

“Christ As Cosmic Rambo versus the Lamb of God”

Isaiah 53:7-9 Revelation 5

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Alright, how many of you want to own up to actually having seen a “Rambo” movie? Let’s have a show of hands. *(pause for the show of hands)* Not surprisingly quite a few of you have seen at least one “Rambo” movie. If you’ve seen one you’ve basically seen them all. What is the plot line of a “Rambo” movie? *(pause for responses)*

(Chances are people will say something like: “There are these good, innocent victims who are in great danger from some really bad people. Rambo comes to the rescue, guns blazing, kills all the bad people, thus saving the good victims.” It’s a morality play. Many of our westerns follow the same plot line.)

Why do we love these kind of morality plays? What is appealing about them? *(Pause for responses) (chances are people will say something like “We like the idea that the good guys win in the end.” Or “It’s always good to see the bad guys get what’s coming to them.” Etc.)*

The writers of the “Left Behind series also follow the same basic plot line. It is a morality play from a human point of view, how we would run the world if we were in charge. The only problem is that it’s not good biblical theology! God’s ways are not our ways and God’s thoughts are not our thoughts! Thanks be to God!

Last week when I asked you what came to mind when you think of the book of Revelation we got a lot of answers like this: war, destruction, and Armageddon. Indeed, if one listens to the “Left Behind” crowd one would think that God’s grand and glorious plan for this earth, that God lovingly created and called good, is to destroy it in a nuclear conflagration in which

the forces of evil will be destroyed and from which the forces of good will be spared and then build the New Jerusalem from the nuclear cinders! Furthermore, it will be Christ leading the way into battle on his white charger, slaying all who are evil and on Satan's side. The image they present for the Second Coming of Christ is that of a cosmic Rambo wrecking havoc on the forces of evil and exacting sweet revenge for all the slights the forces of good have received at their hands.

When I first thought about doing a Lenten series on the book of Revelation it didn't strike me as a particularly "Lenten theme" but the more I thought about it the more it seemed right. Lent is a time to draw closer to Christ and Christ's passion; therefore, it is essential to clarify exactly what our image of Christ is. Is Christ a cosmic Rambo, God's grim reaper of justice? Or is Christ the Lamb of God, whose passion on the cross and whose ongoing passion for God's earth, and us can transform us and bring healing to the nations? Clearly I've already tipped my hand where I come out. I vote for the latter. Christ for me is most certainly not a cosmic Rambo. For me Christ is the Lamb of God and it is the power of the Lamb that offers hope for the whole world.

Most assuredly the book of Revelation spends a great deal of time talking about the saints of God being "victorious" and "conquering." There are even two passages where Christ is said to "make war", Rev. 2:16 and 19:11, but any close and honest reading of the text will reveal some surprises in regard to these matters. First of all, Jesus, according to Revelation, conquers not with any weapon of mass destruction, but with the "sword of his mouth." What is being emphasized here is Jesus testimony and the word of God. Jesus does not come back to earth to hew down the wicked with a bloody sword.

Revelation chapter 19 is where we find the battle of Armageddon. I encourage you to read it today sometime. If you do you will find that in spite of the insistence of the “Left Behind” folks, there is no indication that Christians take part in the war in Revelation 19. Yes, an army dressed in white robes is mentioned but it is clearly designated as being a “heavenly army. Furthermore, despite the fact that Hal Lindsey and the “Left Behind” folks seem to offer glorious details of the battle in their books, Revelation offers NO description of any such battle! It’s over before it’s hardly begun! New Testament scholar, Barbara Rossing says this is because, “...**the victory has already been won in Jesus’ crucifixion – and is not to be fought in a final cataclysmic war.**” (p. 121) She goes on to point out that “**Nowhere in Revelation do God’s people ‘wage war.’ What they do is ‘conquer’ or ‘become victors’ (the same word in Greek)- and they do that by the Lamb’s own blood and by their courageous testimony, not through Armageddon or war.**” There is no “Tribulation Force” armed to the teeth. Again, this is why we are reading our way through Revelation this Lenten season. You read it for yourself and see if Barbara Rossing isn’t right.

