

The Council of the Critters

There are probably fourteen thousand seventy-'leven good reasons why Heaven is not a democracy. God, as beneficent autocrat, to my knowledge, has never opened up His decision process to the possibility of veto or proxy on the part of His creatures.

Still, every once in a while it is fun (and not a completely useless exercise) to consider, "What might have been..." Such questioning and consideration always sends you back to figuring out such things as why Heaven is not a democracy and why God really doesn't need it to be- and neither do we! Therefore...

Once upon a time all the hosts of Heaven were called to assembly. Not only did every seraph and cherub and covering angel cohort appear before the Lord, but so, also, did each animal species that has ever been imagined. The mighty valley of meeting was filled with a cacophony of braying and whistling and neighing as majestic angels, mighty in power, had parrots squawking on their shoulders and chipmunks scrambling around their robes of light.

Never before in the remembered history of the celestial congregation had a precedent been set for such an assemblage. Oh, surely there were times when all the seraph hosts would join together in order to create a new chant of praise or enactment of honor for the Father. Similarly, the cherubim would randomly be found meeting near the base of the throne in order to discuss the majesty of God and shout His praises for their new insights. But such an assembly with all the critters and creatures and beings? No, this had never been seen before. Apparently there had been a unique development in the universe for the Father to have called such a meeting.

When it was determined that every level of angel and every specie of creature was present, the Father stood from the mighty mountain of God. At either side of His posture sat his sweet Cohorts, the sacred Spirit and holy Son, who remained upon the throne, in a posture that revealed both that They were fully in agreement with the Father's awaited announcement, and that They easily desired the universe to focus, singularly, on the Father.

Upon His rise from the glorious, sapphire, mountain throne all of the present creation fell to a sweet, reflective, reverent silence. (Even playful otters ceased their incessant tumbling in order to look in dumb admiration toward the One whom they loved so dearly.) When the Lord finally spoke the distance of the universe quietly echoed his melodious voice, "My creatures, I am sure that you wonder why I have called you to assemble in this fashion. I know that because our celestial congregation is swelled today by the critters of the Kingdom that you each sense this must be a very, very important convocation. To you, the little, playful critters we welcome you!"

And with that the majestic God swept His glorious arm around the congregation and smiled at the butterflies and geese and zebras and foxes and all of the gathered critters. For a moment the dumb creatures stood in silence and then responded to the smile of God with a cacophony of calls and roars and screeches that made the arches of the mighty city ring. The angelic hosts looked around in disbelief and then broke into laughter at the joyful chaos that surrounded them.

When the last little black cap chickadee had concluded his joyous chirping the mighty God spoke again, "My friends, this day a tragedy has befallen our realm. Many of you know of the wonderful experiment of love that We have initiated on the little sphere called Earth. Many of you, especially the angelic host, have been fully aware of this design of love from the day of its inception when my Son spoke and the light broke on the chaos. You observed as the sacred Spirit brooded over the chaos like one of our dear mother hens," and at that the Lord nodded toward a wonderfully colored chicken who nearly exploded when she threw her chest out in pride. "Yes, many of you have been keenly interested in this new venture of love within our realm.

"But, the potential of pain and rebellion that has been possible from the moment of our first creation in this universe has now come to fruition among these new children." A moment of insecurity swept over the mass congregation. Though they were not at all capable of comprehending all the implications of the words, just a look into the gentle

eyes of God told them that this was momentous and that nothing would ever be quite the same, no, not ever again.

“Adam and Eve have chosen to believe the lies of the one that you loved so dearly, our own Lucifer.” Lucifer, his name had not been spoken in those sacred corridors for so very long for even the memory of his fall was so very painful to those who had lived through the event.

“But,” the holy One interrupted their thoughts, “this is not a matter that is beyond resolution. The three of Us have made provision for such an event as this, yes, even before the foundations of the earth were laid. None of you will fully comprehend this, not for a long, long time, but eventually this will all clear and the dust will settle, and in the end We will have accomplished a sweet, if incredibly painful, good.”

At that moment both the Spirit and the Son nodded in ascent and all were assured that, somehow, all would be well again.

“This day then I will do something that has not been done from the day when the very first of you were created. We will, for your own good, allow each of you to see if you can improve upon our plan. Angels, cherubim, seraph leaders and your charges, each of you will be given opportunity to consider this dilemma and see if your collective wisdom will surpass the plan which We intend to initiate.

“But, more than that, today We will, for four hours, grant that even the speechless critters will be given tongues to communicate and minds to reason. Today We wish that all might challenge our wisdom before We announce to Adam and Eve our plan during the cool of the evening. The plan will be your curiosity throughout endless ages but it can be stated as simply as this... My Son has acceded to become one of the fallen children, as powerless and helpless as they, so that He might restore them again to innocence with us.”

Needless to say, all of the reasoned creatures stared at each other and then at the glorious Son in disbelief. He was going to become less than they were in order to try to redeem an ungrateful race.

