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## FOLLOWING CHRIST IN A FRIGHTENING WORLD: *The Lamb's Lambs*

A few weeks ago Cooper, my four-year-old son, and I had the day to ourselves. So we went to the Tigger Movie. He calls it "Tigger Big Screen." And I did something there I have never done before at a movie. I fell asleep! Sorry to admit it. I just couldn't keep my eyes open.

But I was awake long enough to get the gist of the show. Tigger wants to find his family. He is the only Tigger he knows and he wants to find others like him. The rest of his friends, thinking to encourage him, write a letter purporting to be from his family. He is tremendously excited and somehow gets the idea that his family is coming to visit him. Pooh, Piglet and the rest realize that they have gotten themselves into a spot. So, they dress up in Tigger costumes and show up at Tigger's door. He is excited of course and wants to celebrate by doing what Tigger's do: bounce. Then he becomes suspicious. Getting past his initial enthusiasm, he realizes that the skin on the other Tiggers seems awfully wrinkly. And the voices coming out of the other Tiggers don't sound like real Tiggers. At last, he whips the hood off of Pooh and realizes he has been duped. They weren't his Tigger family at all. They were imposters.

Last week we met the Dragon's evil allies: Sea Beast and Land Beast. The Dragon - Satan failed in his attempt to destroy the Messiah Child, his mother, the angelic hosts and the Church. He needs help. So he calls forth two beasts. The Sea Beast is truly horrible looking: seven heads, ten horns, body like a leopard, feet like a bear, a mouth like a lion. A real patchwork job! He terrorizes the world, blasphemes God, and wars against the saints.

Then along comes the second beast. Only this one isn't so scary. In fact, he looks like a little lamb. A cute little lamb with two horns. But something isn't quite right. Because the voice that

comes out of that little creature is not the bleat of a lamb but the fearsome roar of a dragon. It isn't long before we realize that this lamb is an imposter. We have met the real lamb. And this isn't he. And just to make sure that we make no mistake about it, in the very next scene we meet the real thing again, the REAL Lamb of God. And the contrast between the genuine article and the counterfeit could not be more striking.

Think back to last week's text again. Do you remember the role that the counterfeit lamb played? He was the Sea Beast's Minister of Propaganda. He made a statue of the Sea Beast. He seemed to make the statue come alive. He forced the world to bow down in worship to him. He even placed a stamp on the forehead or right hand of every person, great and small, rich and poor, slave and free. Without the mark of the beast, you could not buy, sell, or survive. Do you remember the number of the mark? 666.

Do you see the point that is being made in these five verses this morning? It is a reminder. A reminder of what we have already seen in this book. It is a reminder of who the REAL Lamb of God is. We met him on chapter five, remember? Only he was worthy to open the seals on the scroll of human destiny. And we saw him again later in chapter 7. After God places his mark on the forehead of all the redeemed, they break into songs of praise to the Lamb. And during that song of praise, he is adored as the Lamb who will be our shepherd. Imagine that! We are the Lamb's lambs. We are the sheep of his pasture as Psalm 100 puts it.

You may not have been aware of it but the little girl who did the Call to Worship this morning, magnificently I might add, was my daughter, Rachel. It has been interesting for us, the difference of opinion about who Rachel most resembles, her mommy or me. What do you think? Those of you who know Cyndi and me, how many think she looks like me? How many think she looks like Cyndi?

Frankly, I don't see it. I'll just have to take your word for it. But apparently there are marks that Rachel possesses that cause others to look at her and say, "Ah, that's Mark's little girl. That's Cyndi's little girl."

If we are the Lamb's lambs, what should be our distinguishing marks? What should others see in us? What should we see in ourselves? There are four traits that I want to pull out of this morning's text and I want to mention my indebtedness to Pastor Darrell Johnson for some of these ideas:

**First-We are financed.** The Lamb's lambs are people who know they have been financed. "That's odd," you might think. "What a strange thing to say." But that's exactly what the text says...twice. In verse 3 and 4 we are described as the ones who have been "purchased." One of the defining marks of the Lamb's lambs is that we know that we have been bought and paid for; we do not belong to ourselves anymore.

