12-10-23

Revelation 19:11-21

Because it is the advent season, I hope to spend the next couple of weeks discussing Christ’s second advent or the Parousia. That is the future second coming of Jesus. The Bible assures us that Jesus is coming back and that we need to be ready. Jesus also gives us the warning that we must be careful that we are not deceived. It is vital for us to keep both these things in mind, not only for our own preparedness but so that we can warn others.

As we begin to study these passages, there are a couple of preliminary points I need to make: one is that Jesus is a Warrior King, and the other will be a few comments on considering the book of Revelation. I call these things preliminary because they will set a foundation, not because they are incidental and unimportant.

First, Jesus as Warrior King. In the church today, we are often guilty of having a softened and sanitized view of Jesus. He is the one who loves us enough to die for us. We picture Him as the good shepherd carrying the lost sheep to safety. He is the one who gently comforts children. He is very approachable, we come to Him asking for anything that comes to mind, even if it’s simply for our own comfort. And you know what? All these things are true. These and many other good and gentle things describe our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

The problem comes in when we stop at these ideas; at these facts about Jesus. The love and gentleness only present part of the picture of the God-man Jesus. I think it helps to bear in mind that there is only one true God, the God of the Bible. In some way that is beyond us, He is a Triune God who presents in three persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But He is still one God. So the God we read of in the Old Testament who would bring judgement on His enemies is the same God we read of in the New Testament who redeems us. Now of course, it goes much deeper than that; redemption is a big topic in the Old Testament while judgement is a big topic in the New. But that’s another study.

My point is that the same God who ejected Adam and Eve from paradise for sin; who rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah; who called for the complete annihilation of the pagan population of Canaan; and who even brought foreign nations in to punish His rebellious people, is the same God who died on the cross for us. Sometimes we like to separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New, but that doesn’t work; there is only one God and both Testaments work together to give us a full picture of our Creator.

Even considering these things, it can be difficult to think of Jesus as a Warrior. Aside from the obvious indications that He is a Warrior in our current verses from Revelation, let me give two other Biblical examples. The first is in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Remember that Joshua is the man who led the Israelites once Moses passed away. He led the people into the Promised Land of Canaan and led the conquest of a large section of the area.

There is a short encounter we read of in Joshua 5:13-15. *Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” He said, “No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?” The captain of the Lord’s host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.*

There are a few times in the Old Testament where Jesus appears in the form of a man. These are called “preincarnate appearances of Jesus”. God the Son appeared as a man before He was born of the virgin Mary and became a man. We usually have to tell one of these appearances by the context. Notice two main things. One is that the “man” accepted worship. No angel of God will accept worship so this was deity. Secondly is how Joshua was told the same thing that Moses was when he encountered God in the burning bush.

So, here is Jesus, with a sword in His hand, leading spiritual forces in Canaan land; to do spiritual battle while Joshua and Israel did physical battle. Jesus is a Warrior.

My second example is the cross. That was more than our redemption; that was more than Jesus dying for our justification. That was an act of war in the spiritual realm; that was the actual defeat of satan and his army. The act was so violent that it caused repercussions in the physical world: the earthquake, the curtain tearing, the dead saints rising.

Now just a few comments about the book of Revelation. It is a difficult book. It is full of pictures and words that just seem fantastic to us. The style of writing is called apocalyptic. In fact, an old title for the book of Revelation was “The Apocalypse”. An apocalypse is the violent end of something; in this case evil and the cursed heavens and earth. Christians will be trying to figure out all the details of Revelation at least until Jesus comes back. But it is still very useful to us because we can get the gist of what it’s talking about and we can always be on the lookout for things that take place that fit into what Revelation tells us.

Besides being apocalyptic, Revelation is prophecy; and that is important in the way we interpret what it says. There are a couple ways that people approach this book. One is that it is all figurative. It is just getting ideas across to us and none of it is to be considered an actual description of what will be real. The other basic way of interpreting Revelation is to consider it to be literal.

I believe the best approach is the literal approach. I take most of Revelation to be describing something that will or has actually happened. My main reason for this is because the rest of prophecy in the Bible is literal; why would this prophecy be different? Old Testament prophecy said that Jesus would be born of a virgin and He literally was. It said that Israel would become a nation in a day, and in 1948 it did. Those things are no less fantastic than what we read in Revelation.

Bear in mind that taking a literal interpretation still leaves room for there to be metaphor and spiritual application. We just need to be very careful in applying it. For instance, there is a beast that has ten horns that appears. But an interpreting angel tells the apostle John that the horns represent ten kings. So we know that we won’t see a literal ten-horned monster but ten nations whose leadership will join with the antichrist.

Another example is the recurring theme of the evil city of Babylon in Revelation. Do we take that as a world spiritual force of evil, luxury, and oppression? Or do we take it as the literal rebuilding of the city of Babylon which becomes a dominant world power in all these things? For this one, we must keep our eyes open and wait for the answer.

