

There's a Lion in our Midst

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Preacher: Pastor Cal Morrison

[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, please turn to Acts chapter 2. Thanks very much for leading us there.

Over the past month, we've dipped into Acts chapter 2 to look at the response to who Jesus is, response of repentance and baptism, and then another week we looked at the response of devotion to certain things.

And this morning we're going to look at awe. And as I said before, over the coming weeks, for a short period over summer, we're going to, in different ways, try to aim to have shorter elements, just so that we are kind to one another, consider what we're bearing with.

And it's worth reminding us that it's not always in the amount of words that you say, but that if the Father is revealing these things, Isaiah was asked who would go.

And he said, send me. And immediately following his willingness to go, he was told that he would speak and people wouldn't hear. And so another element as well is not how much words, how many words we spend, but in are we being doers of the words, not just hearers.

[1 : 38] It's a huge challenge to every one of us, isn't it? I think when I'm preparing to share something from God's Word, it's a huge challenge to me.

If it's not, perhaps I shouldn't share it. And so this morning, we're not going to be discussing a lot of things, but really it's going to be a meditation on who Jesus is and what our response to Jesus is.

And so I'm just going to read a few verses from Acts chapter 2. I'm going to read from, let's see, verse 40 to 43.

So I'm sure if you've been here over the past month or if you know Acts, you know that this is the context of the day of Pentecost.

The Spirit has been given to the disciples. And Peter has preached this message about who Jesus was, the one that they crucified as both Lord and King and risen, seated at the right hand of God.

[2 : 57] And the people, many of them had asked, what shall we do? And Peter called them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of sins, and they would receive the Holy Spirit.

And 3,000 of them responded. And so from verse 40, and with many other words, Peter bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. Amen. Father, please would you speak to us through your Spirit.

Would you convict us? Would you challenge us? Would you encourage us? Would you strengthen us? Would you move us to respond to your word, to receive your word, to be doers of your word, and to truly have a sense of the greatness of Jesus?

[4 : 16] We pray in his name. Amen. When I was a young child, I wasn't brought up as a Christian. I wasn't brought up in a religious household.

A favorite story of mine, however, was the Chronicles of Narnia. However, my mom, as you might have known, if I've said it before, I didn't like reading as a child. I didn't read a lot.

But my mom got me the dramatized audio cassettes, and I used to listen to The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe. And I didn't really know what it was about. The remake of the movie came out in 2005 when I had just become a Christian, and I went to see this film, and I was stunned to realize that it was all about Jesus.

However, when I was a child, I didn't know that. But one of my favorite parts of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is when the Pevensie children ask the beavers who Aslan is.

They hear about this name Aslan, and they're wondering who Aslan is. And I feel like it's a bit like how the world miss who Jesus is. And so here's an excerpt.

[5 : 24] Lucy comes in, and she's talking about Aslan, and she says to Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, is he a man? Aslan, a man, said Mr. Beaver sternly.

Certainly not. I tell you, he's the king of the wood and the son of the great emperor beyond the sea. Don't you know who is the king of the beasts? Aslan's a lion, the lion, the great lion.

Oh, said Susan, I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.

That you will, dearie, and make no mistake. If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.

Then he isn't safe, said Lucy. Safe, said Mr. Beaver. Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good.

[6 : 25] He's the king, I tell you. What a wonderful part of the story. C.S. Lewis is trying to tell us something about Jesus here. There were times when the disciples were with Jesus, and he did things that completely terrified them.

You were talking about one of these moments earlier in Matthew. When he stopped the storm in its tracks, they were filled with great fear, and they said, Who then is this?

Even the wind and seas obey him. Or like when his closest friend John, the apostle, beloved disciple, saw him in a glorified form in Revelation, and he said, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not. As Mrs. Beaver says, If there's anyone who can appear before him without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.

And so, do we have any awe this morning at who Jesus is? Can we stop our minds just for a moment to consider the one in whose name we gather?

[7 : 41] This is who John describes as one who was with God in the beginning. And he was God.

He was before the world existed. All things were created through Jesus. Nothing in this room would exist without him.

Through Jesus came stars and galaxies, the size of which we cannot fathom. When we're thinking about Jesus, he is the one who tramples the waves and tells the storms to hush.

He changes the elements of H₂O into the best aged wine, and he multiplies bread out of thin air. Who is this? He personified a human nature so that we could see the image of the invisible God, and that we could actually know him.

