

Roaring Like a Lion • I Peter 5:8, Revelation 5:5

A lion bit me. It was recently in a game park outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. Okay. It wasn't a big lion; it was only four months old and weighed 55 pounds. But it was a real lion. If you lived with a 55-pound house cat you would probably take any potential bite seriously. And, no, it wasn't a serious bite. It didn't even break the skin on my right arm. But he could have. Those teeth were big and the claws looked like a brand new set of kitchen knives. I think the claws were more dangerous than the teeth.

The lion is called "the king of beasts". It's a fitting title because lions have virtually no natural enemies other than humans. Male lions can grow to 550 pound in weight, four feet tall at the shoulder and ten feet long in the body (not including the tail which adds another three feet).

The roar of a lion is formidable. It can be heard as far as five miles away. But never believe anyone who tells you that the roar of a lion is worse than its bite. Lions are carnivores, exclusively eating other mammals. You will never ever meet a vegetarian lion. They have 30 teeth: large canines that grab and kill; razor-like molars that slice through flesh; and small incisors that are especially good at scraping the meat off of bones. The males are up to 50% larger than the females and grow large bushy manes that make them look even bigger than they are but which add very little weight.

All things considered, you don't want to be on the wrong side of a fight with a lion because you can't outrun a lion. There is no point in climbing a tree because the lion will go right up the tree after you. And in hand-to-paw contact you will get sliced and diced. You are literally "dead meat".

If you live in lion country it's a good idea to watch out for these over-sized felines. Of course, most of us really aren't worried about lions in

our neighborhood. Yet, there is a definite lion warning for us all in the Bible. It's found in 1 Peter 5:8-9:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Grammarians would tell us that this is a metaphor. As so often in the Bible, a powerful figure of speech is used to teach an important spiritual truth. The truth that is being taught here is that we have an enemy that is more ferocious than any lion. He is faster than a cougar, stronger than a tiger and dirtier than any alley cat. Our enemy is on the hunt. He prowls around day and night on soft paws, hard to see but never far away. He can

roar louder than the biggest sub-woofer but often keeps quiet until he pounces. He often is not taken seriously until it is too late. Some people actually think he is

extinct until his claws cut into their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, meet the devil! (Hold up stuffed lion.) He is real. He is dangerous. He lives in your neighborhood, prowls the hallways at your school, comes to your church and goes to your work. He is amazingly versatile—sometimes he looks cute and cuddly; he rarely appears to be a threat. You may want to pet him and pick him up, scratch him under the chin and take him home to sleep on your bed.

Watch out! He wants to eat you for dinner! The desire of the devil is to own our souls. He is powerful, smart, clever and manipulative. When he devours us our lives are damaged if not destroyed. He leaves his victims wounded and scarred for life. Often he kills his prey in the process of ripping them apart.

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The approach of Satan is not unlike the largest of lions. The biggest and strongest of real lions only rarely hunt for themselves. They are social animals who live in a pride of lions—up to a dozen lions all together. The other lions in the pride do the work. Several lions surround the victim so that it doesn't matter which way the antelope or zebra runs because there is a lion waiting to pounce. The weight of the lion takes the victim down as sharp claws tear through the toughest hide. Actual death comes by biting the neck or snout and suffocating the prey to death. Once dead the other animal is ripped open and the big male lion comes in to celebrate the victory by consuming up to 80 pounds of meat at one meal. (Let me put that in perspective for you: that's 320 Quarter-Pounders without the bun and before being cooked. That is a lot of meat for dinner!) It is only when the large male lion has finished his meal that he will leave whatever remains for the other members of the pride.

Satan operates in much the same way. Satan has prides of his own. They are not made up of lionesses and cubs of the animal type but of demons that do Satan's hunting for him. Their roar may not be quite as loud, but they are still real and fearsome. The number of demons in our world is beyond the count of any human census—hundreds of millions. They work alone and in teams. They hunt, surround, chase and pounce. They drag us down and go for the throat.

There are many different ways that demons of Satan operate. There are different types of bait and different types of strategies. Coveting is an example of a devilish attack. It is near the top of every list of demon bait. Coveting wants what rightly belongs to someone else. It is deep dissatisfaction that settles in our souls with what we currently have. Coveting may be Satan's most powerful weapon against our souls. He starts with legitimate needs and pushes them over the line into sin. We covet our neighbor's house. We covet our colleague's job and salary. We covet the sight and touch of another person's body. We covet the popularity of classmates. We covet the power of office and position. We covet the lifestyle of the rich and famous. We all make comparisons between others and ourselves. Every one of us

compares our lives to those who have more and to those who have less.

For example: When I compare my house in Eden Prairie to the huts I saw on a trip to the very poor country of Mozambique, I feel very rich. When I compare my house in Eden Prairie to pictures of movie stars' homes that I see in magazines, I feel very poor.

It all depends on what we are comparing to. Comparing to those who have less fills our hearts with gratitude; comparing to those who have more and coveting what they have puts us into the sharp claws of the lion called Satan. Coveting can make a sweet person bitter, a happy person sad, a fulfilled person empty and a godly person sinful. Our enemy, the devil, is prowling around looking for people who can be pounced with wanting what belongs to someone else.