A few weeks back while I was in Montgomery. Even in February it was warm. As I drove by cotton fields, I could not help but wonder what it must have been like for the black slaves toiling under the stifling summer sun. As I looked at the old homes, the capital building, the stairs where Jefferson Davis, Jeff Davis, as they call him, gave his speech announcing secession, it was impossible not to think about that horrible institution which precipitated the Civil War, slavery. More than once, as I drove past plantation style homes, I found myself trying to imagine what it must have been like to be bought and sold like a piece of property. To watch as your wife, your children were sold before your eyes and taken from you, never to be seen again.

Proudly, today, we declare that we are free. All people, white, black, every color. All men and all women are created equal. It is a core principle of our existence as a country. We are free.

Ah, but we who are the Lamb's know differently. We are not free. We have been purchased. Do you remember in chapter 5 what qualified the Lamb to open the seals on the scroll of human destiny? Because he had purchased us with his blood. Paul puts it this way in I Cor 6: "... do you not know that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price." Do you remember the mark of the beast? 666? It is the counterfeit. It is a counterfeit of the mark of the Lamb on the forehead of everyone who belongs to him. That mark is a mark of ownership. It reminds us that we are no longer ours. When we gave our hearts to Christ, he paid a price we could not pay. A price that we can

never pay. We are eternally in his debt. We will forever belong to the one who paid so great a price.

If you truly believe that you are your own person, beholden to none, there are two possibilities. You are either ignorant of what exactly occurred when you gave your heart to Christ or you never have done so.

**We are firstfruits.** Another odd expression, but there it is in the text, v. 5. What does that mean? Firstfruits is a Biblical phrase that means sacrifice. The first fruit of the harvest belonged to God. It would be offered up as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and as a reminder that everything...all of the rest of the harvest...came from God, belonged to God and was only ours because of his graciousness.

With the death of Jesus on the cross, the final, perfect sacrifice was accomplished. Does that mean that we don't need to make sacrifices anymore? Careful, now. This is a trick question. The answer is, No. It didn't get easier, it got tougher. In the Old Testament, we would have offered up fruits or grain or animal. What does the New Testament say we must offer? Everything! The Old Testament standard was easier. The Old Testament standard was a tithe of everything. The New Testament standard is everything!

Do you remember Paul's words in Romans 12? "I appeal to you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God to present your **bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship." One of the distinguishing marks of the Lamb's lambs is that we realize that our entire life is intended to be lived as a sacrifice. As Darrell Johnson puts it, "...the Lamb's people do not compartmentalize life. They don't say, 'This is God's, but this is mine. No, no, no. This is God's, this is God's, this is God's. Sunday is God's and so is Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Quiet time is God's and so is work time and recreation time and sleep time. The first ten percent is God's and so is the next ten percent and the rest and the rest. 'It's all Yours because I am all Yours, Lord.'"

Do you believe it? Do you live your life as if all that you have belongs to God?

**We are faithful.** Did you notice that puzzling passage about the 144,000? There is a new twist added here. What is it? They are virgins. According to the text, the 144,000 with the mark on their foreheads have not "defiled themselves with women but kept themselves pure." There are some of you, I know, who believe this to be a literal number meaning 144,000 virgin Jews. I am sorry, I do not believe it. Numbers are symbols to John. 144,000 is 12...a number of great symbolic significance...times 10 times 10. I continue to believe that this represents the entire body of the redeemed.

As for the virgins, there is no doubt that the early Church valued celibacy as a means of devoting one's entire life to the service of Christ. Jesus spoke of those who were "eunuchs" for the sake of the gospel. Paul said that it was easier to serve Christ as a single person. An early theologian named Origen actually emasculated himself as a sign of his devotion to Christ. Ouch!

