

In our last sermon on the book of Revelation we looked at the marriage supper of the Lamb as that is described in the first part of chapter 19. That is a wonderful subject to consider as it has to do with the love between God and his people. We rejoice in Jesus as the bridegroom of his church. Chapter 19 continues by describing Jesus from a different perspective as one who judges and makes war on his enemies and the enemies of his people. This too is held up for us as reason for joy and worship and thanksgiving. This too belongs to the hope of the people of God.

Just as the verses describing the marriage supper of the Lamb describe the end of the world, so this passage about Jesus as the one who judges and makes war describes the end of the world. This passage describes the final victory of Jesus over the forces of evil in this world. The whole of the biblical story describes God's conquest against Satan and his kingdom and this passage describes the culmination of that conquest. Jesus is presented here as the great victor over all of the enemies of God and his kingdom.

It is significant for our understanding of this passage that one of the common ways that God describes himself to us in the Bible is as a warrior. Tremper Longman and Daniel Reid have written a book called *God Is A Warrior* in which they trace that theme through the Scriptures. Their introductory chapter is entitled, "The Divine Warrior as a Central Biblical Motif." God reveals himself in many ways in the Bible. One of them is as a Divine Warrior who fights against his enemies and the enemies of his people and whose purpose in history is the complete defeat and overthrow of evil in the world. One of the seminal passages for this theme in Scripture is Exodus 15 which celebrates the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. Verse 7 of that chapter sings, "In the greatness of your power, O LORD, you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble." The text we will look at this morning is the culmination of this theme in the Scriptures.

Now we must remember that this is highly symbolic. We are not to expect some kind of literal battle at the end of time on the basis of these verses. This is describing the victory that Jesus Christ will win over Satan and his followers at the end of the age. There is not going to be some kind of literal battle somewhere on earth at the end of the age. Paul describes the same event in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 when he writes that the Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." We are not to think of this as some kind of literal battle, but rather the final defeat of evil and evildoers in the final judgment.

So John writes in verse 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." The white horse is a symbol of purity. The color white is often used in the book of Revelation as a symbol for holiness. Often it is used of the robes of the saints who have endured persecution and remained faithful. One of the important nuances of the symbol of whiteness in the book of Revelation has to do with the rightness of God and his people in the battle

against sin and evil. The martyrs, for instance, are killed as evildoers, but the white robes points to their vindication. In Revelation 20:11 we read of the great white throne. The white horse, therefore, in Revelation 19 does not just symbolize holiness in general, but the righteousness of Jesus and his followers in the fight against the forces of evil.

This idea is continued in the description of the one sitting on the white horse. "The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war." The one sitting on the white horse is going to wage war. The war will result in a lot of death and suffering. Some of the imagery to come is graphic and messy. War is horrific and ugly. The imagery in this passage does not hide that fact. But the one sitting on the white horse is on the side of right. This war is necessary. And from God's side it is perfectly just. Indeed justice requires it. If God were not fighting this war, he would not be just. This belongs to his glory.

The one sitting on the white horse is called "Faithful and True." These terms have to do with the fulfilling of promises. The people of God have always lived in the light of promises from God. Their hope has always been tied to God's faithfulness to his word – to his promises. Those promises are key to our salvation, but our salvation is tied up with the defeat of evil and evildoers in the world. Salvation involves the defeat of sin and evil in our own lives as we are forgiven and renewed in the image of God. But it also involves the defeat of evil in the world. Part of the hope that sustains us on our way is the promise of a world without evil. 2 Peter 3:13 says, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

There are many promises concerning the final judgment. Psalms 96:11-13 calls to all of creation to sing for joy "before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness." (Psalm 96:11-13). When Paul in Acts 17 introduced the gospel to the intellectuals of Athens, he urged them to repent because God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed...." That man of course, is our risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

So the one who is coming to judge and make war is Jesus. He is described as sitting on a white horse, called Faithful and True and will judge and make war in righteousness. The great emphasis in this verse is on the rightness of the coming judgment and how it is something that has been promised and can be depended upon because Jesus is called "Faithful and True." One of the great aspects of our hope is a world from which evil has been banished. And the way to that world involves a final judgment in which the world will be judged in righteousness.

Just think of all the evil in the world today. Think of the evil of sexual slavery. Think of the evil of abortion. Think of the evil of the persecution of the church. Think of corrupt governments which steal from their own people so that millions live in grinding poverty. There is no end to the suffering because of evil in the world.

One day that will all be over. The world is going to be judged. Evil doers will get what they deserve. God will be glorified in his justice.

