

The Return of the King

Revelation 19:11-21

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It's easy for us to develop a view of Jesus that emphasizes only the qualities we find most comforting. Many Americans picture Jesus as loving, compassionate, gentle, accepting, welcoming, and forgiving, and He certainly is all those things. The Gospels give us beautiful pictures of His compassion toward the hurting, His tenderness toward children, His mercy toward sinners, and His willingness to welcome those who come to Him.

In fact, that seems to be one of the dominant ways Jesus is perceived in our culture. A 2023 Barna survey found that 71% of U.S. adults and teenagers expressed a positive view of Jesus, with descriptions including *loving, friendly, compassionate, and generous*. Pew Research has found similar patterns: Americans tend to view Jesus as a moral teacher who is *kind* and *accepting*. Lifeway Research notes that even among churchgoers, the attributes most associated with Christ are *mercy, love, and forgiveness*.

But there is a danger when we create a Jesus who is loving but not holy, compassionate but not just, merciful but not righteous, gracious but not truthful.

This week, I went back and reread what I preached from Revelation 2:18-29:

Much of the false teaching in the early church had to do with the minimizing of Jesus. Many people thought Jesus was important, but not essential. They had given Him a place in their lives, without recognizing He demands first place. Jesus may have been prominent to them, but He certainly was not preeminent.

Sadly, many teachers and churches now offer a version of Jesus which emphasizes friendliness, tolerance, and acceptance. In essence, some have made Jesus into a bobblehead who simply nods at everything we do.

We must move away from "What can Jesus do for me" to "Am I living in light of His lordship?" We don't simply "add" Jesus to our lives like He's some sort of app on our phones; we must adore Him with our lives through our allegiance, adoration, and obedience.

It's easy to find those who teach easy believism which promises "your best life now," while holding to a Jesus who comforts but never confronts, who saves but never judges. Others propagate what one author refers to as "moral therapeutic deism." For some of us, our Jesus is shaped more by personal preference than biblical revelation.

Commentator Robert Mounce strongly states: *"Any view of God that eliminates judgment and the hatred of sin in the interest of an emasculated doctrine of sentimental affection finds no support in the strong and virile realism of the Apocalypse."*

This is where Revelation 19:11-21 takes us. After the worship and the Hallelujahs, after the wedding and the celebration supper of the Bridegroom and His bride, Heaven opens and we see Jesus coming as the conquering King, returning to rule and to reign.

If we want to know Jesus as He really is, we cannot pick and choose the attributes we prefer, as if grazing through a theological salad bar. We need to see and surrender to the whole Christ. The Jesus who was born in a cradle and died on the cross will come again wearing a multiplicity of crowns. The Jesus who came the first-time riding on a donkey of peace will come the second time riding on a white war horse. The first time He came in meekness; the next time He will come in majesty. The first time He came to save; the next time He will come to judge.

Last week, we focused on the first ten verses of Revelation 19 and learned that *when we don't understand what God is doing, we can always affirm who He is by exclaiming, "Hallelujah!"*

We learned in Revelation 1:1 that this book is all about ***"the revelation of Jesus Christ."*** The entire book of Revelation has been leading us to this great moment when He returns to earth to rule and reign. Someone said it well: *"Revelation 19:11-21 is the dramatic climax of the Tribulation and the visible, victorious return of Jesus Christ. It moves us from the marriage supper of the Lamb to the battle of Armageddon. We go from the Bride to the battlefield, from worship to warfare, from the wedding to the war."*

Please stand and worship while we read this section of the Word from Revelation 19:11-16: ***"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and***

makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 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. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Here’s our main idea: *Because Jesus is coming again as the conquering King, we must see Him as He truly is and surrender to His rule.*

1. Recognize the King. The word “*opened*” pictures Heaven being wide open. This word was often used to describe a door covering treasure that has been swung wide open. In Revelation 4:1, a door is opened in Heaven, and John is invited to “*come up here.*” From my understanding of the chronology of Revelation, this pictures the Church being caught up to Heaven before the Tribulation begins.

Here in Revelation 19:11, Heaven is opened again, but this time, Christ is coming down from Heaven to earth. The first opening pictures the Church going up; this opening pictures Christ coming down. The first points to the beginning of the Tribulation; this one marks the end of it.

What John sees is the fulfillment of the longing expressed in Isaiah 64:1–2: “*Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!*”

Every phrase in this passage adds something important and essential to our understanding of the character of Christ.

