

LION + LAMB

We are living in the midst of a global crisis.

COVID-19 has brought tremendous challenges to our community, our country, and our world, resulting in uncertainty and fear. We long for stability and control, but right now we see just how powerless we really are. Yet even in our crisis, God still speaks. Jesus entered into human history to show us how to find hope and peace. If we ever needed hope and peace, it is certainly today! This devotional series will lead us through key passages of the gospel of Matthew to show us how Jesus provides hope and peace in the midst of all of life's circumstances. He provides hope because He is the Lion of Judah. In the Bible, lions are often used to represent a king, and Jesus, the Lion of Judah, is the King of promise who we can look to for hope. More than that, Jesus is also the lamb. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Jesus provides the way of peace! We hope through this uncertain time you can find hope and peace through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father, I confess that there is so much uncertainty in my life. I have fears and concerns that overwhelm me. Open my eyes to see You, Jesus, as my hope and peace. Jesus, You are the Lion and the Lamb who has come for me!

Genesis 49:9-10

⁹Judah 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? ¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Matthew 1:1-2

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

Revelation 5:5

Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered[...].

MEET THE LION

There is a certain magic in taking a child to the zoo. Maybe you still feel the magic yourself! We love to see the immense elephants, giraffes whose necks reach into the skies, or seals who swim easily, almost majestically, through the water. Yet one animal is always a must-see for everyone: the lions. Witnessing the power and beauty and fierceness of lions up close fills us with fear and awe. It is no wonder the lion has been used in ancient cultures as a symbol of royalty.

In Matthew 1:1, we see the beginning of Jesus' genealogy. Two towering Biblical figures are listed: Abraham and David. Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation. David is the beloved king. Jesus is both Jewish in origin and He is in the line of kings! We can have hope because the true King has come. Jesus fulfills God's promise to provide His people with a King! In the midst of a crisis, we want someone who is powerful enough to control the things we cannot. Hope begins when we come to the true King, Jesus.

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Genesis 49:9-10. What is the significance of the scepter?

Read Matthew 1:1-2. Circle the names listed. Who are these people? What do you know about them?

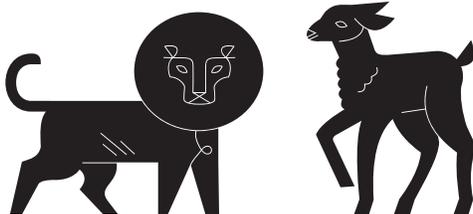
Read Revelation 5:5. These words are being said about Jesus. John, the writer of Revelation, is told to weep no longer. Why? What has Jesus done to conquer?

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the midst of this crisis of COVID-19, what questions would you ask God if you could?

Spend a few moments writing down these questions and bringing these concerns to God in prayer.

Knowing that Jesus has conquered through His death and resurrection, how can Jesus give you have hope during this crisis?



PRAYER

Jesus, help me to see You today as the most important part of my life. I often become distracted by pressures or circumstances. Prepare my heart so I may be a person ready for You.

Matthew 3:1-17

¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” ⁴Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” ¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

PREPARING THE LION’S PATH

Great events are preceded by a great announcement. ESPN sends “College Game Day” to cover the upcoming football match up. Michael Buffer provides his iconic phrase before a great boxing match: “Let’s Get Ready to Rumble!” Kings of old would send forerunners to repair roads and prepare people for his arrival. Jesus’ entrance into His public ministry was no less of an iconic announcement. His cousin, John the Baptist, fully embraced his role as an ambassador for the king. John spent his days in the wilderness eating wild food, wearing camel’s hair clothing, and proclaiming a message of repentance. Repentance? Yes,

the Greek word transliterated “metanoō” carries the idea of changing one’s mind and action. Repenting means we need to change our thoughts and our actions to align with Jesus.

It can be easy to assume we are aligned with Jesus. However, when life is disrupted, finances get tight, or the future looks uncertain, we often become misaligned as we focus on the problems more than Jesus. How can our minds and hearts be prepared for Jesus to do His work?

LOOK IN THE WORD

Look at Matthew 3:1-3. How have you not prioritized Jesus in your life?

What specific changes in attitude and action would you make? Perhaps you can begin to pray more consistently or ask God’s forgiveness for not prioritizing Him.

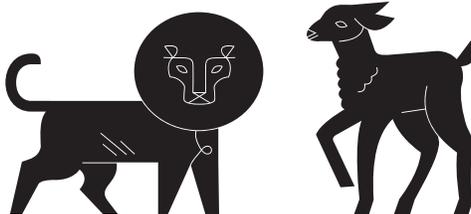
Look at Matthew 3:13-17. What is said about Jesus from Heaven?

