



## The Lion of Judah

by Ronald L. Dart

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” [Revelation 5:5]. Someone recently noted that the Lion of Judah is not a *tame* lion, which led me to ponder what we have made of Jesus the Christ. It’s also true that Jesus is the Lamb of God, but that was for the purpose of *dying* in our place. The risen Christ is, once again, a lion; and he has not been tamed.

We are nearing the end of the age of “relevant Christianity”. The older (not the oldest, but the older) generation has been in a *long chase* after something they call “relevance”. “Youth are into rock and roll, so let’s do Christian rock. Christianity should be made *relevant* to the younger generation.” Now, I don’t know what the churchmen who led in this effort were thinking about the words of the apostle Paul. He wrote to the church in Rome, and he said (Romans 12, verse 1):

### Romans 12

KJ2000

<sup>1</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

<sup>2</sup> And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Seems to me, from what the apostle Paul said, that the objective is for Christianity to transform the world; not for Christianity to *adapt* itself to the world, to *conform* to the world, to *give in* to the world. Doesn’t seem right somehow, coming from a Christ who expects us to offer our bodies as a *living sacrifice* to him.

Yeah, it’s a good thing for a church to get the kids off the street. But is that all the church is called to do? This came into sharp focus for me some time back when I was watching a PBS documentary titled *The Lost Children of Rockdale County*. And what was so striking about this...but to tell you the story: There were some 400 kids in *one* high school that became infected with syphilis. Now, syphilis being a reportable disease, all these kids had to come out of the woodwork. And, of course, in following through on the contacts of the ones that came in, they found many who had not come in and yet were infected. What was so powerful about this program was the way in which they were able to get these kids to talk about their experiences, their attitudes towards sex, their attitudes toward live, and the way they were going. And the title *The Lost Children...* was *so apt*, because they were *lost*. A lot of the girls were getting involved in strange sex with some of these guys strictly because they needed attention they weren’t getting from their parents.

Well, the story was amazing because...(I was amazed, for one thing, because they were able to get these girls to talk about their sex life the way they did) but one scene in church was so striking to me. The church had a program for getting the kids off the streets—and they had Christian rock bands in, and they were clapping their hands and dancing to this Christian rock. The thing that struck me is that the rock music didn’t save them from syphilis. What *might* have saved them from it was a good strong dose of Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah.

You know, the newest generation may be waking up to the emptiness of their lives. It seems that reports are that they are *hungry* for God. They're *tired* of the thin gruel that's being served up in most churches. Many are ready for some *meat*. A meal with nothing but dessert doesn't satisfy for very long. To the wounded, to the sick, to the afflicted who turn to Christ, Christ is indeed gentle. But to those who are whole, he presents a different face. And what's striking to me about this is it turns out that this *other* face that he presents to us who are not afflicted is a much more *compelling* face, a much more *demanding* face. And strangely, people seem to be more inclined to respond to his demands when they understand that Jesus is a whole man and very God. He is demanding. He is confrontational. He is even dangerous. Being close to Jesus can get you killed. He even warned people who came to him that they should *count the cost*. One day when he was out teaching...

**Luke 14**

AKJV

<sup>25</sup> And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said to them,

<sup>26</sup> If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Now, I think that's pretty *demanding*, don't you—that you've actually got to be prepared to turn away from family? Now, in many cases that's not necessary. But in some cases it has been. He has to be willing to make that decision; and if you're not willing to do that, you can't be his disciple.

**Luke 14**

AKJV

<sup>27</sup> And whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

This plainly implies that there is some kind of a cross that every one of us is going to have to carry.

**Luke 14**

AKJV

<sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

And he concludes saying:

**Luke 14**

AKJV

<sup>33</sup> So likewise, whoever he be of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.

Now, I can't think of anything more demanding than that: that Jesus expects us to be able to walk away from *everything*—to walk away from the world, walk away from our stake in it, walk away from *whatever* it is that we have to walk away from to follow him *wherever* it is that he's going to take us. He said:

**Luke 14**

AKJV

<sup>34</sup> Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his flavor, with which shall it be seasoned?

<sup>35</sup> It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that has ears to hear, let him hear.

Now, the generation that is now passing from its position of leadership tried hard to make Jesus relevant to the times, even to make Jesus *easy*. Nothing for you to do, just give your hand to the preacher and your heart to the Lord. Just confess Jesus and that's all you have to do. There's nothing else to it. I think that's a terrible mistake. Jesus is *what* he is. Jesus is *who* he is. People do not need Jesus made into the mundane, the everyday, like everything else in the world. They've had more than enough of that already. What *they* need is to encounter the Lion of Judah, who will call them to great sacrifice and great accomplishment, who will lead them on to really ultimately control the world. Jesus could, as I said, be very demanding when he says, "Whoever forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple." An important, wealthy man came to Jesus one day with a question. He came and said:

### Matthew 19

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> [...] Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

<sup>17</sup> And he said to him, Why call you me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

I don't know what people are thinking about when they offer some other solution to inheriting eternal life. The guy came to Jesus and said, "What do I need to do?" He says, "Keep the commandments."