- Notice how John sees Jesus sitting on a “*white horse.*” Roman generals often rode white war horses in triumphal procession to celebrate their victories.
- Jesus is called “*Faithful and True,*” which takes us back to 3:14: “*The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness...*” Jesus always tells the truth and always does what He has promised. One pastor said it well, “*He is always faithful to His promises and true to His character.*”

- He ***“judges and makes war.”*** As Judge and Warrior, Jesus wages war for the glory of God as He fights against unrighteousness and evil.
- According to verse 12, ***“His eyes are like a flame of fire.”*** This refers to His bright, burning, and penetrating gaze as One who knows all and sees all. Jesus knows every one of your secrets and loves you still. Nothing can be hidden from His penetrating gaze according to Luke 8:17: ***“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”***
- On His head are ***“many diadems.”*** This refers to royal crowns. We know from 12:3 that the dragon wore seven crowns and in 13:1, we read the beast had ten. In contrast, Jesus has a multiplicity of crowns showing His unlimited sovereignty. Before Jesus died, He wore a makeshift crown of thorns placed on His head in mockery. Here we see the rejected King wearing many crowns of glory.
- He has ***“a name written that no one knows but Himself.”*** Even though the Bible gives us many names and titles for Jesus and each one reveals something true about His person and work, we know only a small fraction of what there is to know about Jesus. We can truly know Him, but we will never completely exhaust the wonder of who He is. Even in eternity, there will always be more of Christ to discover and more reasons to worship Him. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, ***“The secret things belong to the LORD our God...”*** I appreciated the insight of Pastor Rashid from the Injili Baptist Church in Kenya, when he made this statement in his sermon this past Sunday: *“I don’t need to understand everything to trust God; I need to trust the God who understands everything.”*
- He is ***“clothed in a robe dipped in blood.”*** This phrase symbolizes victory and refers to the blood of His enemies like we read in Isaiah 63:3: ***“I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.”***
- The name ***“by which He is called is the Word of God.”*** This takes us directly back to the first verse of John’s Gospel: ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** John identifies Jesus as the eternal Word who existed before creation, who was with God, and who Himself is God. The One who came the first time in humility is the same One who returns in majesty. The One who once spoke words of grace and forgiveness will now speak judgment against His enemies.

Because Jesus is coming again as the conquering King, we must see Him as He truly is and surrender to His rule.

2. Revere the King. How many of you know how to ride a horse? Verse 14 says you will eventually know how if you don't now: ***“And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”*** I wonder if this is where the words to that children's song, *“I'm in the Lord's army”* comes from? For those who have trusted Christ, there is a day coming when we really will be part of the Lord's army!

Don't miss that these armies are ***“following Him.”*** The emphasis is not on what we will do but on what He will do. Jesus is the Conqueror; and we are His unarmed companions. The church that has been waiting for Christ will follow Christ when He returns in triumph as 1 Thessalonians 3:13 says, ***“...at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”*** For our armor, we will be wearing ***“fine linen, white and pure,”*** which takes us back to verse 8, where the bride is clothed in fine linen, representing ***“the righteous deeds of the saints.”***

Recently, I received a delightful text from an Edgewood grandmother about her granddaughter who attends a Good News Club at her school in Moline (CEF is one of our Go Team partners): *“My granddaughter came out for breakfast in all white, including her dress, shoes, and hair bow. Her mom asked why she was wearing all white to school and she said, ‘We learned at Good News Club that Jesus washes us white as snow, and I want to show that!’”* BTW, Holly Bailey is hosting a group to equip grandmothers to intentionally help their grandchildren know and follow Jesus Christ on Tuesdays at 1:00 pm in Eldridge. I'm also looking forward to intergenerational Taco Bingo this Saturday at noon.

When Jesus returns, He will not need conventional weapons or military strategies. He will simply open His mouth and unleash the power of His Word according to verse 15: ***“From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations...”*** This ***“sharp sword”*** referred to a long, sharp, and piercing sword. Hebrews 4:12 says, ***“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”***

The only weapons Jesus will need are His words. I'm reminded of these powerful lyrics from “A Mighty Fortress is our God”: *“One little word shall fell him...”* When the King speaks, His enemies cannot stand.

