

The Warrior King

Revelation 19:11-21

Have you ever wondered why all the great heroes of history are generally warriors? When Joanne and I were in England a few years ago, the poets and politicians received their public acknowledgments with signs and sculptures – but the towering statues in the city squares belonged to the warriors, often astride their horse.

Why do we give so much adulation to conquering warriors? Maybe it's because, in moments of clarity, we recognize that there is true evil in this world and only warriors stand between us and the tyranny of despots.

Of course, what is true in the world is infinitely more true in the spiritual realm. This is an intensely practical book. Though the genre is unfamiliar to us, it reveals the spiritual realities in which we live. The images of the dragons and beasts and harlots are meant to impress upon us, in vivid colors, the reality of the Devil and the swarming legions of evil he unleashes on this world through deception, coercion, and death. We've seen that the dragon is particularly intent on destroying the church of Jesus Christ. He makes war against the saints. If you are a Christian, the Devil really does hate you and wants you to suffer. That's just reality – and the numbers of martyred, imprisoned, and persecuted saints today bear witness to that fact.

Our text this morning is meant to thrill us with a view of Jesus – our great Warrior King – who comes to destroy the Devil and all his works, and lead his children into victory. Jesus wants us, his church, his bride, to understand – as we live in this wicked world, as we suffer the Devil's attacks, as we endure the beast's persecuting power, as we watch professing believers apostatize, led astray by the harlot's tempting prowess – the that the Devil's doom is sure. Our King wants us to see that his triumph over sin and death and the Devil is certain, and thus, so is ours. No matter how the Devil may rage, one little word shall fell him. We are more than conquerors through our victorious Warrior King.

In our text this morning we are shown a picture of the great, final, victorious return of King Jesus as he comes to destroy the beasts and their armies. Our text divides evenly into two parts:

- vv. 11-16 – The Conqueror
- vv. 17-21 – The Conquest

I. The Conqueror

Rev. 19:11 *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.*

A. His Identity

The white horse is a symbol of purity and military conquest. In the ancient world, battlefield victories were often celebrated with a parade, and the conqueror would ride upon a white horse or in a chariot pulled by a team of them. The beautiful Andalusian horses of Spain were usually employed for this task.

As heaven is opened, John sees a Victor! He has come *“to judge and make war.”* Notice, Jesus does not make war in order to **gain** the victory. He appears on a white horse, already the Victor.

Military strategists agree that the best generals do not fight a battle in order to gain victory but in order to secure it. In other words, through strategic planning and skillful positioning of troops and armament, the outcome is already determined. All that’s left to do is engage the enemy and complete what has already been won.

And so it is here. The battle at hand is simply Jesus completing what has already been won. The righteous King now engages with the principalities and powers of darkness in order to finally and fully destroy them.

We must not miss the phrase *“in righteousness”* – *“in righteousness he judges and makes war.”* This war is both mortal and moral combat. It is an aggressive act of divine righteousness, a hurricane of holiness, a tsunami of consuming fire. Everything we are told in the following verses concerning Jesus points to the righteousness of his holy war.

He is called “Faithful and True.” He is perfect.

- Faithful in every way to the Father’s holy will. Obedient even to death on the cross. As Paul records in Philippians 2:9, *“Therefore,”* by virtue of and in response to the glorious, conquering obedience of Jesus, *“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.”*
- He is True – in all his being, in all his acts and words. Jesus Christ not only exists in perfect, infinite accord with what is right and righteous, but is himself the definition of true, the plumb line of uprightness. And his war is the perfect and true jihad against all that is untrue, all that is a lie, all that is evil.

“His eyes are like a flame of fire.” He sees everything and with utter moral perfection.

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

The Warrior King acts in perfect accord with what he perfectly sees.

"On His head are many diadems" A diadem was a crown signifying the highest ruling power. Jesus is the highest ruling power on earth and in heaven. **"All** authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). There is no greater power than the power of Jesus. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

"And he has a name written that no one but himself knows." In ancient times it was believed that to know a person's name gave you some aspect of control over the person. So, when Jacob was fighting with the angel of the Lord he asked, "Tell me your name" (Gen. 32:39). It was an attempt to gain some control. But Jesus is beyond human control. He is the sovereign God.

"He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood." Scholars debate whether the blood on his robe is the blood of his already defeated enemies or his own atoning blood. I'm not sure we need to differentiate – the one accomplished the other. The cross was both God's judgement on sin and Christ's victory over evil. But we are certainly intended to see a reference here to the prophecy of Isaiah 63 as he spoke of a coming Warrior King.

Isaiah 63:1–3 *Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." ² Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.*

Jesus wants us to see him as he is – the King who will utterly destroy his enemies as he crushes them with righteous divine indignation.

Rev. 19:15 *He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.*

B. His Army

Rev. 19:14 *And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.*

Though Jesus single-handedly defeated the Devil and will single-handedly, with one word, destroy all evil forever, in the book of Revelation Jesus is not alone. There is always a company of saints with him!