### Matthew 19

AKJV

<sup>18</sup> He said to him, Which? Jesus said, You shall do no murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,

<sup>19</sup> Honor your father and your mother: and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

<sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, If you will be perfect [*complete*], go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

<sup>22</sup> But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Counting the cost for this man suddenly became relevant Christianity. It just wasn't relevant. It just didn't fit with his life. He couldn't make it work with his life. As I said, Jesus could be very demanding. He could demand everything you've got. Not for himself. He said, "Sell it, get rid of it, give it to the poor; and come follow me." Jesus could also very confrontational.

On another occasion, Jesus was talking to a gaggle of people who had gathered around him. (They were always there, it seems.) This is John 8, verse 31:

### John 8

AKJV

<sup>31</sup> Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed;

<sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

This is one of those phrases that has passed into *our* language; and it was spoken, according to John, "to those Jews which believed on him". Now, I'm not quite sure what to make of what follows here, because it's almost as though there were two groups of people we're talking about. And yet, we also know that during a great deal of Jesus' ministry there were people who followed him all over the place and believed on him who didn't stick—who later on would turn back and walk no more with him. He was a confrontational, a very disconcerting figure in very many ways. And so consequently, when he

made this statement, “If you stick with me, continue in my word, you’ll know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how say you, You shall be made free?

Now, this to me is an *astounding* statement. They were living in an *occupied country*. They were dominated by the Romans. They didn’t have complete *freedom* to do what they pleased. Well, Jesus answered them and said:

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>34</sup> [...] Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin.

<sup>35</sup> And the servant stays not in the house for ever: but the Son stays ever.

<sup>36</sup> If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

And he’s talking about free from sin and error. He continued:

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>37</sup> I know that you are Abraham’s seed; but you seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you.

Now, there’s a disconnect here. John starts out by telling us Jesus spoke these words to those who believed, but these people now that he’s talking to don’t fall in that category. I think they interjected themselves into the congregation right after the first words to the believing disciples. Jesus said, “You seek to kill me because my word has no place in you.” Now, I don’t know what you think about people being confrontational, but here’s Jesus looking people right in the face and saying, “You’re trying to kill me.”

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>38</sup> I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father.

<sup>39</sup> They answered and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.

<sup>40</sup> But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

<sup>41</sup> You do the deeds of your father. [...]

Now, that stung. There’s no question at this time that Jesus was beginning to get under their skin, because they retaliated. They said:

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>41</sup> [...] We be not born of fornication [*Implication: “like you were”*]; we have one Father, even God.

And Jesus is not going to let them off. He said:

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>42</sup> [...] If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

<sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my word.

Now, this is fascinating; because he just looks these people in the eye and says, “You can’t understand what I am saying. It’s not *possible*.”

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and stayed not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Jesus talks to these people face to face and says, “Your father is *the devil*.” This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild, folks. This is Jesus, verbally, taking the hide off of a group of Jews that had gathered around him on this occasion. He says:

**John 8**

KJ2000

<sup>45</sup> And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not.

<sup>46</sup> Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me?

<sup>47</sup> He that is of God hears God’s words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God.

Now, this is a theme Jesus develops elsewhere in his gospel. Those who believed the written word of Moses and the prophets tended to believe Jesus because he was consistent with them. Now, you might think that all those Jews out there following Judaism in this day and age really believe the written word of Moses and the prophets. You would be wrong, as becomes *very clear* in any consistent study of the gospel accounts—that these were people who had actually placed *their* traditions *above* Scripture. And as a result, they were *denying* the authority of those scriptures while they *claimed* to support them. Those who practiced Judaism without that commitment to Scripture had big problems.

Now, have you noticed how *big* a figure Abraham is becoming in this discussion? He looms very large.

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>48</sup> Then answered the Jews, and said to him, Say we not well that you are a Samaritan, and have a devil?

I don’t know where this came from. They’re saying, basically, that Jesus is not even a Jew—“You come from Samaria.” I guess they believed that his illegitimate father was a Samaritan.

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>49</sup> Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and you do dishonor me.

<sup>50</sup> And I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeks and judges.

<sup>51</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

That was a little too much for the crowd.

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>52</sup> Then said the Jews to him, Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.

“That’s not possible, because they’re dead!”

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>53</sup> Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom make you yourself?

This is important; you need to understand this. His audience was beginning to tumble to the gist of what Jesus was telling them. I don’t think they immediately got it; and I don’t think he was, necessarily to start with, heading in this direction; but it’s going there.

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>54</sup> Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honors me; of whom you say, that he is your God:

<sup>55</sup> Yet you have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like to you: [...]

Ouch. Here he stands in front of a group of people, *telling* them that they are liars, *to their face*. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild? Yes. A bruised reed he will not break? Oh, yes. But as far as this is concerned, when the time comes for telling the truth, Jesus steps right up and tells it.