Jesus' rule will be ***“with a rod of iron.”*** This means that Christ's rule will be absolute, unbreakable, and irresistible. A rod of iron cannot be bent or broken, and Christ's kingdom cannot be challenged, overturned, or overthrown. He will rule with perfect authority, and no rebellious nation or individual will be able to successfully oppose Him as we read in Daniel 2:44: ***“...it shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”***

This image comes from Psalm 2:8–9, where the Father says to the Son: ***“I will make the nations your heritage...You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”*** This is emphatic and reinforces Revelation 2:27: ***“...and He will rule them with a rod of iron.”***

We also read how Jesus will ***“...tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.”*** John MacArthur writes, *“This vivid symbol of God's wrath comes from the ancient practice of stomping on grapes as part of the wine-making process.”* In a similar way, Jesus will crush his enemies, and their blood will flow like juice from grapes.

This is a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Joel 3:13: ***“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.”*** This is what's behind these lyrics from the Battle Hymn of the Republic: *“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on.”*

Verse 16 gives us one more name of Jesus: ***“On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of lords.”*** The thigh was the typical location of the warrior's sword, and the thigh would have been visible when riding a horse. This name emphasizes the universal sovereignty of the warrior Christ in His triumph over all the enemies of God and goes back to Deuteronomy 10:17: ***“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God.”***

I've often found this quote from Abraham Kuyper encouraging: *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”*

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3. Respond to the King. It's essential to repent and receive Christ before it's too late because terrible judgment is coming. Verses 17-18 describe a scene that is sobering and shocking, even grotesque: ***"Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.'"*** One commentator writes: *"Death is the great leveler! You may be somebody in this life, but when death comes calling, you will find that you're a nobody without Jesus!"*

Here, we see another angel making an important appearance. The fact that he was ***"standing in the sun"*** means he's standing in a prominent place, for all to see. As angels often do in Revelation, he cries out in a ***"loud voice"*** as he invites all the birds to the ***"great supper of God."*** William Newell points to four different suppers described in the Bible:

- The supper of salvation (Luke 14:16-24).
- The Lord's supper, a commemoration of Jesus' sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). We will celebrate this next weekend.
- The marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).
- The great supper of God (Revelation 19:17-18)

Everyone will attend either the marriage supper of the Lamb or the great supper of God. The question is: Which one will you attend? Those who repent and receive Christ will join Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Those who reject His gracious invitation will face the judgment pictured in the great supper of God.

The great supper of God presents a grim contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb because it will result in an unprecedented slaughter with uncounted millions of dead bodies, both small and great. MacArthur writes: *"To have one's unburied body left as food for birds is the ultimate indignity, especially for proud kings and mighty military commanders."*

This fulfills the startling words of Jesus found in Matthew 24:28: ***"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."*** It also echoes Ezekiel 39:17, where God calls the birds to a great sacrificial feast following the destruction of Israel's enemies related to the destruction of the forces of Gog and Magog: ***"Speak to the birds...and you shall eat flesh and drink blood."*** A similar thought is stated in Jeremiah 7:33: ***"And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air."***

The message is unmistakable: God's judgment is coming, and no human power will be able to stop it. That's why this passage is not merely intended to satisfy our curiosity about the end times, nor does it allow us to create the character of Christ a la carte. It is a warning to repent of sin and an invitation to receive salvation because the conquering King is coming. Those who have rejected Him will face His judgment, while those who have received Him will belong to Him forever. The question is not whether the King is coming; you can be certain He is. The question is whether you will meet Him as your Savior or face Him as your Judge.

In verses 19-21, we read about the fate of the beast, the false prophet, and the kings of the earth: ***"And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh."***

This is an entirely one-sided encounter, more a one-time act of judgment than a prolonged battle or war. Chuck Swindoll adds, *"Let's cut to the chase: Before anybody on earth can utter the word 'Armageddon,' the battle will be over."* Commentator Donald Barnhouse captures it this way: *"The battle of Armageddon is the laughter of God against the climax of man's arrogance."* This is a fulfillment of Psalms 2:2-4: ***"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed...He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision."***

Isaiah 66:24 gives us another sobering picture of the finality of God's judgment: ***"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*** The Bible does not teach annihilationism, which is the idea that those who reject Christ will simply cease to exist. Instead, Scripture consistently presents final judgment as conscious, ongoing, and eternal.