He's the radiance of the glory of God, grace and truth incarnate, and the exact imprint of his nature. This Jesus, this Jesus, who we gather in his name, he upholds the universe.

[9 : 07] Not just the church. He upholds the entire universe by the word of his power. In him, all things hold together. He is the immortal God, yet he put on immortality so that he could conquer death in his body.

When he came into this world, he said, according to Hebrews, sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me. God is so unlike us that we could never fathom such a God if he never told us who he was and what he was like.

We could never make up a God like this. Who's like him? This lion of the tribe of Judah. Who can behold him and not tremble? Who can come before him and stand still?

What would you do? For instance, let me illustrate this. If you came out to a normal church service, you sat in your normal seat, we sang a hymn, we're all making mistakes today, we sang a hymn, we gave some notices, we had a time of prayer, and you were sincerely seeking the Lord in prayer, eyes closed and everything, trying to block out things that would distract you, and suddenly, in your seat, you hear a low growl.

Now, you open one eye to peek. We've all done it in prayer. You open one eye to peek, and you notice something across the room, something moving. Now, at this point, both of your eyes are open, but no one seems to have noticed.

[10 : 57] It's only you. Someone is still praying up the front, everyone else eyes closed, but you've got your eyes open because you've noticed something.

And then you catch a glimpse of something moving, something with fur. And you think to yourself, I wonder if Jennifer's dog, Snowball, is maybe going to wander.

But no, no, the thing is, it's up here, and it's so large that it can't possibly be Snowball. Behind that partition, and then suddenly, you see it emerge.

A lion. Inside this building, a lion. Now, you don't spend any time wondering why a lion is loose in Scotland, let alone how it got inside this building.

Your first instinct is to get out of the building. Would it not be? Imagine seeing that. You'd be terrified. You see this lion among us.

[12 : 04] Do you see the lion that is in our midst? Now, the Greek word in our passage, translated as awe, is phobos, which is where we get phobia from.

It basically means flight, panic, aversion, fear. It's used 47 times in the New Testament, and without exception, every use is in some way related to fear or reverence.

At the mocking of the crowds at the start of Acts chapter 2, the onlookers have grown eerily quiet by verse 43. Those who didn't believe are no longer mocking.

Something has happened. There's a sense of awe, a sense of fear, a sense of aversion. They became uneasy, quiet, wary about this group called the way.

Notice that in verse 43, awe came upon every soul. This isn't just the disciples. This isn't just the Jesus people and the believers. This is everyone.

[13 : 12] This is a moment of which persecution didn't happen because there was something wary about this group of people who were calling on the name of Jesus. They gave them plenty of space.

Let's not bother this group anymore. Something strange is going on. Do you know the lion in our midst? The lion. Think of how Mr. Beaver described him.

Do you not know who is the king of the wood? He's the king of kings. The son of the great emperor beyond the sea. He is the son of the living God. He's a lion, I tell you.

The lion, the great lion, the lion of the tribe of Judah. There is none like Jesus. None like him. You cannot domesticate him.

He's not a pet. And he is certainly not safe. But certainly he is good. A lot of time the world will not see the lion that is in our midst.

[14 : 15] And so the onlookers might not understand why we do what we do. Because they don't see what we see. It might look strange. It might look odd. It might invite mockery and persecution.

But there will be other times where people will grow strangely quiet. People even in the community will back off and have a sense of reverence and aversion where they thought of hostility towards Christians as something fearful.

Maybe we shouldn't do that. What if there really is a lion in their midst? What if? Is this not what Gamaliel says when they're all arguing about what to do with Peter and John and Gamaliel says listen just hang on a minute because if God is with them we will be fighting against God.

It's not a good idea. It's not a fight that you will ever win. So sometimes there will be that sense of aversion in the community.

Sometimes awe will spread out. The world doesn't see who is the lion in their midst. But if anyone should have a sense of awe should it not be us?

[15 : 28] And by that I don't mean just fear or panic but a holy reverence for who God is. That we could ever approach God is an incredible thing.

That we have been brought together not to be destroyed. We deserve to be gathered together to be destroyed. But we've been brought together to be saved. To be given life where we're due death.

to be forgiven rather than justly judged for our sin. This speaks of His incredible mercy and goodness. It is not because He is tame that He doesn't devour us.

It is because He is good and merciful. And our sins they are many but His mercy is more than God.

