

“RIDING IN ON A WHITE HORSE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 19:11-21

Introduction.

John is on a roller coaster ride of visions, first in heaven, then on earth, then back in heaven, then back on earth. Following the rejoicing of the great multitude in heaven now comes a vision of a great triumph on earth over the enemies of Christ by Christ and His armies.

Remember in chapter 16 and the seven bowls of God’s wrath and judgment I said those visions were more general and that in the chapters to come we would get the same events but with more detail. Chapter 19 is more detail.

Everything in our text is meant to lift up Jesus and highlight how great is our King. This passage is meant to give great hope and courage to every suffering Christian. We have a king like no other who is coming to triumph over all their enemies. He is the only true king.

John’s vision unfolds in three parts, each sections beginning with “I saw.”

The Glory of the King, vss. 11-16.

“I saw heaven opened ...”

The first thing he sees is a rider on a white horse. What follows is obviously a very vivid and highly symbolic vision of Jesus at His Second Coming.

This is not the Christ of Christmas and Bethlehem. This is not Christ humble and riding on a donkey. This is not the Christ of Calvary and the cross.

This is the Second Coming, this is Christ victorious, Christ triumphant. This is Christ the Warrior King. This is the consummation of Christmas and of Calvary. In the Roman world John inhabited emperors and conquering generals rode white horses. This white horse is a symbol of victory and power and authority as are all the rest of the symbols.

Notice what a contrast all the descriptions and attributes are to the description of the beast. This is Jesus glorified. This is the revelation of Jesus as who He truly is. I am going to walk us through this long list of descriptive phrases which make clear the rider is divine, the rider is God.

First, we are told of His names which contrast the blasphemous names on the beast.

Revelation 13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.

He is faithful and true.

What a change and what a relief, finally a leader and ruler without character flaws and moral failures. Even the best of human rulers have failed us, Moses, David, Solomon.

He is the righteous judge who makes war.

Again, what a change and a relief, a leader who decides and acts and who's decisions and actions are above reproach, with no hint of scandal. No one will question Christ's leadership and judgments.

This war will be the most just of all wars as it is waged by the righteous and just judge of all mankind.

He has a name no one knows.

This reveals Christ's divinity in two ways. First, He is in control of what He reveals and what He doesn't reveal.

Second, there are things about Him we will never know, even in eternity. God is infinite, He can never be exhausted, you can't get to the end of Him. There will always be much that is incomprehensible.

He is called The Word of God.

He is the Word present at creation speaking all things into existence. He is the Word made flesh coming to redeem fallen flesh. He is the truth and wisdom of God.

He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Clearly this is none other than Jesus Christ, He is the only Lord and King above all others.

From this list of names we move to the descriptions of His character or nature.

His eyes blaze like fire.

Can you imagine entering into a court room where the judge can read minds and can see into our hearts and lives and completely knows everything about us and our past and all we have done?

Jesus' gaze penetrates to the depths of every human heart. He sees absolutely everything. There are no secrets or secret places in our hearts He doesn't know. (Samaritan woman at well).

Hebrews 4:13 No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

“Almighty God *unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid*” (1662 Book of Common Prayer).

He has many crowns on His head.

The dragon had seven crowns and the beast had ten crowns. Christ's many crowns indicate not just His authority but His supreme, absolute, kingly authority. There is nowhere in this universe that He does not rule and reign. He wears the crown of every realm. He is the only cosmic King. He alone has authority to bring human history to an end.

His robe is dripping in blood.

But whose blood?

Some think it is the blood of Jesus by which He redeems His people. Some think it is the blood of the martyred saints who are gathered at the altar and throne in heaven.

I lean toward a third option, that the blood is the blood of His enemies splattered on His garments in battle. The context of Revelation 19 is one of battle with enemies and not of redemption of the saints. There is a possible connection here with Isaiah 63:

Isaiah 63:2-4 Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?
3 “I have trodden the winepress alone, I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.
4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.

Christ is treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. In any case, whatever the blood is, it is the blood of victory, victory on the cross over His enemies, over sin, Satan and death.

Take careful note, if His blood is not shed for us, then our blood will be shed by Him.

The armies of the king.

With the king comes His armies. Like their leader they are riding on white horses and clothed in His purity, in white linen. Their uniforms are like His.

Who is this army?

There are numerous references in the Gospels to Christ's Second Coming where He is accompanied by a vast army of holy angels.

Luke 9:26 ... the Son of Man ... comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Jude 14-15 ... "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed.

But there is also a reference in Revelation 17 of saints and martyrs coming with Christ:

Revelation 17:14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Also of the seven references in Revelation to being clothed in bright, white linen, six of the references are to the saints and only one to angels.