We read of this in Revelation 14:11: ***"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night..."*** Revelation 20:10 gives an even clearer picture of the lake of fire: ***"And the devil who had deceived them***

was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

These are difficult words, but they are the words of Scripture. We dare not soften what God has spoken simply because it makes us uncomfortable. That’s why the gospel is so urgent. Unless you repent and receive Christ, you will spend eternity being consciously tormented day and night forever in a very hot place.

That is not a message designed to make you “turn or burn.” It is a warning from a holy God who loves sinners and has provided a way of salvation through His Son. The same Jesus who warns us about judgment is the Jesus who stretched out His hands on the cross to save us from it. The invitation is urgent: repent, believe, receive Jesus Christ, and be saved.

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Invitation

God is delaying judgment because He is giving you time to repent and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior according to 2 Peter 3:9, ***“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*** The very next verse says it is dangerous to presume upon His patience: ***“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed”*** (2 Peter 3:10).

The saddest part of judgment is the fact that no one needs to face it because Jesus absorbed the righteous wrath of a holy God. Unfortunately, many never repent and will end up facing this judgment in the never-ending fires of Hell.

According to a Pew Research survey, 79% of Christians in America said they believe Jesus Christ will return to earth someday. That’s a remarkable statistic. We believe He’s coming, but do we live like He’s coming? It’s possible

to affirm the doctrine of Christ's return with our lips while living as though His return will never happen.

Jesus' second coming is not merely a truth to be believed; it is a truth that should change the way we live. Since the King is coming, we must be ready by living today in light of that coming day.

It's one thing to believe Jesus is coming back. It's another thing to live like He is.

Brothers and sisters, in light of the return of Christ, we must do everything we can to share the gospel with people before it's too late. To help with that, we're kicking off a five-week elective called "On Mission: Sharing Hope Naturally" next Sunday at 10:45 in the Student Center. This class will provide practical tools for starting spiritual conversations and how to clearly share the gospel.

That's My King Video (adapted from Shadrach Meshach Lockridge's sermon called, "The Seven Way King.")

My King was born King.
The Bible says He's a Seven Way King.
He's the King of the Jews.
He's the King of Israel.
He's the King of righteousness.
He's the King of the ages.
He's the King of Heaven.
He's the King of glory.
He's the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords.

Now that's my King.
Well, I wonder if you know Him. Do you know Him?

Don't try to mislead me. Do you know my King?
My King is the only one whom there are no means of measure can define His limitless love.
Well, well, He's enduringly strong.
He's entirely sincere.
He's eternally steadfast.
He's immortally graceful.
He's imperially powerful.
He's impartially merciful.

That's my King.
He's God's Son.
He's the sinner's Savior.
He's the centerpiece of civilization.
He stands alone in Himself.
He's honest.
He's unique.
He's unparalleled.
He's unprecedented.
He's supreme.
He's pre-eminent.
Well, He's the grandest idea in literature.
He's the highest personality in philosophy.
That's my King.

He supplies strength for the weak.
He's available for the tempted and the tried.
He sympathizes and He saves.
He's strong God and He guides.
He heals the sick.
He cleanses the lepers.
He forgives sinners.
He discharged debtors.
He delivers the captives.
He defends the feeble.
He blesses the young.
He serves the unfortunate.
He regards the aged.
He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek.
Do you know Him?

Well, my King is a King of knowledge.
He's the wellspring of wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance.
He's the pathway of peace.
He's the roadway of righteousness.
He's the highway of holiness.
He's the gateway of glory.
He's the master of the mighty.
He's the captain of the conquerors.

He's the prince of princes.
He's the King of kings and He's the Lord of lords.
That's my King. Yes. Yes. That's my King. My King, Yes.

His office is manifold.
His promise is sure.
His light is matchless.
His goodness is limitless.
His mercy is everlasting.
His love never changes.
His Word is enough.
His grace is sufficient.
His reign is righteous.
His yoke is easy and His burden is light.
Well. I wish I could describe Him to you, but He's indescribable.
He's indescribable. Yes.
He's incomprehensible.
He's invincible.
He's irresistible.
I'm coming to tell you, the heavens of heavens cannot contain Him, let alone a man explaining Him.
You can't get Him out of your mind. You can't get Him off of your hands. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him.
Well, the Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him.
Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him.
The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.
Herod couldn't kill Him.
Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him.
That's my King. Yes.

He always has been and He always will be.
I'm talking about He had no predecessor and He'll have no successor.
There's nobody before Him and there'll be nobody after Him.
You can't impeach Him and He's not going to resign.
That's my King! That's my King!