

Remembrance Sunday

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. Those of you that don't know me, my name's David, and it's my privilege and pleasure, really, to be opening up that quite wacky reading from Revelation this morning.
- And I thought we might begin by getting our brains warmed up with a bit of a quiz. And so I'm going to show you a picture from a film, kind of a screenshot from a film, and I wonder if you could kind of shout out, you don't need to put your hands up, and just yell out what film you think it is from.
- And we could get a bit competitive. We could have this side of the church versus this side of the church, and the winning side will get to go for coffee first. Oh, yeah. There are obviously the holy ones amongst you that will want to serve by letting the others go first, and the wonderful team that serve us every week by giving us caffeine.
- Bless you guys. So let's see how we go. This is the first one. Day After Tomorrow, 1-0. Okay, it is the film Day After Tomorrow. A bit old. Being an ex-geography teacher, this was my go-to in the last week of term.
- Here you go, kids. Let's watch this. Do a mind map, and we'll discuss whatever it's all about, global warming. But yeah, if you've seen it, the cataclysmic end of the world, practically, through all things weather-related.
- [1 : 1 3] Brilliant. Next one. Yes. Yes. 2012. 2012. 2012. 2012. 2012. 2012. 2012. Kind of similar ilk between... 1-1. 1-1. Yep. A similar ilk maybe with the Day After Tomorrow vibe with lots of weather and earthquakes kind of heralding the end of the world as we know it.
- Brilliant. 2012. 2012. Next one. I am legend. Oh, I think someone got it at the back there, I think. I think it was this side. Sorry, guys. I think it was. I am legend.
- A bit spooky, this one, actually. And if you've seen it, it's got a really good message about salvation and resurrection, actually. It's got quite a good Christian message in it. But I am legend. Will Smith is kind of the last man, so he thinks.
- Spoiler alert, sorry. The last man in New York. But it's called I am legend. It's a good film. Bit scary. Hunger Games. Hunger Games. Yeah, we had it. 2-2. It's getting close.
- The Hunger Games are kind of three films in this kind of trilogy. And it's not quite the end of the world, but it kind of is this apocalyptic, one kind of section of the world controlling all the other sections through violence.
- [2 : 1 6] And yeah, it's, again, quite a good film, actually. I think there's one more. Divergent. Yes, 3-2. Well done. Give us a round of applause. So if you want to go first for coffee at the end, you are allowed.
- But if you feel the Lord saying, actually, you should bless your brothers and sisters on this side, it's up to you. I'm not here to judge. But yes, Divergent. A kind of similar vibe to maybe The Hunger Games in terms of this weird kind of end of the world or end of society kind of thing.
- Very good, David, you might be saying. Yeah, but what on earth has this got to do with our reading from Revelation? Well, there's kind of an overarching theme, actually, with some of these films. And Hollywood has got this nailed, hasn't it?

Hollywood thinks, I know what makes a good film. End of the world stuff. Violence. Warfare. Conflict. Power. Cataclysmic events that no one has seen before.

Powerful oligarchs taking advantage over the weak. The poor downtrodden struggling to survive. Guns and weapons are a necessity. Control and authority are the order of the day, according to Hollywood.

[3 : 25] And actually, it's not just Hollywood, is it? We've seen in the last week or so how those with lots of money and lots of power know how to get out of paying their taxes with offshore havens, while us poor, weak lot have to pay our taxes.

We've seen how powerful men in Hollywood have allegedly taken advantage of weaker men and women in that kind of sphere of influence, and they're in less privileged positions. And if you'd excuse me for getting political, just a second, I won't do it for very long, but we have someone across the pond who is the President of the United States who can't go through a day without tweeting that he has the biggest nuclear weapons or the best army or better weapons than anyone else, especially North Korea.

Supremacy is all about firepower. And as we remembered earlier, there were so many occasions in the past where this has been true, where violence, warfare, conflict have brought countries and people and societies down to their knees.

And Hollywood still continue to churn out these apocalyptic films, don't they? Violence wins, conflict wins, the powerful succeed, those of the greatest arsenal, the greatest firepower will be successful.

But actually, as so often happens, when we read Scripture, it says, no, actually there's a different way of looking at it. Well, you've got it wrong.

[4 : 59] That's not the way to do it. So if you've got a Bible or a tech Bible on your phone, you might want to think about Revelation 5. We're going to be kind of focusing around that. And Revelation is one of those books that has been kind of, I think, either ignored by churches because it's a bit too weird.

In fact, a little helpful Reformation fact for you. Martin Luther didn't like Revelation very much. He didn't want it to be in the Bible. But towards the end of his life, he thought, actually, it's all right.

We'll have it in. So Revelation's either been kind of ignored or shunned a bit. We might open it a bit, but not very much. Or maybe it's the other side of the spectrum. And some churches or Christian denominations maybe focus so much on this book of Revelation that they're able to tell you that the Lord Jesus Christ is returning next Thursday at 8.23 exactly.