The Lord then raised his majestic hands and spoke, “So, now, my ignorant but perfect critters, I now give you wisdom to reason and speech to communicate so that you might

tell how my Son might be represented as a your symbol upon the earth. By what animal shall mankind know my Son?"

Miraculously, and in a moment, all of the dumb creatures suddenly found that they had a clarity of thought and voices to speak, but they had no sense as to how they might consider their challenge. It was at that point that the Spirit embraced Mitrani (the seraph who cared for the majestic white horses of the Son's great, golden chariot) and the angel knew that it was to be his privilege to bring the critters to order. With that the mighty seraph stood and raised his arms and said, "Now, beloved critters of the Kingdom, let us fulfill the wish of our King. Let us determine which of you might have the honor of being the eternal symbol of the Son of God! You, great elephant, speak and give your arguments as to why the Son should be known as "The Great Elephant of God".

At that a mighty behemoth of an elephant raised his massive trunk and trumpeted loud and long. When the sound died he shook his huge frame and spoke, "It is only fitting that the Son of God should take the banner of the elephant for we are strong and impressive and we carry the greatest burdens of all creatures upon our backs. More than that, there is not a creature that would wish to be our enemy for our size would intimidate even the most arrogant. When these fallen mortals consider the Son of God let them see Him in the armor of the elephant!" And with that the huge creature stood upon his great hind legs and flailed and trumpeted until all were truly impressed with his presence.

Mitrani then responded, "You have given a convincing argument great beast of the Kingdom." Then, nodding toward the cheetah he said, "Now you, fine cat of the Kingdom, what cause can you give that would justify the Son of God to reign under your banner?"

The cheetah suddenly raced around the entire assembly like a golden blur and then came to stop right in front of Mitrani, not even breathing as though he'd taken one step. His golden eyes shone as he spoke, "Surely the Son of God should be known as the great Cheetah of God for none could surround His people as quickly and as completely as He!"

Mitrani stroked his chin and then looked to see the eagle perched high in the mighty branches of the Tree of Life above the swollen tide of the river. "And you, fine eagle, have you any reason why Messiah should be the Eagle of His people?"

The eagle suddenly stretched his wings and screamed as silently toward the gathered throng as an arrow is dead to its target. Suddenly, at the last moment, he deftly adjusted his feathers and pulled to a gentle, resting stop at the feet of the Seraph. With a shrill screeching voice he cried so all could hear, "The eagle of God! Yes, the eagle of God!" His searching eyes burned around the assembly, "That is only fitting for I alone have the vision that could see from any distance for the benefit of my people. Messiah, the eagle, could remain in the safety of the crags and mountain reaches and yet, in only a moment, would sweep in with mighty talons for the defense of his children. Yes, Messiah, the eagle, could scream liberty for all who would join him on the mountain top!" At that the eagle flapped his span in majestic pose for all to admire as he let the logic of his words sink in.

"Not so!", boomed the voice of the buffalo, "not so!" The ground shook as he stomped the living grasses and walked toward the podium, nostrils flaring. "An eagle is majestic, I grant you that, but he is far too distant for the symbol of Messiah. Let our prince be represented by the buffalo, mighty, majestic, and powerful. Let all who look to Messiah the prince see the image of one who can shake the earth by his mere presence, and yet is capable of gently resting with his young by the side of the stream."

At that very moment an insolent little chipmunk raced right under the buffalo's feet, did about seven laps around the menacing hooves and ran up the beast's legs, over his back and jumped onto the shoulder of Mitrani. "Take that! And take that to your power, too!" The little creature chattered and pranced, with his tail swishing in defiance. "You may impress others with your mass and muscle but you don't intimidate me! And if a little chipmunk can ignore your brawn then what makes you think that you can impress a world that needs to be brought to attention by God?"

Flipping his tail and dancing on the angel's shoulder the chipmunk then made his case for a Chipmunk Messiah. "Everyone of you think that the only way to draw attention is my flexing your muscles. This is not so. I dare you to find even one in this congregation today who has not noticed me," the little guy chipped. "No, you have noticed me, and why? Because I am beautiful and sleek and quick and flexible. I feel that Messiah the Prince should stand before the world as a Chipmunk. My multi-color

fur will be attractive to all for there won't be anyone excluded. My size will allow me to go into the smallest of holes so that anyone in any dilemma may know that Messiah can find them and deliver them from any tight place. My speed will bring me to my children quickly, and my industrious nature will teach my people that they never need fear that I must rest and will not be available to them."

Some of the assembled critters were both impressed with the little rodent's brash logic and offended by his seeming arrogance. But, somehow the chipmunk's tenacious speech seemed to give permission for all creatures, no matter how apparently insignificant, to lay claim to the title of Messianic symbol.

The tortoise spoke of his plodding stability. The stallion told of his magnificent silhouette against the threatening skyline. Butterflies claimed wisdom from their delicate beauty while jackals reminded all of their ability to find any wandering and lost soul in any barren expanse.