Having said all these things by way of foundation, I believe our verses for today and next week are very literal. These words are strong and they are violent. They tend to talk about things we don’t have a taste for; they don’t fit into our view of civilization and justice; they don’t even fit into our sanitized view of how war should be fought. If I may say so reverently; they don’t fit our view of a soft fuzzy Jesus. Accordingly, some will interpret these verses as a physical picture of Jesus’ victory on the cross; a battle that has already taken place and has been won.

No, this is a dramatic picture of how evil sin is and how much God hates it. Because of His grace and mercy, He bears with us giving us time to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. But a time will come when He will strike against evil and there will be no mercy. All those on the wrong side of Christ will pay the ultimate penalty: death without dignity; and then the final white throne judgement of God. Up to this point in Revelation, there have been three waves of God’s wrath upon the earth referred to as seals, trumpets, and bowls. Our verses take place once these are complete or possibly as part of the last bowl; at this time, there are no more chances for those who live on the earth.

The apostle John saw heaven open up and while that has happened before, this is big. He sees a white horse with Jesus sitting upon it. Remember how Jesus entered Jerusalem sitting on a donkey. When a king rode a donkey, it was a symbol of peace. When King Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem, it was a symbol of Him bringing us a way to have peace between ourselves and God. Likewise, when a king rode a horse, it was always associated with war; either going into battle or returning in victory. Jesus is now riding a horse and He is coming in war.

If we look back to chapter 6 and verse 1, we are introduced to another who comes riding a white horse and he comes to conquer. It is noticeable that while he is armed with a bow, he has no arrows. He will conquer with diplomacy and intrigue. This is the antichrist. Satan takes the things of God, and fakes them in a twisted way. This is why we are so often warned in the Bible to not be deceived. Many millions will be deceived and follow this false Christ to their destruction. Both are conquers, both are on white horses; but Jesus won’t be coming to talk and negotiate; He has a sword and a rod of iron.

Many false Christ’s will come including the antichrist. They will be able to talk very well and convincingly. They will be able to perform signs and wonders. They will claim to be Jesus on His second advent. Don’t be fooled. When Jesus comes back, it will be loud, bright, glorious, all will see, and He will go directly into battle with the hordes that are led by the antichrist and the false prophet.

Throughout the Bible, we find many names of Jesus and they all tell about Him. In these verses we find four names and two of them are Faithful and True. This is our Saviour Jesus. He is faithful and He always will be. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:13, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*” Faithfulness is an attribute of God; it is part of His character. So, while we can be secure in the salvation He offers us, we also know that He will bring the wrath He has promised to those who reject Him.

And Christ is True. He is the truth. And in Titus 1:2, Paul refers to God “*who cannot lie*”. In these things we see that Christ is the perfect judge.

He will judge in perfect righteousness because He alone knows the true heart of each person. He knows the motivation behind each action. He does not need to hear arguments between defense and prosecuting attorneys. When Jesus comes upon the scene of the antichrist, the false prophet, and the hordes that are following them, Jesus will know perfectly each and every one of them; and He will justly wage war.

In verse 12 we are told that His eyes are a flame of fire. This does have a metaphorical meaning: It means that He is able to see all things perfectly; that He is able to see into the hearts of all who are before Him and that nothing escapes His notice.

He wears many diadems. The antichrist was given a crown. The dragon has a crown on each of his seven heads, the beast has a crown on each of his ten horns. But Christ wears many crowns. He is the ultimate King of all the nations of the earth and of the spiritual realm. He is Christ the everlasting King and all the others will pass away.

We encounter a third name which is one unknown to us. There is a great deal of speculation as to what this name might be. But the thing is that God doesn’t want us to know or He would have told us. To continue to dig into things that God has clearly hidden is not a wise thing to do. It is really sin, because we are trying to get around something God has established. This is rebellion. Perhaps one day, we will get to learn this name of Jesus, but until then, we must wait content in the sovereign wisdom of God.

We didn’t get too far into our verses today, but I really needed to lay some ground work. We will continue with these verses next week. I encourage you to read them and study them on your own so you will have a better grasp of things next week.

Prayer

Precious Lord Jesus, when we consider the justice that You require and the wrath that comes in response to our disobedience, it should truly cause us to tremble at the thought. To stand before Your blazing eyes, absolutely unable to hide any part of our heart or soul, is terrifying to anyone who even slightly comprehends Your holiness and Your reaction to sin.

We come to realize that we are entirely unable to defend ourselves; we have absolutely no ground upon which to stand, we are guilty beyond doubt and deserving of eternal separation from You. We shudder to think, that we would be required to stand before You when You appear from heaven on a white horse, waging war.

With all this, we bow in humble gratitude, that You have called us to You, while You were still on that donkey, offering us that wonderful gift of peace with God. We do not take Your wrath lightly, but we cling to Your mercy and grace, knowing that while You are the judge, You are also our only and sufficient defense.

For all these things and more, we praise You and thank You in Your most holy name

Amen