Barbara Rossing points out that not only does Revelation NOT promote war, holy or otherwise, it actually subverts war. It sees the kinds of war we are use to on earth as being not of God but of empire, not holy, but evil. War is the way of the beast, not the way of God.

Instead of Christ as cosmic Rambo the book of Revelation offers up to us Christ as the Lamb of God. Before church started I gave Michele Gilbreth a concordance, a book that lists all the uses of every word that is in the Bible. I asked her to up several words related to war and the image of Christ as a cosmic Rambo in Revelation. I asked her to look up “horse” to see how

many times this is connected with Christ in Revelation. (Ask Michele how many times it was used.) (only 7 and four of these refer to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse) I asked Michele to look up “lion” to see how many times that is used. How many times was it used? (only three) I asked Michele to see how many times “war” is used in Revelation. How many times is it used (only 8 and most of these instances are the forces of the beast making war on the saints) Finally, I asked Michele to look up “lamb or “lamb of God” to see how many times it was used. How many times was it used? (29 times!!!!) Lamb or Lamb of God shows up in the following chapters 5,6,7,8,12,13,14,15,17,19,21, and 22! Now what would you conclude? *(wait for a response) (Clearly this is THE major view of Christ in the Book of Revelation and it is found throughout the book.)*

Chapter five in the book of Revelation is a pivotal chapter. It opens the way for much of what follows, much of which is quite mysterious and quite horrifying. Yet, if we keep the message of chapter five in mind, strangely reassuring, especially when we contrast it with such horrors as the riding forth of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: war, famine, disease and death. The incredible claim of the book of Revelation is that power of the Lamb of God is at the very heart of the universe, that we should never be discouraged or fearful, no matter what horrors we experience in this world, no matter how often it seems that the forces of evil triumph.

No other apocalyptic work uses the image of the “lamb” for it’s divine hero. It is clear that this is no ordinary lamb, given John’s description of it having “seven horns and seven eyes”, which he explains are the “seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth”. It is clear that this is no ordinary lamb, given that of all the creatures and beings in the world, only the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll. Clearly, there is a unique power at work in this

lamb. Yet for all this the word that John uses for “lamb” is the diminutive form. Not only is Christ the Lamb of God, he is the tiny “lambkin of God.” One can almost picture Mary’s little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow! Interestingly, the only other place this word is used in the Bible is when Luke has Jesus sending out the disciples into the world “a lambs among wolves.” (Luke 10:3) There are many “wolves” in Revelation, yet Christ, the Lamb of God, will exercise the mysterious power and wisdom of God. As Rossing puts it, **“The lamb is an image Revelation wants us to carry with us into our lives, like the children’s nursery rhyme ‘Mary had a little lamb’ – Where ever we go, to school, to work, or shopping, everywhere in the world, the lamb is with us, leading us into a new way of life.”** (p. 112)

Now lest we get all caught up in this beautiful, romantic, rose colored glasses view of Jesus, we must remember that this lambkin in all its vulnerability is powerful. Ward Ewing is president of the Episcopal Seminary, just blocks from where the World Trade Towers where in New York. Reflecting on those apocalyptic horrors, Ewing speaks of “Lamb power” and of our calling as Christians to develop a lifestyle centered around Christ’s self-giving love. He says, **“Lamb power is the power of vulnerable but strong love to change the world. In all things, large and small, personal and political, the power of vulnerable love can bring healing. If we are to follow the Lamb, we cannot remain safe and secure ... Vulnerability-the primary characteristic of Lamb power-includes by definition the possibility of suffering.”**

Verse 9 Revelation chapter 5 says that through his death on a cross Christ has redeemed the world and is forming all his followers into **“a kingdom of priests serving our God.”** In Revelation we are to go about this work with

an attitude of worship and song. There is a message here for us today. This is more than just whistling in the dark while passing through a cemetery. We have the assurance that “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might honor and glory and blessing!” Christ is not the cosmic Rambo executing cosmic justice. Christ is the lambkin of God! Amen.

(play the song from Handel’s Messiah, “*Worthy is the Lamb.*”