WHAT’S NEXT?

Spend some time asking God to soften your heart and align you with what Jesus is doing.

Write out your concerns for the day and ask Jesus to give you wisdom in how to deal with them.

Thank Jesus for coming!



PRAYER

Lord God, Your Word speaks of Your strength, Your might, Your control, Your wisdom, Your ability to heal, and Your control of all of my circumstances. Today, I pray You would help me to trust in who You are, regardless of those circumstances.

Matthew 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” ⁷Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” ¹¹Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

THE PROVEN LION KING

“Look, Simba. Everything the light touches is our kingdom... A king’s time as ruler rises and falls like the sun. One day, Simba, the sun will set on my time here, and will rise with you as the new king,” says King Mufasa from the Pride Rock overlook. Sitting beside him, illuminated by the rising sun in the cool of the morning, is his son, Simba. The cub is officially next in line for the throne, qualified by birth. Only a short time earlier, he had been confirmed in a great ceremony as the next king, being held high in the sky by the strong and wise hands of the elder, Rafiki. He did not know it then, but what stood in front of young Simba was a great test that answered one question: would this young lion prove himself fit for the throne?

Today’s passage keeps us in the wilderness and asks the exact same question, but with a different Lion.

Jesus, the Lion of Judah, is faced with a great test in Matthew 4. Driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, having eaten nothing for 40 days and 40 nights, Satan, “the tempter,” appears before Jesus. The two trade blows in the wilderness. This tempter, even at his strongest, stands no chance against the Lion of Judah, even at His weakest. Jesus claims a swift and skillful

victory, brandishing nothing but the Word of God as His weapon.

Dr. Thomas Constable would describe the situation like this: “Jesus’ genealogy and virgin birth prove His legal human qualification as Israel’s King. His baptism was the occasion of His divine approval. His temptation demonstrated His moral fitness to reign.”

Our King has proven Himself worthy of the throne. Will we, now, follow the example He set in the midst of isolation?

LOOK IN THE WORD

Look again at this account. What does “the tempter” target in Jesus’ life?

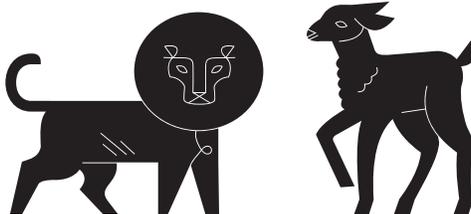
How does Jesus respond when Satan tempts Him?

Why is Jesus able to respond to Satan as He did?

WHAT’S NEXT?

Who was with Jesus out there in the wilderness? Trick question: no one was with Jesus! Other than the company of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was in isolation. For Jesus, this was a challenging but incredibly useful time. Many of us are in a similar season of wilderness isolation. Do you view this time as a waste or an opportunity?

Two things that often contribute to added temptation are (1) a lack of rhythm, and (2) solitude. Are there any new ways you are currently being tempted toward sin? Are there any old sin patterns you have seen returning? Take a minute, write them out, and pray for Christ’s strength to overcome those temptations.



PRAYER

Father, thank You for the amazing gifts you have provided in my life. As I spend time meditating on Your Word today, please show me what it looks like to live a life characterized by Your redeeming grace.

Matthew 5:1-16

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons[a] of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ¹³“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

THE LION'S PEOPLE

Who are you, really? Over the years, you may have interacted with many different stereotypical groups: the cool crowd, the athletes, the artists, the academics, the wealthy, the poor, the Christian, the secular. Every group has social norms required to enter in or stay in, and learning these norms while adopting these attitudes can be exhausting. Even as an adult, these social demographics and pressures still exist. However, Jesus cut through the cultural norms of His day and clarifies what His people should look like. In Matthew 5-7, we receive the most revolutionary teaching the world has ever heard. He astonishes every listener by the power of His words and the authority of His message. Jesus describes the characteristics of His people, but these are not actions to mimic. Instead, as Oswald Chambers states, “The Sermon on the Mount’ is a statement of life we will live when the Holy Spirit is getting His way in us.” We become the Lion’s people when His Spirit changes us from the inside out. If we become this type of person, we can shine like lights in this world. We will stand out as different when people see us truly changed by Jesus’ grace.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Read through Matthew 5:1-11. Which of the attitudes is hardest for you to accept or live out?

