ has sent his holy spirit into the world with all his omniscience perfect understanding and wonderful discernment and the fact that there are seven horns eyes and spirit simply expresses numerically the idea of fullness and perfection more importantly notice how those in heaven respond they're looking at this sacrificial lamb who is standing with seven horns and seven eyes they don't say huh I wonder I wonder what those horns and eyes represent let me grab today's newspaper and see if I can't discern what's what's no they immediately immediately begin worshipping the lamb and singing his praises and that's precisely how we ought to respond the book of revelation isn't about Russia it's not about

China it's not about the current president of the United States it's about Christ and his glory and if we miss that we've really missed the entire point haven't we if we miss that I fail to see how this book could be the encouragement it's supposed to be to us remember what the opening lines say blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear now in chapter 7 John he's curious about this great multitude of people standing before the throne and before the lamb they too are shouting their praises crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb who are these people John wants to know well in revelation 7 14 one of the elders says these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb so these are people who have endured the misery of the sinful fallen world they've trusted in Christ and in Christ alone for salvation the lamb has cleansed them with his blood and now they stand before the throne redeemed once and for all everything they once suffered is all behind them forever more but there's more jumping back to revelation 5 look again at the song here in revelation 5 verse 9 you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth that last line is important and sometimes we hold to the idea that Christ died merely to give us an escape from this world you know it's so we can leave this place go to heaven yes but that's not all when Christ redeems he redeems completely he doesn't leave any of it undone the story of our redemption does not end when we die and go to heaven as [36 : 35] Peter had to remind the believers who were seated with doubts by the scoffers the Lord will return here to this place he will not leave this world to continue on in its sin and its suffering and its injustice forever we don't just escape and the world just keeps going around doing what it's always done he will remake the world ushering in a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation 21 John says I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away this is not describing some far away place this will be the earth this will be the new normal and the ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation shall reign right here on this new earth and that's essentially how the Bible concludes what a day that will be you meditate on that bad days seem to get a little bit better

I'll close with the final passage from Begg and Ferguson's book which ties everything we've talked about in this series together they write we shall then see Jesus as the seed of the woman who crushed the serpent's head as the prophet of God whose word directs our lives as the great high priest who intercedes for us and as the king who subdues all our enemies and reigns over us forever we will recognize him as the son of man seated beside the ancient of days and as the suffering servant who is now exalted as the lamb on the throne on that day we will see with unclouded vision why his father has given him the name above all names let's pray oh father of glory seated on the throne we glimpse through your word in revelation five the vision of the lamb who was slain the lion of judah who conquered death he stands worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals he alone is deserving to unveil the mysteries of your divine providence to execute your eternal plans as the elders and the living creatures they sing a new song in heaven may we join them here on earth in this place this morning worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing lord let this be our anthem let it emanate from our souls and from our hearts shaping our thoughts fueling our actions guiding our prayers the blood of the lamb has ransomed a people for god from every tribe from every language from every people and nation making us a kingdom and priests to serve you and one day we will reign on the earth and it's with this hope we find courage to face our trials the lamb who stands victorious in heaven he guides us he is with us he loves us and he will come again for us may our lives be never ending doxologies magnifying the name of christ the lamb who is worthy and we pray this in his victorious name amen to