Of course, the pounce of the devil comes with a whole paw-full of other ways to cut; it doesn't have to be coveting. It can be greed, sex, pride, hatred, selfishness—whatever it takes to knock us down and devour our souls. But, amazingly, the Bible teaches us that there is a way for us to remain safe under potential attacks from Satan and his pride. Lions depend on surprise. If you watch out and the lion knows you are looking, most lions won't attack. If they can't catch you by surprise they will move on and find another animal to attack. So 1 Peter 5:8-9 tells us:

Be self-controlled and alert. (Take away the element of surprise from the enemy.) Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

If we are constantly on guard against sin and Satan, if we stand strong in our faith, if we maintain solidarity with other Christians near and far, Satan will call off the attack and we'll be spiritually safe. The moral of the story: Take Satan seriously and always be on guard against sin.

Now, the devil is not the only lion in the Bible. There is actually another lion in the Bible that is much larger and much stronger. One interesting thing about lions is that they are very

observant of size and power. So, when a more powerful lion arrives in a territory or a pride there is often a bloody fight. The smaller and weaker lion quickly realizes he is no competition for the bigger and stronger lion and he gives up. The biggest lion always wins.

The book of Revelation describes a ferocious battle between God and Satan. It is the ultimate battle for human souls and the future of heaven and earth. At times it appears that Satan and evil are winning and that God is the loser. It is enough to make a good person cry. Then comes the good news in Revelation 5:5: *“Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.”*

So, ladies and gentlemen, I want you to meet a real lion—The Lion of the tribe of Judah is Jesus Christ himself. It is one of his many nicknames, although this is the first and last time in the Bible that he is called by this name.

It all goes back to the first book of the Bible. Jacob was the father of a large family that became the nation of Israel. When he was dying he had each of his sons brought to his deathbed for a prediction about their future and the future of their descendants. Long before the nation became a monarchy he predicted that his son Judah would produce a tribe of descendants that would include the royal line of kings. In that prophecy he talked about the people of Judah (who were later called “Jews”) as being like lions. Here’s what dying Jacob said in Genesis 49:8-10:

“Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter (the insignia of royal rule) will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff

from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”

These became famous and familiar words to the Hebrew people in following generations. About 1000 years later, during the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament, Jews started to connect the lion prophecy to their expectations of a Messiah. In the book of 2 Esdras 12:31 there is a reference to this lion of the tribe of Judah. He is described in this way: *“This is the anointed one that is the Messiah.”*

Two great concepts in Hebrew teaching came together. The one was the Lion from Judah and the other was the Messiah from God—and they merged. The Messiah is the Lion King. He is the Lion Messiah. The point within the Bible is very, very clear. Jesus, the Son of God, can whip Satan in any fight. He is stronger. He is smarter. He is better. He will be victorious. In that we have great hope—the assurance that sin will not win, the devils will not devour us and Satan will not be the final victor. Jesus the Lion will win!

But here is the problem. We are under attack. Satan’s roar is deafening. We have been beaten up. Life is tough. We feel like we are losing in life. We believe in Jesus. We agree that he can out-roar Satan. We have faith that he will triumph. We are convinced he is the ultimate winner. But it’s hard to maintain that hope and perspective even though we anticipate that someday Jesus will be the victor. How do we “hang in there” in the meantime?

I recently read an interesting football story. In October 1982, in Badger Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin, 60,000 Wisconsin fans watched the Michigan State Spartans beat up their home football team. But an extremely strange thing happened. Even when a Wisconsin player would drop the ball, shouts and cheers would come from

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the Wisconsin stands. It just didn't make any sense. All of this excitement and enthusiasm was coming from the Wisconsin fans even though they were losing so badly out on the college football field. But the rest of the story is that these fans were listening to portable radios and 70 miles away the Milwaukee Brewers were beating the St. Louis Cardinals in the third game of the 1982 World Series. So the cheers weren't about the comparatively lesser game at Badger Stadium; the cheers were about the greater victory in the World Series

That's the way it is with Christians and the lions. We sometimes are eyewitnesses to the attacks of Satan but our ears are tuned to the promises of God who says, "*Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.*" As Christians, our faith and our hope are in Jesus the Lion. But let's not forget that he is a lion, not a domestic cat. He will not be tamed.

Our primary familiarity with the cat family is our household pets. Americans spend \$2.15 billion dollars a year on cat food and \$295 million on kitty litter. While we all have cat stories and we joke about the independence and strong wills of our Tabbies and Garfields, the truth is that they are domesticated. Housecats are trained to use a litter box, come running at the sound of an electric can opener and purr on command.

Lions are different. Nobody housebreaks a wild lion! They don't curl up on your lap. They are mighty, majestic often unpredictable and difficult to control. Jesus is a lion.

Now it is also true that the Bible describes Jesus as a Lamb. We may think of him as calm, quiet and gentle. Those are certainly aspects of who he is. But never forget that he is a lion. He is wild and powerful and independent and exciting. We never dare try to domesticate Jesus. We can never fully explain or understand him. Jesus is the mighty Lion King who does what he chooses and goes where he wants. He protects us but he is never controlled by us. He is the King and we are his servants.

One poet wrote: "Dogs come when they are called. Cats take a message and will get back to you."

Jesus Christ is much more than a cat. He is THE Lion. We don't call him; he calls us. He is the Boss.

Listen for the roar of Jesus. Take great comfort that it is a roar of protection against every other predator.

Listen for the roar of Jesus. May it be music in your ears and poetry to your souls.

Listen for the roar of Jesus. Run to the roar and never run the opposite way.

Our Lord Jesus Christ,

We hear your roar and we are stunned to silence at your majesty.

How grateful we are that you are the Lion King. We declare our allegiance and our love to you, our Lord Lion.

Amen.

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