

Portrait of Christ as Our Eternal Future

Pastor Tim Keller posits this scenario: Imagine you have two women of the same age, same socioeconomic status, same education level, and same temperament. You hire both of them and say to each, “You are part of an assembly line, and I want you to put part A into part B, and then hand what you assembled to someone else. I want you to do this for eight hours a day.” It’s very boring work. Their conditions are the same in every way, except for one difference. You tell the first woman that at the end of a year you will pay her thirty thousand dollars, and you tell the second woman that at the end of a year you will pay her thirty million dollars.

After a couple of weeks, the first woman will be saying, “Isn’t this tedious? Isn’t this driving you insane? Aren’t you thinking of quitting?” But the second woman will say, “No. This is perfectly fine with me. In fact, I whistle while I work.” Pastor Keller draws this conclusion:

“You have two people experiencing identical circumstances in radically different ways. What makes the difference? It is their expectation of the future. What we believe about our future completely controls how we experience our present. We are irreducibly hope-based creatures.”¹

What do you believe about your future? Today we conclude our examination of portraits of Christ from the Old Testament. And we finish with a bang! We’re going to look at three portraits – they portray Christ as a stone, a lion, and a groom. These symbols of Jesus all describe His role in the future. And if you today have a personal relationship with Him, these symbols will change the way you deal with your present circumstances, because they will fill your heart with hope! So, first we must see the symbol of ...

I. Jesus, The Stone

It’s found in the book of Daniel, which, many of you know, is both a book of history and a book of prophecy. Daniel is one of thousands of Jews who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. While they were there, God performed many miracles for him and his friends. Remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Those were Daniel’s friends and God saved them from King Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. But God also gave Daniel a special gift of interpreting dreams. So, when the king had a gnarly dream that none of the Babylonian magicians, enchanters or sorcerers could interpret, he called on Daniel. And when the king asked him if he could interpret his dream, Daniel said: (Dan. 2:27-28)

... **“No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. ...”**

Daniel takes no credit for his gift, but immediately gives credit to God. Is that what you do when someone compliments you about your great giftedness? Just asking.

Then Daniel used “God’s gift” by describing exactly what the king had dreamed. It was a huge statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, body and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. In verses 34 and 35 Daniel said to the king...

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like

the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” (Dan. 2:34-35)

This king had this dream in about 602 B.C. In this dream and the subsequent visions in Dan. 7 and 8, God predicted in accurate detail the future kingdoms that would dominate the world in the sixth, fourth, and first centuries B. C. The statue was describing the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. It is so historically accurate that secular scholars have claimed that the book of Daniel couldn't possibly have been written in the sixth century. “It must have been written,” they say, “after all these empires had come and gone.” But Dan. 2 isn't only a prophecy about geo-political realities. No, it's a prophecy of Christ, which is still in our future. Christ is the “*stone... cut out by no human hand.*” And what does that Stone do? Daniel said:

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (Dan. 2:44-45)

So, the Stone is the representative of “*the God of heaven*” who is going to set up a “*kingdom that shall never be destroyed*” but will “*break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end...*” This refers to Christ at the end of the age, which is proven by the prophecy of Rev. 19:15 where One called “*The Word of God*” comes to earth to “*strike down the nations, and he will rule them ...*”

So, do you look at the world today and say “What is going on? This is craziness! Everything is coming apart!” Is your present filled with fear and worry and all manner of gloom and doom? What was it that Pastor Keller said? “*What we believe about our future completely controls how we experience our present.*” And what was it that Jesus said?

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. ... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.”

“... In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (Matt. 24:6, 7; John 16:33)

If you are a follower of Jesus, then your future is under the control of the Stone of Daniel 2 that will “... *break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end ...*” That Stone then will become a great mountain that will fill the whole earth. “*the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.*” Jesus said, “Take heart, don't worry; I'm in control.”

But Christ isn't only the Stone of Daniel 2, He's also...

II. Jesus, The Lion of Judah

Several of our worship songs speak of Jesus as the “Lion of Judah.” In “The Lion and the Lamb” we sing:

*Our God is a Lion, the Lion of Judah;
He's roaring with power and fighting our battles.
And every knee will bow before the Lion and the Lamb,
Every knee will bow before Him.²*

But where is this portrait of Christ as a lion found in Scripture? It's found in a couple of places but one of the most intriguing is in Genesis, where Jacob, whose name was changed by

God to Israel, is giving a final blessing to his twelve sons, before he dies. We heard part of that recited by our children but let me show you something else. In Genesis 49:1 it sets the scene...

Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.” (Gen. 49:1)

Then, after blessing and prophesying over the three older sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi, he put his hand on Judah and said,

**“Judah, your brothers shall praise you ...
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.**

**Judah is a lion’s cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.**

**He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?**

**The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;**

and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. “(Gen. 49:8-10)

Now, these words of blessing weren’t just nice words before Jacob died. They were legally binding promises of the future. And Judah’s blessing is unique. Judah is promised the highest place of respect among the brothers. “...*your brothers shall praise you... Your father’s sons shall bow down before you.*” But it’s not just the place of highest respect in the family, it’s a place of authority in the world. “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him...*” This is unique because usually the oldest son receives this respect and authority. But Judah is the fourth oldest. So, what’s going on?

