

Father, we are a very humbly grateful people to be here today. As you care for the physical structure of this church, we pray now that you will care for the spiritual nourishment of all who are seeking you today. May our eyes be cast up and may our hearts be opened. And may we worship you with every word that we say, every song that we sing, in prayer and as we explore your word to us, Lord, lead us. Lead us, teach us, guide us. That is our prayer. Because you are the pastor of this church. You're the creator, redeemer, sustainer of all creation. We know that. We love you for it. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Okay, for the main reading today, we're going to be reading a parable that you're very familiar with from Luke 16. But I want to tie in and try to develop the power of what is being taught by trying to develop the power of who Christ is. Is, not was, is. Only by understanding that will you really grasp what is being taught in the parable that we're going to read. So we're going to go to Genesis 49 verses 8 through 12 for our opening reading. We're going to talk about this lion of Judah. Judah, your brothers will praise you. You will grasp your enemies by the neck. All your relatives will bow before you. Judah, my son, is a young lion that has finished eating its prey. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down. Like a lioness, who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants. There's the prophecy. Until the coming of the one to whom it belongs. The one whom all nations will honor. He ties his foal to a grapevine, the colt of his donkey to a choice vine. He washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth are whiter than milk. We hear of the lion of Judah and we know of this idea that the lion becomes the lamb of God, the sacrificial lamb. Top of the food chain, the apex predator, becomes a sacrifice in God's upside down kind of kingdom. We see the imagery, we begin to hear it in that prophecy from Genesis and all the way to Revelation now. Let's go there. Revelation 5, 1 through 5 and you'll hear a lot of the same terminology regarding this. "Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll and it was sealed with seven seals and I saw a strong angel who shouted with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?' But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it. Then I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, 'Stop weeping. Look! The lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals.'" We're going to keep that imagery in our minds and the idea of the lion of Judah and the sacrificial lamb who is Christ as well. All hail the power of Jesus' name. We just talked about the power of knowing your name and through the word of God we know His name, the name above all names, all hail the power of Jesus' name. No other name on heaven or on earth is worthy of worship than Jesus the Christ of God. A mighty fortress is our God. You read Psalm 91, I was reading Psalm 91 this week and you feel the power and the presence and the omniscience and the omnipotence of God Himself, Redeemer, Stainer, Creator of all. A mighty fortress is our God. We speak often of going inside ourselves to be with Him. That's the gift we're given through salvation, to be able to be with Him now and always, every moment of every day. And He is a mighty fortress against that. There is power in the blood. When we talk about the lion becoming the lamb, the lamb that is led to slaughter, the lamb who sacrifices himself, the Christ of God, the power of that blood, one drop of the precious blood of Jesus Christ replaces the entire animal sacrificial system. Who knows how many gallons, truckloads, swimming pools full of blood there was before Jesus, but that will be no more because there's power in the perfect blood of Jesus. Are you picking up what we were putting down today? When we talk about Jesus the Christ, we talk about Him in several different contexts and with several different images. What we are focusing on today is that upside down imagery of the lion of Judah becoming the lamb of sacrifice. There's only in that power, that apex of our salvific history, our spiritual natures are redeemed in that moment. And I think in large measure, guilty as charged, we take that for granted or we just go through our day and we don't realize what it means to be redeemed by the power of the blood of Jesus. What we're going to read after we read from John is a parable that describes that power in a sort of backward fashion. The fact that we have, if you want to call it, access to

that power now through the blood of Jesus, we can be adopted into the kingdom now because of the blood of Jesus. We can walk spiritually redeemed now because of the blood of Jesus. But there will come a time when you won't have that choice before you. When the free gift that God is offering all of humanity is no longer valid. I'm going to read about that. But now Jesus is speaking here in John chapter five. Kids, I can hear you. We talked about that before the service, right? Thank you. If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid when someone else is also testifying about me. And I assure you that everything he says about me is true. In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist and his testimony about me was true. Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. John was like a burning and shining lamp and you were excited for a while about his message. A little interlude here. You're excited for a little while about his message. His message was, "Come, be baptized for the repentance of your sin." That doesn't necessarily jive with the sacrificial system that is supposed to take care of that. All of a sudden John the Baptist comes along and says, "Be baptized for the repentance of your sin." Leading the way for what Christ would do and not only the baptism in water, but the baptism of God's Holy Spirit. And the old will be done away with and we will walk forward in the new. John is that transitional peace, if you will. Not just ceremonial baptism, but the baptism for the remission of your sin, for repentance. That's something different. But I have greater witness than John my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish and they prove He sent me. And the Father who sent me has testified about me Himself. You have never heard His voice or seen Him face to face and you do not have His message in your hearts because you do not believe me, the One He sent to you. This is going to become very important to understand in Luke 16. You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life, but the Scriptures point to me. Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life. That is the hard-hearted nature, of course, as He addresses the religious leadership structure of the time. But that is representative of the hard-hearted nature of every human being born in rebellion to God. And that is represented as we see with 70, 75 faithful individuals and there's more. There's those that are not just saying that, but you see a small percentage of individuals who live in the kingdom of God, possessed by the very Spirit of God, walking in the power of God's Holy Spirit. And the rest of the world is like, "You're fools, you're idiots, you're crazy, you're weak. I don't need that crutch. I'm all that I need." And Jesus is speaking to that person. You know that there's more. Every human being, I am convinced, every human being knows that they are more than just a pile of atoms and molecules and elements. I'm convinced of that. You cannot look at you, at the creation, all of creation, and Paul addresses this actually, and say, "Oh, this is random." Somehow, some way, something came from nothing and then that something somehow, some way developed into these amazing complex ecosystems and biological structures and you can't. It takes more faith to be an atheist than it does to be a Christian. You've got to believe so much junk. You have to just take great leaps of faith in order to believe that that's true. We come down off of that for a little bit. But when you hear, it always fires me up when you go into the Gospels and you actually hear Jesus preaching. That's what fires me up. He's standing there saying, "You searched the Scriptures day and night. I am your salvation. It all points to me, but you are blind and you are hard-hearted." Not you. We'll address that next, in the next parable. Long Black Train is a song that is quite wonderful. Josh Turner brought it's newest incarnation, but it has a story. When you have a 190 year old church, you have a lot of stories. Everything has a story and there's lots of stories attached to the whole church, but there are lots of stories that I can tell from the past 13 years. I want to pay homage to a dear friend who has died. His name was Keith Metzger. Some of you probably still remember him, know him, knew him. Keith was one of one. You talk about making somebody and throwing away the key, that's Keith. But a real salt of the earth fellow, a faithful man, an inspiration, and I'm so happy to call him my friend. He got together a group of guys and we sang a few songs at that time. One of them was Long Black Train. He was an individual that people would naturally gravitate to. He's like, "Hey, fellas, you want to stick together and sing some songs?" Fellas got together and we sang some songs because it was Keith. We decided that we needed to give ourselves a name. Well, Keith, here's the story of Keith's telephone in

church. He sat right here where you guys sit and we were preaching along one day. If you know anything about the music group Queen, they have a song called Fat Bottomed Girls, right? And that was Keith's ringtone. And I'm preaching away and all of a sudden you hear, "Fat Bottomed Girls, you make the right..." I'm like, "Keith!" And the congregation's like, "Keith?" He's like, "Sorry, man." So we ended up, that parlayed itself into a cleaner version. The group that he formed, we called ourselves the Big Bottom Boys. So we were the Big Bottom Boys for a while. And here's honest as the truth, he changed his ringtone. There's a group called Wham-A-Jam out there and they have a song called "Back Day." And so I'm preaching along one day and he goes, "Whoa, back day, Wham-A-Jam." I'm like, "Keith!" And everyone's like, "Keith!" I'm like, "That's not better, Keith!" One of one. One of one. But a fantastic person. A little bit of homage to him as we play along and sing "Long Black Train." We'll try to do it justice, all of our strings. And when we do something like this, I hope that this is a good example. You've seen Sandy got up and sang a prelude a few weeks ago, right? And then Jody's got the guys coming up and saying, "What do you want to do? Do you want to come sing with the fellas when we get a group together? Let us know. Whatever. We talk about sharing our gifts." And so we do. So, Keith. He had the most beautiful testimony. There are some funerals that just preach themselves. And as he was dying, he was in tremendous pain. And then there was this moment of just peace. And he said, "It's so beautiful." And then he lost consciousness. And I left him alone with his wife and his daughter. And, like I said, some funerals preach themselves. "It's so beautiful," were his last words. In the