We must consider this with the awareness that we are no better by nature than any evildoer. We are sinners saved by grace. We cannot stand before God on our own merits, but only in the righteousness of Christ. Jesus has paid the penalty that we deserve. We have been rescued from Satan's kingdom. But there are those who have refused to submit to God. There are those who have given themselves over to fight against God and his people. And part of the hope that God holds out for his people is that they have been defeated and they will be judged in the final judgment.

This paragraph, Revelation 19:11-16 has a lot of description of Jesus. Descriptions of Jesus are given to us to nurture our love and our faith and our hope. One of the great purposes of the Bible is to tell us about God and about Jesus and what they have done, are doing and will do to elicit our worship and our delight and our trust and our hope and our obedience. When the Bible tells us about Jesus, as it does here, we are to savor what it says for the strengthening of our faith and love. Verse 12 says first that "His eyes are like a flame of fire...."

These words are used more often of the risen and exalted Christ in the book of Revelation. The commentators mostly suggest that the description of the exalted Christ's eyes as eyes that are like a flame of fire has to do with his penetrating and piercing gaze. And that in his role as the divine judge. In the description of Jesus in the letter to the church in Thyatira, we find this same phrase – he "has eyes like a flame of fire" and later on in that letter Jesus says of himself, "I am he who searches the mind and heart, and will give to each of you according to your works." The same idea is expressed of God in Hebrews 4:13 which says, "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."

So Jesus, who is described in our text as the one who will defeat all his enemies in righteous judgment, has "eyes like a flame of fire." His righteous judgment of the wicked will be on the basis of perfect knowledge of the minds and hearts of his enemies. In human trials one of the problems is that human beings do not have this kind of knowledge of those who are being judged, but that is not a problem for Jesus. His judgement of sinners will be on the basis of perfect knowledge and understanding. Nothing is hidden from his sight. Every evil thought and motivation will be laid bare and judged with perfect righteousness.

Verse 12 continues, "And on his head are many diadems...." A diadem is a kind of crown or a royal headband. It would not be the kind of crown that might first come to mind when we hear that word, but a kind of headband used in ancient times as a symbol of royalty. The diadems on Jesus head are a contrast to the diadems on the heads of the dragon in chapter 12:3 and the beast in chapter 13:1. The devil and his earthly representatives claim the power and authority of kingship. But the exalted Jesus is the true cosmic king who over rules all other claims to power and authority. As verse 16 of Revelation 19 goes on to say, "On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

Think of the world that we are living in today. The various rulers of this world have a legitimate authority to rule, but that authority comes from God as Romans 13:1 tells us. "For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God." But human authorities often do not acknowledge that their authority comes from God and they often do not exercise their authority in submission to God's authority. We see that when governments promote all kinds of evil beliefs and behaviour. In the west claims to authority are often rooted in humanistic thought and in other parts of the world either variations of humanism in communism or other false religions. There are all kinds of claims to authority that are not rooted in and submissive to God's authority.

When Jesus returns – when this vision of Jesus making war on a white horse is fulfilled, all claims to authority that are not consistent with Jesus' authority will be put in their place. The authority of Jesus which at the present is very real, but hidden, will be demonstrated before all the world. Jesus will be revealed as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. All human authorities that defied the authority of God will be finally and utterly conquered. As Paul puts it in Philippians 2:10-11, "At the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Then will be the final answer to the prayer of Psalm 72:11, "May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!"

So, "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." This last phrase is interesting because this passage reveals many of Jesus' names. He is called Faithful and True. He is called "The Word of God." And his name is "King of kings and Lord of lords." So much about God and about Jesus is revealed to us by his names. But then we are told that "he has a name written that no one knows but himself." This suggests that we do not have an exhaustive knowledge of the greatness and glory and power of Jesus. What we do know from the Bible is wonderful and glorious, but there is more to Jesus than has been revealed and that we can comprehend. So in the context of this passage, we are given these wonderful names of Jesus that tell us so much about his power and glory, but there is much more to the glory of Jesus, than has been revealed. What we know about Jesus is wonderful and glorious, but it does not exhaust all there is to know.

Verse 13, "He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood" Some commentators think that the reference to blood here is to Jesus' own blood shed on the cross, but that is probably not the point here. The context here is about war against Jesus' enemies and so the blood here is a reference to the blood of his enemies.

The OT background here is Isaiah 63:1-3 which speaks of God coming in judgement against his enemies. I will quote just verses 2-3, "Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the people's no one was with me; I trod them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel."

This is describing a war and the Bible is not hesitant to use language that may make us feel squeamish. We must keep in mind that this is a perfectly righteous war on the part of Jesus. There is no injustice here. We must also keep in mind that this is symbolism for the final defeat of the forces of evil that fight against God and his people. These are the people who slit the throats of Christians before cameras for all the world to see. These are the people who shed the blood of millions and millions of babies and call it women's health. The language of Scripture about the judgment of God upon the wicked reflects the divine abhorrence of wickedness and those who cruelly engage in it.

