

Sermon – 04/05/2008 pm

Behold the King

Study Text: Revelation 19:11-16

Students were receiving their awards at the annual prize giving ceremony of the law school. There were awards for property law, contract law, criminal law, and so on. In the middle of ceremony one student was called up to receive his award for war law. We might think that war goes on outside the rule of law but it seems there are laws to study regarding war.

A case can be made for the conduct of just war – however flawed such arguments can become. The judgment of all men and governments is flawed by sin so there will never be agreement on what is true justice. Only God is absolutely just. Divine justice means condemnation for all human beings, for all have rebelled and sinned against God. God is just but also the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

God will execute his justice at the time of his choosing. In his mercy he has delayed such execution, but it would be extremely foolish to confuse postponement with cancellation. *God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has ordained. He has given assurance of this by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17:31).

Jesus himself said that the Father had given him the authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of man. And *the hour is coming when those who are in their graves will hear his voice and come forth* (John 5:27, 28). Jesus emphasized that his judgment is righteous for it is in complete accord with the will and the word of God the Father.

Warrior

In another glimpse into heaven (*cf.* 4:1) John saw Jesus Christ seated on a white horse. It is the same risen Jesus he saw in his very first vision while in exile on Patmos, as we see by comparing the descriptions he gives. John was in exile on Patmos for *the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ* (1:9). He has just heard these same truths in the message of the marriage supper of the Lamb. He was told to write *the true words of God* and to worship God for he had been given *the testimony of Jesus* (19:10).

In this new vision John saw heaven opened. This time he did not see the Lamb upon the throne but Christ on a white horse. It is interesting that in his first glimpse into heaven he heard of the lion of the tribe of Judah, but when he looked he saw a Lamb as though it had been slain. This time he **heard** of the marriage supper of the Lamb but **saw** Christ on a white horse at the head of the armies of heaven.

Heaven was open not only for John to see in but for Christ to ride out. Jesus ascended into heaven almost 2000 years ago promising to return. What will his second coming be like? He will not come 'born of a woman' but will come as the divine warrior and judge. He will come on a white horse, the horse being a symbol of battle and a white horse of victory in battle.

Years ago the story of the lone ranger was serialized on TV. The lone ranger wore a mask and rode a silvery white horse. In each episode he would ride off to bring justice to a town that

was being plagued by criminals. He would ride off as quickly as he came leaving the people asking 'who is that masked man'.

There is no mistaking the rider on the white horse which John saw in heaven – even if he had a secret name that no one knew. Look at the way he is described. He had many crowns on his head – not just one but many. Maybe these represented all the kingdoms of the world that had become his. The evil beast had ten crowns but the King of kings has many.

The divine warrior had eyes like flames of fire, just like the Son of man in 1:14. Fire is symbolic of cleansing, of purification, as well as destruction. Another feature familiar to us from that earlier vision is the sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. This symbol was also used by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:2). In the vision here in Revelation 19 the sword is said to be for striking the nations. A sword is a weapon of war. It is appropriate for a warrior to carry a sword. This divine warrior will strike the nations of men in the same manner as he struck Pharaoh and his armies destroying them in the sea.

The sword is not in his hand, however, but in his mouth. What does this mean? Words come from the mouth. Judgment will be through the word of God. He will strike the earth with the sword of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked (Isaiah 11:4). Men and nations will be judged and condemned on the basis of the word of God. With God there is no difference between his word and his work – not like there is with men. When God says 'let it be done', it is done. God has spoken and his word will not fail.

This vision also points to a fulfilment of Psalm 2 where it is prophesied of the nations that he (Messiah) will break them with a rod of iron and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

Another symbol of judgment is that of treading grapes in a winepress. This symbol which comes from Isaiah 63:2-6 was used of divine judgment in an earlier vision. Divine judgment was pictured as a harvest – for the earth was ripe for harvest (14:19-20). Presumably the gospel has been preached to all the nations as a witness to them (Matthew 24:14). They have been called to repent but refused to do so. They are now ripe for the wrath of God. *He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God* (19: 15). In this image the juice becomes blood which flows out (14:20) or in this case splatters on the robe of the righteous warrior coming out of heaven (19:13).

Written Names

Whilst the visual features of the one on a white horse point to judgment, the names by which he is called indicate that his judgment is entirely righteous. Firstly he is called *faithful and true*. He is faithful and true to his promise to vindicate his people. They have suffered and died at the hands of Satan and his evil agents in this world.

This letter remember was first read by Christians suffering at the hands of imperial Rome with its oppressive idolatry and insatiable appetite for blood. Similar regimes exist in the world today. The people of God are still crying out for their blood to be avenged. God hears their cry and he will vindicate them one day.

You might also suffer one day because of your faith in Jesus. Satan is on the prowl wanting to devour the children of God. Are you standing firm in the Lord Jesus Christ and resisting his attacks, knowing that your brothers in the world are going through the same sufferings (I

Peter 5:9). Is this picture of divine judgment clear to you and is it firmly fixed in your heart and mind?

The divine warrior has another name – *the word of God* (19:13). John first used this name for Jesus in the gospel (John 1:1). God has spoken fully and finally in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is the embodiment of God's great plan and purpose for the human race – namely salvation and judgment. Salvation for those who bear the Father's name and judgment for those having the mark of the beast. Jesus has been lifted up like Moses' snake in the desert. Those who look to him will live but those who don't will die.

On Jesus was written a name that no one knew except himself (19:12). He also had a name written on his thigh. It may be that this is the secret name made known. Why written on his thigh? The thigh has significance in the making of solemn promises in the Old Testament (Genesis 24:2). Jesus was wearing a robe dipped in blood, the blood of the wicked he had crushed. It was on this robe around his thigh that this name was written.

This name refers to his sovereignty over all the kings and kingdoms of this world. This name is much superior to 'Babylon the great', the name the great prostitute had written on her forehead. On the Cross of Jesus was written the title 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. This is the name that is above every other name, the name before which every knee shall bow. Jesus is the Lamb of God who overcame the world the flesh and the devil (17:14).

War

The one called faithful and true sitting on a white horse went forth in righteousness to judge and make war (19:11). He was followed by the *armies of heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean* (19:14). Some think these are angels but in the context they may well be saints. Remember the bride of the Lamb was *clothed in fine linen, clean and bright* (19:8).

The word of God has been proclaimed in all the earth. It is a word of life for those who believe, those who turn from following Satan to follow Christ. This word is violently rejected by Satan and those who remain loyal to him. There must ultimately be a showdown for the kingdoms of this world can have only one king. God made this world. It belongs to him. He has redeemed his chosen ones and will establish them in his everlasting kingdom. *The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever* (11:15).

Despite the already determined victory of the Lamb his enemies foolishly prepare for war (16:14, 17:14). The place for battle is symbolically called Armageddon (16:16). The divine warrior will make war but as we have noted his sword is in his mouth. 'Making war refers not to a literal battlefield conflict but to a legal battle and judgment'. Jesus is coming as judge and executioner. The enemies of Jesus and his followers will make a desperate last-ditch effort but they will not prevail. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, coming forth on a white horse has prevailed!

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