middle of excruciating pain. So, you go and tell me that it doesn't take more faith than not to believe. Okay. Now I'm crying. Thanks, Onnit. Okay. You're all right. Let me get rid of this one. I get sentimental sometimes. There are lots and lots and lots of stories in here. I'm always saying everything has a story. Everything you see here. If you come up here and you look at this mess, nearly everything has a story. And there are cards from people and, you know, everything has a story. And that's really what it's about. I've always said, I don't know, I really don't, honestly. I was under church before I even was called. I don't know how other churches operate. I don't. I just know that what I read in scripture is about relationships. And it begins with our relationship of being right with Him as individuals. And then as humans among yourselves. And then as congregation. And then we fit into the big picture somewhere. And we know that. We've demonstrated that in the generosity of this church. And the many people in town that have been affected. And the many people in the region that have been affected by your generosity. And in giving up your time as well. The repairs that we call back. It's about that. You know. It's not about paying for some Christian entertainment every Sunday morning. I've always been fascinated with that concept of the lion and the lamb. If you know me, then you know that I have that prophecy tattooed on my body. Well my right arm is the prophecy from Genesis. It's the lion of the tribe of Judah. And the image of Jesus Christ embedded within. And on my left arm I have the lion of the tribe of Judah hanging on the cross as He is crucified. If you've ever heard Randy Simpson sing. He sings an incredible song. I was listening to it this morning again because I was thinking about it. The Shepherd Became the Lamb. You can look it up on YouTube. Look up Randy Simpson. The Shepherd Became the Lamb. If you've been in here and you've heard him sing. Salvationist plan began when the shepherd became the lamb. And there's a great song, The Lion and the Lamb. It talks about Christ in both roles, if you will. What I've always been fascinated with, what has always touched me, what has always motivated me, I shouldn't say, is the power that I experienced when I became a Christian. The difference that I experienced in the way I was and the way I became and am still becoming. Because every Christian is a lot like the kingdom of God. You are now and you are yet to come. So it's happening within you now but you've not reached your glorified state. You won't reach that until Revelation when the Lion of the tribe of Judah opens the scroll and we see the Lamb who was slaughtered, breeding from the Lord of Life. These are powerful, powerful images, powerful ideas. And I wanted to bring them up today because when we read through scripture, even those powerful words of Jesus that I read, we can go, "Okay, that was my reading assignment for today and close the book and move on." Not realizing what he said and how it applies to every single person, Christian and non-Christian alike. He's standing before you, if you can see that, in his word, saying, "Here I

am. All of me. Who I am. What I do. Who I am is here. All of it." And yet you just are checking a box. You're just clicking off that reading plan. What are you doing? And Jesus is imploring them, and again, by virtue of him preaching this to those who are hard-hearted in nature and really should know better, he's preaching into the church and those who should know better and then beyond the church for those who don't know any better. Because they're ignorant of it. The power of salvation is something that, again, I just expressed in a story when you see a man sulk of the earth go through what he went through and upon his passing, he knew and he saw and he experienced the beauty and the power of salvation. "I know it. I'm convinced of it. I witnessed it and I felt it." So when we read this next parable, I want you to feel that. I want you to feel the pain in the voice of the rich man. The pain that he feels not only for himself, but for his loved ones. And by extension for all of those who can come after him. In this parable, he gives up on himself and he says, "If you can't do anything for me, then help my siblings, help all of Abraham's children to know and understand what I'm just experiencing." And Jesus said, read John 5. Well, he didn't say that, but you'll hear it. And that's probably what you would say, read John 5. Jesus is telling you who he is. So let's read this now. There's been a tremendous build up. And of course, it's scripture, so it will never let us down. In Luke 16 verses 19 to 31, Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered in sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores." There's an image. It's meant to be disturbing. It's meant to be powerful. "Finally, the poor man died, carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet." Some translations say in Abraham's bosom. "The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am enanguished in these flames.' But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, or didn't, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are enanguished. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. Listen to this, church. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there." These are powerful and powerfully definitive statements that are being taught by our Savior. I won't say in a desperate attempt, but in a very intentional attempt for human beings like us to understand the reality. When the rich man died, you can pretty much rest assured he didn't have a moment of peace on earth and say, "It's beautiful." And when he ends up where he ends up, I can't change the words of Scripture so they don't say "torment" and "anguish." We can soften the blow all we want, and many preachers will. Oh, when, if you're not with God when you die, hell is the absence and the presence of God. Well, not really, because God is sovereign even over hell. Hell is information and torment and anguish. And the rich man, who thought he had everything, didn't understand that all of the joy that he was ever going to experience in his entire conscious life, he's experiencing then and there as he eats and drinks and does whatever else he does. That's his joy. And there are several occasions when Jesus says, "That is the only joy you will ever have in your life." So he gives up. The rich man said, "Please, Father Abraham, at least send him," again, it's a parable, "So send the message, send the message of salvation, send the message that when you pass, when you die, you can be with the Lord. Send him to my father's home. I have five brothers and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment." But Abraham said, "Moses and the prophets have warned them." John 5. It's not the same, but it's the same. Your brothers can read what they wrote. The rich man replied, "No, Father Abraham, but if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God." Abraham said, "If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." And we can look around the world today and guess why? That's true. And we can look inside the church today, Christendom, and say that's true. In a few weeks, you're going to hear all kinds of aspects of Christianity and progressive Christianity, which is an oxymoron in and of itself. Talk about how the resurrection isn't real and how it can't be real because all of this spiritual nonsense is not really a part of who Jesus was. He was

really just an awesome dude and a great teacher and whatever. You're going to hear all of that stuff coming from inside the church. When the reality of the resurrection is that those who will put their faith in Jesus Christ and who He is, what He did and what He offers now will be saved. Right up until your last heartbeat, I truly believe that that offer stands. But after your last heartbeat, that offer no longer stands. And we read in Luke 16 that this is true. And the rich man begs, "Go to my home, tell them." I did. Well, you're too lazy to read. If they just saw somebody raised from the dead and goes and preaches to them, they will believe. I tell you this, they will see someone raised from the dead and yet they will not believe. That's the power of the lion, the tribe of Judah up against, if you will, the hard of heartedness, stubbornness and pride of humankind. And that is the battle every day, every week, inside the church, outside the church, sharing the word of God, living the word of God. The lion lives in you. And again, that's to use modern terminology. That's the best image that I identify with. The lion of the tribe of Judah. You're going up against the lies and the dominion of Satan, who has blinded the eyes of so many, hardened the hearts of so many. Teachings like this can sometimes make it feel futile. I agree. But what can we talk about your feelings? Don't get in the way of the truth of what we are called to do. You can make it feel futile. Even Jesus is saying that not everybody is going to be saved. Not everybody will. OK. So, OK, I don't know what to tell you. Lay down, lock the doors, wait to die and see what happens. I don't know. I know what scripture says we're supposed to do. We're supposed to live that life and live it to the full. All the good, all the bad, all the grief, all the glory, all the everything in these fragile clay-bolt jars, these bodies of ours that will betray us in the slightest distance. All of that is the Christian life. The power, however, transcends any circumstance in your Christian life. I want you to take that away today. You're going to need it maybe this afternoon, maybe this week, sometime in your life. I want you to think about it every single day. The power of salvation, the power of our resurrected Lord, the power of God's Holy Spirit living within us transcends every human circumstance. The lion became the lamb and sacrificed himself for you so that you may live as the person God saw when He created you in your mother's womb. You may live that way. You may be that person, that woman, that man, that husband, that wife. There's something to that. When the rest of the world is telling you, you don't matter, that anything else, anything and everything else in the whole world matters, accept who you are in Christ. The power of that transcends this world. That's the message for today. Read Luke 16, read John 5. Man, that just slapped you in the face, John 5. Here I am standing in front of you. What does it matter? Your hearts are so hard. If you want to know God, my brothers and sisters, then know Him. Read, pray, talk to other godly people. And guess what you do when you do that? Read, pray, learn, grow, become. And know that no matter what's happening there, the power of God, your salvation, transcends it all. And as I say, and nearly every few of you have preached, you have a choice now. You won't have a choice when your heart beats its last. I want each and every one of you to experience that peace that I saw, that I testified to. You see, I want you to experience that peace. I want you to see that beauty as you enter into His presence. I know there's a lot of work left here to do, but I can't wait. I'll go when He calls me, but... in the meantime, you're stuck with me.