This is all tied to Judah’s act of sacrifice. If you remember the story of Joseph, ten of his brothers conspired against him when they were young shepherds, first to kill him and then to sell him into slavery. And whose idea was it to sell him? It was Judah’s idea. It might be considered an act of mercy because the other brothers wanted to kill him, but still, it was his idea to sell his own brother into slavery.

Roll the tape ahead twenty years or so. Famine strikes the land of Canaan. Jacob sends the brothers (minus Benjamin) to see if they can buy grain in Egypt. Joseph is now the Viceroy of Egypt, in charge of selling grain to foreigners. To make a long and very interesting story short, Joseph recognizes his brothers and decides not to reveal his identity but to test his brothers to see if they’ve changed since they sold him into slavery. He sells them only a little grain and demands that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin (Joseph’s only brother by his biological mother), back with them if they want more. Jacob at first refuses to send Benjamin because he thinks that he is the only son left from his favorite wife. So, in order to get his father to agree to send Benjamin, Judah steps forward and says ...

... “Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die... I will be a pledge of his safety. ... If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” (Gen. 43:8-9)

When they appear before Joseph, he springs his trap. He sells them grain, but hides the money they paid plus a silver cup in Benjamin’s sack. After they leave for home, Joseph sends soldiers to bring them back, charging them with thievery. The punishment is that they must leave Benjamin with him in Egypt as a slave. But it’s really a test. Do you see it? Joseph is re-enacting the same moral test that his brothers failed concerning him twenty years earlier. Will they try to rescue their brother Benjamin or will they leave him in Egypt just as they did with Joseph?

And who steps forward? The brother whose idea it was decades before to sell Joseph. Judah bows before Joseph and says: (Gen. 44:32, 33)

“For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame ... Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back ...’”

Judah, the innocent brother, was willing to take Benjamin’s place and become a slave in a foreign land. As far as he knew when he made this offer, it would have been for the rest of his life. He was willing to sacrifice his life back home so that his younger brother could go free. If you were Benjamin, how would that have made you feel?

But listen! You ARE Benjamin! This is exactly what your spiritual brother, Jesus Christ did for you and me. We are the ones who broke the law of heaven. We are the ones who are guilty. We deserved to live for eternity in slavery, but Jesus, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, said to your captor, *“I shall bear the blame... let the boy go home...”* This is why Moses blessed Judah and gave his tribe authority over all the others. Jesus is called the Lion of Judah because He re-enacted on a cosmic scale the personal sacrifice of Judah for us. And those who have accepted Jesus as the substitute for themselves, will live in eternal freedom. So, Jesus is the Stone of Daniel 2, the Lion of Judah and finally...

III. Jesus Is the Groom.

What’s your favorite wedding story? Jane Austen’s six novels are still wildly popular even in this age of gender politics. A professor of English at U Penn, Michael Gamer, said in 2017, “I would say that of dead authors, she may very well be the most popular out there. Perhaps second to Shakespeare, but arguably with a greater fan base.”³ That’s quite a statement. Why are Jane Austen’s books so popular? Did you know that all six of her novels end with a wedding? At least two end with a double wedding! And guess what? So does our story!

Eph. 5:32 says that the Church, meaning all Christians, is the bride and Jesus is our groom. So, what does that mean? It means that Jesus is the King of the final, eternal kingdom. And if you have accepted His proposal, one day you’ll participate in a wedding that will surpass any dreamed up by Jane Austen by powers of infinity! The apostle John saw the preview:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” (Rev. 21:2-4)

What is it that wakes you up at night and steals your joy? Is it not your regrets over the “former things” in your life? Even if you’re a Christian and you’ve asked God to forgive those things, still, you can remember them. And Satan is determined to see to it that you never, ever forget them. So what, if anything, can be done about these “former things”?

I’ve told you before, that one of my sweetest memories growing up was how at night, as my brother and I were nodding off to sleep, we would often hear our Dad singing by himself in the living room. We grew up attending a church begun by Swedish immigrants. In their old hymnals there was a section entitled, “Songs of the Homeland.” But these weren’t songs that looked backwards, remembering the “good old days” in Sweden. No. They were forward looking, yearning for their real home, their home in heaven. One of those hymns, written by an

old Swede named Nils Frykman was called, “My Future.” I remember that this was one of my Dad’s favorites. He’d sing these words:

*I have a future all sublime, beyond the realms of space and time,
Where my Redeemer I shall see, and sorrow nevermore shall be.*

*O, God be praised, He planned for me; from anxious care I’m spared and free,
He bids me cast on Him my care – what then remains for me to bear?*

*O precious Savior, teach thou me to live my life more true to Thee
The little while I yet must roam, before I reach my heav’nly home.⁴*

“What we believe about our future completely controls how we experience our present.” What do you believe about your future? If Jesus is your Stone, your Lion, and your Groom, then your future is described by C. S. Lewis’s last words of the last book of his *Narnia* series:

Now at last [you will begin] 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.⁵

Is Jesus your Stone, your Lion, your Groom? Let’s pray...

¹ Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Viking Books, 2016), p. 153

² The Lion and the Lamb /Mooring, Brown, Johnson/2015 Meaux Mercy, The Devil is a Liar!/CCLI#7038281

³ Jane Austen’s Enduring Popularity, [omnia.sas.upenn.edu/sept. 27, 2017/Susan Alhborn](http://omnia.sas.upenn.edu/sept.27,2017/SusanAlhborn)

⁴ Nils Frykman, *My Future*, translated by A. L. Skoog, 1920

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), p.184