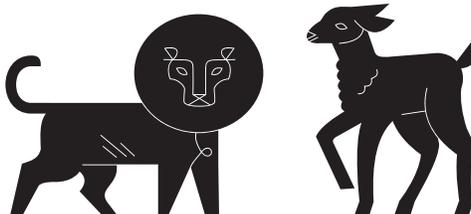
Take out a piece of paper and list out what will be received by these “blessed” people. (i.e. Matthew 5:3, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”)

Have you known someone who truly looked like the “blessed person” described by Jesus? What did they do that made them shine bright for Jesus?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Pick one of the qualities that is most difficult for you to model. Write it out and begin to ask Jesus to change your heart so that you can fully be that kind of person.

Are you ever tempted to hide or downplay your Christian identity? What verse from this passage can give you confidence when you struggle to identify as one of the Lion's people?



PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving me the greatest gift I could ever ask or hope for: the salvation of my soul. Thank You for choosing me, for adopting me, for redeeming me, and for rescuing me from my sin. Today, would You help me to respond with grateful obedience?

Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 3:21-25

²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LION LAMB

Imagine you have found yourself right back in your eighth grade algebra class. It is a regular Wednesday morning, until a new teacher walks in. “This is not Mr. Oldman,” fellow students whisper through gritted teeth. No, this is Ms. Newman, and, despite her newfound opposition, she is there to teach algebra. She begins, and the students, now boiling in their seats, listen to her spout a new method that seems to them ridiculous and nonsensical. Some are even so bold as to say, “This is not algebra at all.”

This, to the Pharisees and religious teachers of Jesus’ time, was exactly what He came to do—teach a confusing and errant message. Today’s passage proves otherwise.

Jesus, in this loving and challenging address, explains that His purpose is not to abolish or ignore the Law and the Prophets (the whole Old Testament, in other words). Instead, Jesus came to fulfill them as both the conquering Lion and the sacrificial Lamb. This is a message that would have filled scribes and Pharisees with rage but now fills us with hope and joy.

Jesus is the Promised Lion Lamb who sacrificed Himself on our behalf and rules on His throne.

LOOK AT THE WORD

Look at the passage again. Does Jesus, in light of this, instruct His listeners to abandon the Law?

What does Jesus set as the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven? Is He being serious? Is this standard actually possible?

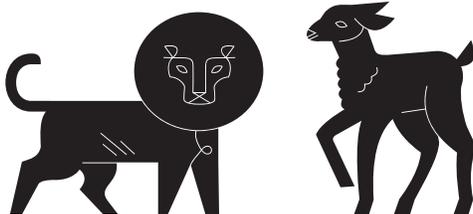
Read Romans 3:21-25. What is the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven in these verses?

WHAT'S NEXT?

This is great news! Our entering into Christ's Kingdom is 0% dependent upon us, and 100% dependent upon Him. Take a moment to thank God for this truth.

Notice the truth woven into Christ's words here. He still desires for us to obey His teachings. How can you obey Christ today?

Think of one person you know who is living in this Pharisee mindset, assuming their own righteousness will allow them entrance into God's kingdom. Pray now for them to choose to place their faith in Jesus, and pray for an opportunity to share the truth of today's devotional with them.



PRAYER

Lord, free me from the anxieties of life! There is always something to worry about and trials that come my way. Help me to rest in knowing that You care and that You will provide enough for me today.

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

A LION'S PROTECTION

If there is anything that can squeeze the joy out of any moment, it is worry. One of our Grace staff members recently came across a website that had a list of “twenty things you can worry about beside the thing you are worried about.” No, thank you! We all have our own worst-case scenarios to run through—we do not need another list! There are so many things we worry about: our finances, our jobs, our kids, our houses, our cars, our clothes, upcoming events, canceled events. Does Jesus have anything to say to those of us who have many legitimate worries in life? Yes! His instruction is, “Do not worry.” Luckily, He says more than just that. He actually lists everything we worry about: food, water, clothing—living. He lists every worry and says, “Do not worry.” Why? Because God knows our needs. If we know the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ, we can be certain He cares for our needs. We no longer have to live locked up in worry if we have confidence in a God who cares. Even more, we can actually live boldly, passionately, and freely. We can seek His kingdom and live for God if we actually know Him and how much He cares.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Look at Matthew 6:25-30. Which of these worries best describes you?

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Jesus diagnoses the problem of our worry in Matthew 6:30: “little faith.” In what ways is your faith “little” in this time?



God does not promise to solve your worries in the way we want. He does, however, give us something to seek in Matthew 6:33. What does it look like for you to seek His kingdom and His righteousness?



WHAT'S NEXT?

Write out all of your worries. Get them on paper!



Ask God what He thinks of these worries. Are they as big a deal to Him as they are to you?



Instead of spending too much time worrying, who can you reach out to this week and encourage with these verses?