Get ready. Go and tell everyone. But actually, I think there's a lot we can learn from this book if we use it appropriately. You see, there are some people that say it's all in the past.

Revelation is a book that's all about the second century because that's when it was written. So everything in there is about back then. We might be able to read it and learn a bit and kind of apply it a bit to our lives now, but not that much.

[6 : 17] It was for then. And there are other people that say, no, no, no, no, no. You've got it all wrong. It's all about the future. Every single part of it is about the second coming. And if you're clever enough and you can look at all the Cody bits, you can work out when Jesus is coming and when all that exciting stuff is going to happen.

But I think actually, as so often is the case, there's kind of a middle ground here, that we can look at some parts of Revelation and we can say, actually, yeah, that kind of fits back in the second century.

We can learn from it, but it's back then. And some of it we can look at and we can say, wow, that's the future. We're looking forward to the second coming of Jesus in his glory. That's great. And there are other parts of it that are almost timeless.

I love the reading today of the elders worshipping at the throne of the Lamb. And I kind of think, I don't know how correct I am, but I love the idea of that just happening for eternity, forever and ever.

That this morning when we came and we worshipped, we were joining in with the worship of the elders and the living creatures before the Lamb. Wow. But the first thing we need to admit, I think, is that Revelation is just a bit weird.

[7 : 28] You've got a prostitute. You've got a beast. You've got angels. You've got seals. You've got plagues. You've got, I mean, it sounds like quite a fun party, doesn't it? You've got all this weird stuff going on.

What is it all about? Well, hopefully this morning we can unpack a tiny bit of it, Revelation 5, and maybe apply that to where we're at today in On Remembrance Sunday.

So let's see where we are with chapter 5. John has written a letter to lots of different churches and then he's just been taken up into heaven. We don't know if that's a kind of spiritual vision that he's having or a more physical being taken up.

But he's there. He's in heaven and this angel is almost giving him a guided tour. There's the canteen, there's his stuff, you know. He's being taken around the throne room of God.

He's experienced the worship, he's seen what that's like, and the bit we're at today, this morning, is that John is presented with a scroll. It's almost like, in modern day, getting an email.

[8 : 31] You know, he's presented with a scroll, that's how they used to communicate in the second century. Great, let's open it. No one, we read, is worthy to open the scroll.

It's been sealed seven times, it's got seven marks on it, it's got seven seals. You think of those wax seals on old envelopes. That's kind of what it's like. This is an important thing to open.

We're not going to go today into what is in the scroll, because that gets even more wacky. We're going to think today just about the fact that no one, John can find, has the authority to open that scroll.

And this is where it gets really interesting. Revelation 5, 7 and 8. Then one of the elders said to me, do not weep. Do not weep.

The line of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Great.

[9 : 29] The lion's here. Excellent. What does John see? Then I saw a lamb looking as if it had been slain. And it goes on to say where the lamb is and what it looks like.

But it's so easy to miss that bit. The elder says, look, a lion. And John looks and he sees a lamb. It's so easy for us to skip over that and miss the significance of that moment.

But let's think about it. Here is John. He's in desperate need of some authority, of some power, some strength to open whatever is in this scroll. And the angel says, don't worry, the lion's here.

And this violent image of a lion echoes down throughout the Old Testament. Whenever you think about the lion or the lion of Judah, it talks about a warrior, a kind of warrior-type messiah who's good at fighting God's battle, unweaking vengeance.

Formidable force. That's what you think of when you think of a lion. Fierce control, powerful nationalism. This is the power of Israel. Great. John turns round and he sees the opposite of a brave, formidable lion.

[10 : 44] He sees a half-dead lamb. The slot in the system that's been reserved for this lion is actually being filled by the slain lamb. The majestic, invincible, Aslan-type character has almost just been replaced by a half-dead Shaun the Sheep.

What is this about? But this reading points us to where true power lies. All honour and authority is found not in the roaring lion that John heard, but in the lamb which is sacrificed.

Jesus is both the lion of Judah and the lamb that was slain. He's not the lion when he's in a bad mood and the lamb when he's feeling quite nice.

He's not the lion on a bad day and the lamb on a good day. He is the lion and the lamb. He's the roaring conqueror and he's also my and yours sacrificial offering.

There is violence involved but it's not the violence of a lion that will inflict violence. It's the violence of a lamb who endures.

[11 : 56] It's not the violence of a lion which tears its prey to shreds. It's the violence of a lamb who endures that being torn to shreds for me and for you.

And what is amazing is that this word slain is in the perfect tense which means that it happened once but its effect is ongoing. You see, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not just an event that happened and then it was superseded by the resurrection and then the ascension.

Yeah, the crucifixion happened but look, he's alive now. Well, yes, that's true but the effect of his crucifixion goes on and on and on. Jesus Christ dying on the cross has cosmic effects on the universe throughout history.