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Now we come to a crucial question: How did the people who heard these words understand them? How did they take Jesus’ meaning on this occasion? Because this is important. You know, we play games with words, sometimes; and we run our concordance searches, and look back at Greek lexicons, and all this kind of thing; trying to understand what the Greek said. But the fact is, not just merely what Jesus said, but what did he *mean*? And one of the ways you understand that is how the people who heard it, who speak the same language, were in on the whole congregation—how did they take it? Jesus said:

**John 8**

AKJV

<sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

<sup>57</sup> Then said the Jews to him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?

<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I am.

<sup>59</sup> Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the middle of them, and so passed by.

So the Jews understood him well enough, and they were ready to *stone* him to death for what he said. What is the very least that we can take from Jesus' words in context? You can take that he existed before Abraham, and Abraham saw him.

Now, I am sure that those who doubt that Jesus existed before his human birth will have some kind of explanation for this. There are those who question the validity of the Gospel of John because this scripture is here. I don't think they realize that this is the first step in reducing the authority of the New Testament to rubble. And you can't go there. Jesus Christ existed before Abraham. Abraham saw him, Abraham knew him, Abraham sat down and ate with God [**Genesis 18**]. He was his friend.

You may have wondered what I meant when I said that Jesus was dangerous. I don't mean that he was dangerous in that he directly caused harm to people, but it *was* dangerous to be his disciples. On that last night before he was crucified, after the last supper, he sat talking with his disciples. This is John, the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter. He said:

**John 15**

AKJV

<sup>17</sup> These things I command you, that you love one another.

<sup>18</sup> If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

<sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Now, when you read this...I don't know what you make of it, but how can we possibly try to achieve some kind of relevance in modern society when, in fact, we are not *of* the world? We don't think the way the world does. We're not bringing them a message about *this* world. We're not trying to adapt Christ to the world; we're calling on people to adapt themselves to Christ. And the result of it? We could be hated for it.

**John 15**

AKJV

<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

Uh, well if you think about that for a minute...Did they keep his sayings? No. Did they persecute him? Yes. What does that say is going to come *our* way if we're doing what we're supposed to be doing as Christians? Gaining approval? Well, hardly. Maybe. Maybe people will like some of our Christian acts. Maybe people will be very happy with the fact that we feed the hungry and clothe the naked. That's all very good. We did a pretty good job of that after Hurricane Katrina, as Christians, didn't we? But that's not all there is that we're called to do. Jesus said:

**John 15**

AKJV

<sup>21</sup> But all these things will they do to you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. [*They don't know me or my Father.*]

<sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.

They can't claim ignorance. They came face to face with God and rejected him.

### John 15

AKJV

<sup>23</sup> He that hates me hates my Father also.

You know, when I read this...so many people, so many of that day, would have thought they had been worshiping God. They had been in the temple every day, every week (whatever it was). They had made their pilgrimage festivals down there. And they would never have imagined for a moment that they *hated* God. And it was only when that contact with God was put to the *real* test of a face-to-face confrontation that they were able to learn that they *did*. Jesus said:

### John 15

AKJV

<sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. [*It had to happen.*]

<sup>25</sup> But this comes to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

This, to me, is one of the most *stunning* things you read in the whole Bible; because there was no legitimate reason for hatred. Sometimes in the modern world, we're always looking around to find out why it is people don't like us—why it is that people might hate Christians, why people want to destroy Christians. And, in fact, this question of the persecution, the destruction of Christians, has not gone away. Not by a long shot. There are places in this world, right now where we live, where it is worth your life to confess that you are a Christian. You're like as not going to be kidnapped and sold as a slave on the auction block in some parts of this world. How in the world does that happen? Well, it happens because they hate God; and they have no cause for it, so don't look for it. Now, Jesus went on to say to his men:

### John 16

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> These things have I spoken to you, that you should not be offended [*stumble*].

<sup>2</sup> They shall put you out of the synagogues: yes, the time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God service.

<sup>3</sup> And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

Your whole world, he said, he going to come apart. The synagogue was a part of their life; it was a part of the way they came and went, the way they did business. And he says, "The time is gonna come. They're going to throw you out of there, cut off your business contacts. The time will come that whoever kills you will think that he is doing *God* a service." Mind you, not Rome a service; not the civil government a service; God—which means the people who are going to be killing you are going to be religious people. And they are going to do it because "they have not known the father nor me." So, it's dangerous to be a Christian. John 17, verse 13—Jesus is praying for his disciples. He said:

### John 17

AKJV

<sup>13</sup> And now come I to you[, *Father*]; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

<sup>14</sup> I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.



So the Lion of Judah is, indeed, *not* a tame lion. He did not call you to make your life easier, less demanding, more pleasant. He called you to send you in harm's way—to make *very large* demands of you.

You know, it came as a shock to me one day, when I came to realize that God did not call me merely to save my miserable hide. He called me, not to save me, but to *spend* me in his service. No, the Lion of Judah is not a tame lion; but we get to walk with him and share the excitement.

Until next time, I'm Ronald Dart.

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