- In Revelation 1:13 we see Jesus standing "in the midst of the lampstands" – he is present in the midst of his church.
- In Revelation 7 John sees those who have "washed their robes and made them white" – and they are with Jesus.
- Rev. 7:15 says, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
- In chapter 14 John sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion "and with him 144,000 who had his name written on their foreheads."
- In 17:14 we are told that the Lamb will conquer the beasts of the earth and sea "for he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

The glory of Jesus is that he has bound himself to his people, to his bride. When we see Jesus in his glory, we also see those who are "with him!" And they are made like him. Notice, the armies of heaven following him are dressed in fine linen, white and clean, and they also ride white horses. They are also conquerors! But notice two things:

- Their robes are not dipped in blood. Why? Because they have conquered not by their blood, but by the blood of the Lamb!
Rev. 12:11 *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb...*
- The army of Revelation 19 is not there to fight, but to observe the triumph of their King and to participate in his victory.

II. The Conquest

Revelation 19 can be divided into two suppers – the inestimably glorious wedding supper of the Lamb and the incredibly awful supper of the birds of prey.

- Notice in verse 9, an angel announces a blessing on those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.
- In verse 17, an angel invites the birds of heaven to "Come, gather, for the great supper of God." And in stark contrast to the wedding feast of divine love, we have the horrifying feast of God's wrath.

The scene is grotesque – but it is true. Queasy scholars, those who are uncomfortable with the idea of an avenging God, like to say that this is only a symbol, and that is true. It is a symbol. The question of course is, a symbol of what? It is undoubtedly a symbol of utter destruction, total defeat, and eternal death for all the enemies of Christ.

Two things to note:

1. Notice how quickly and effortlessly this final triumph is accomplished. There is no lengthy, drawn-out battle. It is over in a moment. One moment, the beast and the kings of the earth gather with their armies to make war against the King of Kings (v. 19). The next moment, the beast and false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire and all the rest are laying dead on the battlefield. All this accomplished by the sharp sword coming from the mouth of the Lamb – the Word of God. Martin Luther: “One little word shall fell him.”
2. Notice that this destruction does not only involve the beast and the false prophet. They are “thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.” It also involves “the rest” – all those who followed the beast; all those who believed the deceptions and joined him in his war against the Christ. Jesus said specifically in Matthew 12:30, “Whoever is not with me is against me.” And here we see the end of all those who were against him.

Rev. 19:21 *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.*

Have you ever looked at a group photo that included you, maybe an old high school picture of your whole class? Which face do you look for first? Your own. We want to know where we are in the picture.

Where are we in this picture of divine judgment? This picture does include you. Not a single soul is left out. And as you try to find yourself, remember that there are two options, only two possible places you can be.

- You will either be seen following Christ, robed in white, riding in glorious victory, on your way to the wedding supper of Lamb...
- or you will be on the battlefield, destroyed by the wrath of God and left for the birds of prey.

That is a very hard message for many to hear. We live in a relativistic, pluralistic age and it is hard for us to imagine that the moral universe is really this drastically binary. We believe in

options, moral options. Our present day has taken the rainbow as their sign: many colors, many options, all free, all good, all open. Universal moral codes are thrown into the trash heap of history. They are seen as enemies of human freedom and authentic self-expression. Only you can decide what is right for you.

For a society such as ours, nothing is more offensive than a story such as this, a scene in which Jesus Christ comes to kill all those who lived in keeping with their authentic selves and contrary to God's character and law.

Dennis Johnson: "Such a presentation of a divine Warrior, full of wrath and vengeance against those who disregard His authority, is offensive to man today...Scripture, however, paints a realistic picture of the moral structure of the universe."

You see, no matter how pluralistic and relativistic a society might become, the moral structure of the universe is fixed according to the Divine and Holy Nature of God the Creator. It is perfectly immutable and inevitable. There are no hacks. All the relativistic nonsense of our modern world will come to a crashing halt on the day of judgment, as men and women are faced with the terrifying reality of an unbending moral law upheld by a perfectly holy God.

Judgment Day isn't simply something that will happen, it is something that **must** happen. The irrevocable moral structure of this God-created universe demands it. The terror of being without Christ is that you will be and must be destroyed by Christ.

But it is precisely this reality that makes the glory of the gospel shine. The glory of the gospel is that God, in his moral perfection, sent his own and only Son, to stand between you, the guilty sinner, and your certain destruction before the holy law of God. Jesus took the guilt of your crimes and gave himself, body and soul, to be crushed by the righteous wrath of God. And by his death and resurrection, a way has been opened through the pitiless wall of death. And he bids us to follow him, our victorious, conquering King, into eternal victory. It's the greatest story on earth.

What should this revelation of Jesus do for us? What would be the evidence that we are "getting this," that we are truly seeing Jesus as our glorious Warrior King?

Humility – How can we be proud when this glorious King gave his life to ransom ours?

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.

Courage – Yes, the world is a mess. Yes, the Devil is at work and evil abounds. But only for a little while. Jesus is coming again. He is the Victor, and one day we will follow him into the eternal joy of a new heaven and earth. We don't need to be afraid. Jesus has this.

Love – If the Son of God came to rescue us in this way, all the way to join our human state, bear our sin, suffer our death, endure the wrath we deserved in order to bring us into His glory and victory – shouldn't we love Him? Wouldn't we want to live for Him?

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.