We learn to live free from the chains of sin. Yes, we mess up but the sacrifice of the Lamb of God at that point in time allows me, David Sims, 2,000 years later with all my mistakes all my sin all my temptation all my lusts all my problems my pride it allows me to nail that to the cross of Jesus and to fall to worship the slain Lamb.

And John gives us an amazing description doesn't he of the Lamb-Lion and this is where Revelation gets a bit weird. I did find a few cool pictures I was going to show you but they're just a bit creepy but some people have drawn Jesus Christ as the Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns.

[13 : 29] It looks a bit like something out of a horror movie if I'm honest and I don't think that's what Jesus is going to look like when we meet him face to face. I think this is again a time when Revelation is being a bit more symbolic because you see the word seven symbolises perfection and Jesus has seven eyes the Lamb has seven eyes and seven horns this is ultimate perfection this is God identifying himself and saying actually this is the perfect way to conquer thank you very much and it's through sacrifice.

The world says violence and muscle power but actually we as followers of the Lamb fall to worship the slain one. I wonder if you want to live in power this morning or power comes through worshipping the sacrificial Lamb.

I wonder if you need to be a conqueror this morning while we conquer through worshipping the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the topsy-turviness of the Kingdom of God.

We read Revelation 5 that a slain Lamb that is half dead is more powerful than the military nationalistic power of the lion.

And when we think back to Jesus' life we see that lots of his teaching reinforces this point there's power through sacrifice. In Luke 22 Jesus has just been betrayed by Judas and all the kind of priest soldiers come to arrest him with their swords and their shields and their spears and the disciples get a bit worried and one of them reaches out with his sword and cuts off one of the soldiers' ears.

[15 : 09] You would have thought of all times when self-defence was a good excuse this was it. Jesus knew that he was about to be taken off for an unfair trial. He was about to be crucified and yet what does Jesus do?

Jesus says no, no, no, no that's not the way to do things and he actually heals the soldier's ear. Or in Matthew 5 when Jesus talks about turning the other cheek when someone hits you on the right cheek.

There's power in sacrifice. You see this morning we worship Jesus don't we? The lamb who was slain. The God who gave himself as an offering for us.

And we know that this death was not the end. Revelation 5 chapter 12 says worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.

And every creature responds saying yes amen to him who sits on the throne be glory and power forever. You see this God that was crucified is now reigning.

[16 : 20] He is worthy of all honour and glory and power. Power is not found in which country has the best nuclear weapons. power isn't gained by shouting the loudest on Twitter.

Power isn't found by finding clever ways of keeping your money to yourself and not having to pay your tax. True power is seen in the self-sacrifice of Jesus the slain lamb.

And my final point is where John writes in verse 9 because Jesus was slain and with his blood he purchased us for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and a priest to serve our God. This morning we are the kingdom of God. We are priests in the kingdom of God.

The word kingdom that's a powerful word. That refers to the reign of Jesus Christ. It refers to his kingship his authority. It refers to the reign of the Messiah.

[17 : 24] But where does it come from? It comes from his sacrifice. That's where true power comes out of. The slaughter of the lamb means that we as followers of the slain lamb can partake in his kingdom.

And being in his kingdom we pray for the sick and we see breakthrough. We prophesy into situations and we see powerful things happen. We take ground from Satan.

We tell demons to go and in Jesus' name they go. And yet we realise that this isn't the end of the story is it? The kingdom is here but the kingdom is also coming.

The rule and reign of Christ through his sacrifice is here but it's also not fully here. We see sickness. We see the effect of sin on the world. We see the effect of evil in a society where greed and money is almost rewarded.

But that doesn't mean we stop prophesying into situations in the name of Jesus. It doesn't mean we stop commanding healing in Jesus' name. It doesn't mean we stop step by step taking ground from the devil.

[18 : 33] You see the lamb sacrifice happened once and for all but the effect of his sacrifice that keeps going. And I recognise that that's really tough for us that we know people we ourselves maybe really struggle with illness family situations certain weaknesses that we haven't seen breakthrough in years and years and we keep praying and we don't see that breakthrough.

And it's not because we don't believe enough. That's not true. It's not because we don't have enough faith because it's not about our faith it's about what Jesus did. It's not because we don't pray hard enough.

It's because we live in the now and the not yet of the rule and reign of Jesus. This morning with John may we keep our eyes fixed on the slain lamb and join with the angels who fall down and proclaim you are worthy of blessing and honour and glory.

I really think that we're called as Christians to proclaim to a world that sees authority in terms of violence and strength that actually authority comes through sacrifice. It comes through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The only one the lamb was the only one found worthy to open the scroll. In a world that looks for military strength we preach the slain lamb.

[19 : 57] In a world where power so often comes with self-interest we preach the lamb of God self-sacrificed for us. To a world which seems to turn its back on God we say look we see the lion of Judah we see our powerful God in all his strength in all his authority and he comes as a slain lamb.

He is the sacrifice for my sin. He is the one that bore my shame and brought me into relationship with him.