The problem is, if you take this literal view, you fly in the face of every piece of Biblical teaching about sex. The Bible never teaches that sexual relations are defiling. On the contrary, from the second chapter of Genesis on, marital sex is presented as God's gracious and loving gift to humanity. Jesus affirmed it when he said that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two should become one flesh. Paul even used the image of sexual union to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church.

No, you must ignore too much biblical material to take a literal view of this "virgin" reference. And it also ignores entirely the context of the letter. Do you remember one of the practices that occurred in the temples dedicated to Emperor worship? Temple prostitution. In fact, in chapter 17 we will read of the "Whore of Babylon." Five times in Revelation John calls idol worship "pornography." The image of illicit sex is used throughout Revelation as a metaphor for idolatrous behavior.

It makes perfect sense, then, that this body of believers who have not bowed their knee to the Roman idols ...who have not "slept with the whore of Babylon" as it were...would be described as virgins. What does it mean? That they have saved themselves for

marriage to the bridegroom, Christ. They did not sully themselves with adulterous, idolatrous affairs with other gods. They belong only to Jesus.

Put simply, the Lamb's lambs are faithful to him. We do not sleep around. We do not toy with other gods...other idols. We belong only to him. The other night, Cyndi and I lay in bed talking. We asked each other why our 12 ½ years had been so good, for it has. We had several suggestions but we agreed on this one: we have been faithful to each other and the thought that the other person was not being faithful has never crossed either of our minds. The Lamb's lambs are faithful.

**We are followers.** Verse 4 makes this simple and powerful statement: "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes." At Christmas time, as a way of drawing the Revelation and Christmas together, I quoted the first part of a familiar nursery rhyme. Do you remember it? "Mary had a little lamb." We know the rest: "Whose fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, the Lamb was sure to go." If you ever travel with me to Israel, you will see this nursery rhyme in living color. The shepherd walks along and the sheep follow. That is their job. That is our job, too. We are to follow our Lamb.

We seem to be hitting a similar theme here, don't we? We have been financed. We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to Jesus Christ. We are firstfruits. Our whole lives are to be lived in sacrifice to Jesus Christ. We are faithful. Our eyes do not stray. We worship only Jesus Christ. We are followers. Wherever Jesus goes, we go. Whatever Jesus does, we do. When he says speak the truth, we speak the truth. When he says care for the poor, we care for the poor. When he says love our enemies and pray for our persecutors, we do so. When he says take up our cross and follow him, we do so, even to the point of death.

These are some of the distinguishing marks of the Lamb's lambs. Do you feel intimidated? Me, too. We cannot possibly fulfill these demands perfectly. Thank God we do not have to. The Lamb has already done it for us. We do not exhibit the marks of the Lamb so that we might earn his favor. We exhibit the marks of the Lamb because we belong to him and the longer we follow him, the more we become like him.

My brothers and sisters, we are Children of the Lord. We are the Lamb's lambs. Shouldn't the world be able to tell? Shouldn't those who look in at our lives be able to notice a difference? Do they? Do you bear the marks of the Lamb in your life?

**Sermon Discussion Questions for  
The Lamb's Lambs  
Revelation 14:1-5**

Pastor Mark Toone  
March 26, 2000

- Review the "lamb" texts in Revelation beginning with Chapter 5. Do not read all of them but remember together the various themes of each section. (5-7; 14:1-5)
- Why is it appropriate for the land Beast story to be followed by this text? What is the appearance of the Land Beast? Describe the various ways in which he, and the Dragon and Sea Beast, try to counterfeit the work of God. Focus particularly on our text. Where are the parallels?
- Pastor Mark described four marks of the "Lambs lambs." Can you remember what they are? What text is each point drawn from? What do they mean? Can you find others in this text?
- Honestly appraising your own life, what "mark" do you find most difficult to exhibit? Please pray for each other.

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