But it was not cheap. His mercy is not cheap. It came at the cost of the blood of Jesus the Son of God. The living God.

[16 : 31] He is Spirit. He doesn't have a body like ours yet He took on flesh and blood so that in His flesh He could be broken. His blood could be poured out to cover our sins.

So, is there anything that should bring us to a sense of awe this morning? It's not going to be my preaching. It's not going to be the songs. It's not going to be this building.

But it's going to be the lion in our midst who Jesus is. Look around the room and see the lives that have been transformed by Jesus.

Those who need not their eyes to see. people here who need not their eyes to see who He really is.

Talking of our dear sister over here who loves Jesus and can see clearly when many people who have their eyes in perfect condition see not a thing of this lion.

[17 : 32] Or those who praise His name with a failing breath. Do we not know people in this congregation whose breath is failing them yet they use their failing breath to praise the name of Jesus?

Or those who have hope where there's no earthly reason for hope? And those who stare down death with a confidence that He will raise them up to eternal life?

We know what it's like to sit with a dear brother or sister who's staring down death with a hope that the world cannot explain. How much more should we notice the lion in our midst?

Do we realize that Jesus cannot be domesticated? Are we doing these things that we do because it's our duty? Because it's our tradition?

Or because we actually know the lion who is in our midst? Jesus is the great lion. He cannot be domesticated.

[18 : 33] He isn't a tame lion. Do we ever treat him like he's some sort of circus lion who's brought out to woo the crowd and then put back in the cage?

We cannot squeeze God into a tradition or box him in by our understanding. We are finite. We don't know everything about God.

We can't fathom His essence and nature and who He is. He's not tame. He's not safe. But He is good. And so over the summer we're going to explore the attributes of God or as Matthew Barrett calls them, the undomesticated attributes of God.

And because God is so unlike us, we often only think about the things that we can relate to, the communicable attributes that He displayed and shared with His creation, such as love and power and goodness and wisdom.

It's good to consider these things. But when those are the only things that we consider and relate to, as much as we would affirm the attributes of God that are not shared, such as being eternal, infinite, omnipresent, omniscient, we tend not to delve too far into those because they're unfamiliar.

[19 : 51] However, when most of our thoughts about God revolve around only the things that we can understand, we become in danger of what Luther accused Erasmus of in one of his letters when he said, Brother, your thoughts of God are too human.

Jesus is fully human and fully divine. When we think of God, we mustn't think that He is simply the greatest creature in all of creation.

We must remember that God is in a completely different category, a different category of being than anything in creation. There is God as Creator in a Creator category, and then there is creation and everything in it in that category.

There is one Creator. Nothing in all of creation has ever or could ever cross that line into the category of Creator. And so, nothing in creation can truly know God or see the infinite, eternal God as He is in Himself as the Creator, omniscient, infinite, eternal, King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, the One who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, says Paul to Timothy.

Yet John, John says, no one has ever seen God, but the One who is at the Father's side, the only God, He has made Him known.

[21 : 25] So, the awe that we experience, while we can never know God fully, we can know Him truly because He has revealed Himself to us.

He's revealed enough about Himself for us to know what He is like, for us to know that He is not safe. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but to know that He is good and merciful.

He has revealed enough, and He has done enough for us to be in awe of Him. And the awe that we experience now points to a greater experience to come.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Paul says, what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

[22 : 31] For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. With unfailed face, beholding the glory of God, the glory of the Lord God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And yet Peter would say, though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Is that not true? Is that not inexplicable to the world? And if that is your experience now, think of what your experience will be when you see Him and behold Him in His glory.

as John writes, beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

So let me finish where I started in quoting C.S. Lewis, this time from the last book, The Final Battle. C.S.

Lewis writes this, and as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion, but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.

[23 : 53] And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they are all lived happily ever after, but for them, it was only the beginning of the real story.

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Let me pray. Lord, our great God in heaven, we thank you that we can come to you without being consumed, that we can approach you with confidence because of Jesus, your great mercy, glory, and we plead with you, Lord.

We think of Moses having the boldness to ask to see your glory. We ask that we would just have a sense of the lion that is in our midst, that we would have a sense of the greatness of Jesus, that we would know our God through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that we would be moved in our hearts to respond in awe, to respond in praise, to respond in worship, for he alone is worthy.

In Jesus' name, Amen.