The giraffe could stand above and be noticed in any crowd.

No one could argue with the whale's argument of size.

The wolf told of the strength and grace of solitary observation.

The beagle spoke of loyal acceptance and the kangaroo countered with arguments of carrying the young in a protective embrace.

Scores of creatures all seemed to sense that in their nature, make-up, and temperament a special attribute that would allow them, singularly, to be the very best representative of what Messiah should be for His people.

Throughout all of the debate a tiny, unassuming little lamb stayed in the background, almost trembling at the thought that anyone would ever consider him to be a potential candidate for such an exalted honor. There wasn't one ounce latent within his nature that would predispose him to even hoping for such a recognition. Still, as the hours of claim and counterclaim wore on it was as though there was a spark of courage snuck into his little heart and in a moment of completely uncharacteristic bravado the lamb suddenly surprised himself even more than the entourage around him by standing up on the edge of the assembly. More than that the lamb was surprised when Mitrani

raised his hands to bring arrest the attention of the crowd. As the din subsided the angel was able to say, "Many of you have been able to state your case but there may yet be one or two who have not presented their claim... and one must be the little lamb over there on the edge. Little lamb," he said as he appealed in gesture to the edge of the crowd, "might you have an argument for staking your claim to this eternal position and honor?"

For a moment the lamb felt all the eyes of creation looking upon him and he desperately wanted to run, but then he sensed that if he would defer and not speak his silence and reticence would disappoint the wondrous Son of God. That thought was more than his little heart could bear so he, with trembling voice, finally spoke...

"I'm sorry," he glanced around nervously, "I really can't speak to you about how I deserve to represent the wonderful Son of God. Unlike many of you I'm not courageous, or powerful, or strong. I'm not at all swift or even particularly handsome. I just wonder if mankind might not be served well by being drawn to a Messiah who could be snuggled then perhaps Messiah the Lamb would be a fitting symbol."

Animals of every stripe looked at each other and then, almost as with one voice, began to cackle and guffaw and snort. "A snugly Messiah? How preposterous!" The mass of critters seemed to believe that this was the most foolish proposal they had ever heard. The din of rejection to the lamb's hopes rumbled and swelled and then grew almost uncontrollable when suddenly a mighty lion took a majestic leap from his resting place near the center of the crowd. In one giant and powerful motion he sprang over hundreds of raucous animals and came to a gentle landing directly in front of the lamb. With his massive, golden frame shielding the lamb from the taunts of the rabble the lion suddenly turned, shook his glorious mane, and let forth with a tremendous roar that rattled the very foundations of Zion.

Every creature was immediately shaken to silence at the roar of the tiny lamb's defender. His fiery eyes slowly scanned the multitude, looking for even one who would dare continue to laugh at the lamb, but there was not one in the whole assembly who dared challenge his authority.

The lion did not speak one word. The glance of his anger was enough to bring all of Heaven to silence. Truly, the flexing of his rippling haunches and the rhythmic sweep of his twitching tail told every critter assembled that the lion would not allow one more

cackle at the expense of the lamb. He, the mighty defender, had taken his stand and there was not found one who would question him or challenge his posture.

Remarkably, this awesome act, in spite of the threat that it thundered to the beasts of the city, did not evoke one ounce of fear within the lamb, no, not even for a moment. The trembling one stood, safely leaning upon the massive flanks of his mighty defender. The lamb's love and admiration for the lion, at that moment, was absolutely immeasurable.

As that scene was etched into the collective memory of Heaven, the Father quietly stood from the sapphire mountain. He raised His mighty right hand to burn the moment forever and proclaimed, "It is decided. When my beloved joins with this hurting and lost race in their experience, He shall forever after be known as 'The Lamb of God'. I hereby proclaim that as the lamb He will truly be the best representation of my gentle love for the abandoned and scarred, the powerless and the fearful."

All of heaven was stunned and yet amazed at the incredible sensitivity and wisdom of God in the proclamation. Then, assuming that the holy Father was done, the congregation began to disband but they were arrested when the divine One spoke once more...

"More that this, from this very day forward, my Son shall also be known as the mighty 'Lion of Judah'. This symbolism will stand as an eternal reminder of what this great and noble defender has done this day in our presence."

With that pronouncement the mighty lion once again shook the foundations of Zion with a roar that echoed off of distant stars, and as he did the little lamb curled up to eternally rest at his feet. When the rumbled voice finally bounced to silence all of Heaven bowed, acknowledging the infinite wisdom of the Sovereign of Heaven.

*And one of the elders saith unto me,
Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed...
And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne
and the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders,
stood a Lamb...*

and every creature which is in heaven,

*and on the earth, and under the earth,
and such as are in the sea, all that are in them,
heard I saying,
Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power,
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb forever and ever.*

-Revelation 5:5,6,13,14