This could be angels or saints or both.

Notice one unique feature of this army, they don't have any role in the battle. Listen carefully to verse 15 again:

Revelation 19:15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Every phrase, every action is done by Christ and is a fulfilment of some OT prophecy.

The battle belongs to the Lord, He fights it, He gains the victory and He gets all the glory. His only weapon is the shape double edged sword from His mouth representing His all-powerful Word by which He does everything.

Isaiah 11:4 and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

So if Jesus does all the fighting, why is there an army?

To glorify the King, to reveal to all the great and many deeds of the king, who rescued them, redeemed them, clothed them in His righteousness, and sets them on great white horses, reflecting His own majesty and splendor.

The Victory Dinner, vss. 17-18.

“I saw an angel standing in the sun ...”

Next there is an angelic messenger standing in the sun. I’m not sure what that means, perhaps he’s reflecting the brightness of the glory of God. His message certainly has God’s authority.

This scene is called the *supper of the great God*. Chapter 19 is the chapter of two great suppers. Two weeks ago we saw the marriage supper of the Lamb. Now we see the supper of the birds. The first was for all believers of the Lamb, the second is of all the unbelievers.

This is a gruesome and unpleasant scene for us, but a very familiar scene in the OT where those fallen in battle are eaten by birds of prey. Goliath threatened to make David dinner for the birds. In Ezekiel’s prophecy against Gog and Magog:

Ezekiel 39:4 You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.

This supper consists of the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses and their riders, all those who bear the mark of the beast.

This is a graphic symbol of judgment and defeat. To be denied the honor of a burial and devoured by birds or wild animals was a sign of great dishonor. It was the sign of the curse of God on the disobedient.

It is far better to be conquered by the grace of Christ and to surrender to Him, than to oppose Him and be conquered by His justice. It is better to be a diner with Christ than to be dinner for the birds.

The Victory of the King, vss. 19-21.

“I saw the beast and the kings of the earth ...”

World War I was called the war to end all wars which unfortunately prove untrue.

The battle in this vision truly is war to end all wars. We are at the end of time now. This is a more detailed view of the Battle of Armageddon first mentioned in the sixth bowl of God’s wrath in 16:14-16.

Lots of people get caught up in the geography of this great battle and where it will take place. But that’s not what’s important. What’s important is the spiritual meaning of this symbol.

This is a picture of the great conflict between the cosmic principalities and powers, between God and Satan, the final struggle between good and evil. This battle is the decisive, collective defeat of all evil and all Christ's enemies by Christ at His Second Coming.

All the forces of evil are arrayed, Satan's fake or counterfeit christ, the beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth and their armies, and all who wear the mark of the beast. They mount as much opposition as they can against Christ and His armies, but it is hopeless.

This is foolishness of the highest order. Imagine the creature fighting against its creator or the clay making war on the potter.

The battle starts in verse 19 and it's over in verse 20. Two of the three members of the evil trinity are captured and thrown into the lake of fire. The third member will join them in the next chapter when the great serpent, Satan himself is overthrown.

All the anti-Christian opposition and persecution represented by the evil human institutions and systems are brought down and defeated and destroyed. First is the doom of the supernatural opposition, the principalities and the powers. Second is the doom "the rest."

They are slain by the word of His mouth, by the truth, by the message of the Gospel of Christ, which in part is repent lest you too should perish. Truly the battle belongs to the Lord.

The fiery lake of burning sulfur is a description of hell, the final dwelling of the wicked and unrepentant.

Matthew 13:40-42 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The judgment of God is eternal and all consuming. Evil must be destroyed for the sake of God's justice and righteousness and for the sake of the new world.

Implications and Applications.

Look beyond the daily routine of your lives to the eternal significance and purpose of your lives. You belong to the King of kings and to a kingdom that cannot fail or fall.

Sweep floors with a sense of royalty. Change diapers with a sense of royal significance. Do your work as unto the Lord. What you do unto the least is seen as done for the King.

Live and work with a sense of nobility in your blood. We serve a great king, serve Him well, serve Him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

But live and work with a sense of a great warfare. Every day is a fight. Salvation is a fight, it is a battle to the death and to the end against sin and evil. Jesus has equipped us for it with His armor and He has taught us to daily pray, "Deliver us from evil." In our spiritual warfare we don't ever have to feel intimidated or threatened. We walk through a valley of the shadow of death, but ours is a fighting without fear.

The king is coming. Plan your lives around His return. Build your life around the future that will be yours when He comes, not around the future you can create here and now. Make your plans and goals and priorities to fit His. Put all your eggs in His basket. He will never fail you or let you down. Long for His coming.

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have *loved his appearing*.