And then we have another name of our great warrior God who will one day complete his victory over all that is evil. "[T]he name by which he is called is 'The Word of God.'"

The Word of God in Scripture has to do both with revelation and with accomplishing the will of God. By his Word God reveals himself and his plan and his will to us, but he also accomplishes his purposes through the power of his Word. And all of that is associated with Jesus as he is called "The Word of God." John 1 is the most familiar passage in this connection, where we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Later on the Word is identified explicitly as Jesus.

The Word of God is associated with creation and with upholding and governing the whole creation, but it is also associated with accomplishing God's plan for salvation and judgment. Isaiah 55:11 says of the word that goes out from God's mouth, "it shall not return to be empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

So calling Jesus, the Word of God in Revelation 19 highlights Jesus' power and glory in another way. There is an emphasis in this passage on his kingship, and here by calling Jesus the Word of God, the text is pointing to that fact that this king is so powerful that he does not have to lift a finger to accomplish his purposes. In this context he is waging war against his enemies and he is so powerful that all he has to do is speak in order to defeat and destroy them. Again think of the powerful rulers of this world in their arrogance in not submitting to King Jesus. Some of them have atomic arsenals at their disposal. Some of them have mighty armies at their disposal. But Jesus will overcome them simply by speaking. As Martin Luther wrote in "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," "The prince of darkness grim/we tremble not for him;/his rage we can endure, /for lo! His doom is sure;/ one little word shall fell him..."

Verse 14, describes the armies of heaven. "And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses." This army of heaven is composed both of angels and the church. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 says that at the end of the age the Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels...." And Revelation 17:14 says that the Lamb will conquer his enemies, "and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

The focus in the passage as a whole is on what Christ does, but this verse suggests that the armies of heaven, both saints and angels, share in Jesus' victory. They are not described as doing anything except following the Lord, but they are following the Lord and that probably implies some involvement in the battle. There are numerous verses in the NT that describe the angels as being involved in the final judgment and Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:2 teaches that the saints will judge the world.

At the very least, we will be there and observing and agreeing with the righteous judgment of Christ. The armies of heaven are on white horse like their leader and they are dressed in white garments. Even as in the here and now we are part of the army of God, so in the final battle we will be there following our king into battle and on the side of righteousness. We will agree with what Jesus will be doing and have some part in it.

Verse 15, brings our attention back to Jesus. "From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron." The sharp sword that comes from his mouth is the Word of God and so the point here is the same as his name being the Word of God. The Bible often uses the imagery of a sharp sword to teach us about the power of the word of God. Isaiah 11:4 is part of the OT background here which says of the coming Messiah, "he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked."

The second part of the verse comes from Psalm 2 which says of the Davidic king who ultimately is Jesus, "You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

And then we have the last part of verse 15. "He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." Jesus' victory over sin and evil involves not only bearing the wrath of God in the place of his people, but expressing the wrath of God against those who reject him and insist on living in rebellion against him. This is a fearful sentence. "He will treat the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."

Now the application of all of this can go a number of ways. Certainly there is a warning here for all who are not faithful followers of Jesus Christ. This can be expressed in the language of Psalm 2 which as we have seen is an important OT background to the truths that we have considered from these verses in Revelation 19. Psalm 2:10-12 says "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." This warning is addressed to the kings of the earth and the rulers who set themselves against the LORD and against his Anointed, but it certainly applies to all who are living in rebellion against Christ. We do not want to be enemies of the one who is described in Revelation 19:11-16 on the day when he will come to judge and make war.

On the other hand the whole Bible teaches "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." The one who is described in our text is the same one who came to save his people from their sins. He is the one who gave his life so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. When we read of the fury of the wrath of God

the Almighty we are reminded that Jesus bore that wrath in the place of his people. There is no need for any of us to be on the wrong side in this final war that these verses in Revelation 19 describe. Through believing in Jesus and following him, we can be included in the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, following Jesus on white horses.

The focus of the application in its own context here in Revelation 19 is on celebration and worship. Revelation 19:1-2, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

When we look out at the world in our time, we see a great deal of the warfare against Christ and his church. We see it in the persecution of Christians in many places in the world. We see it in the aggressive nature of the radical left in the west. We see it in so many other ways in our culture – rebellion against God in sexuality, living for pleasure rather than living for God, selfishness, and all manner of idolatry. While we are no better than any of our enemies, we have been rescued from Satan's kingdom and included in the kingdom of Christ. And the passage that we have looked at this morning celebrates the final victory over the enemies of God and his people. It is given to us to comfort us. It is given to encourage us. It is given to nurture our love for Christ and our worship of Christ. May the Lord bless it to us in those ways.