

Revelation 19:11-21

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 01] Perhaps one of the most vivid depictions of Jesus we see in the Gospels is that of an underwhelming king. Mounted on the back of a feeble and lowly colt, he entered the city of Jerusalem.

Betrayed and abandoned, he had no visible army, no battalion of forces that trailed him into the city. He was disdainfully given a crown of thorns and clothed in a scarlet robe as soldiers jeered at him, mocking him, the king of the Jews.

The Jews of that day actually resented the sign that was fastened over the cross. For to them, he was no king at all, certainly not their king. Just imagine the restraint that had to be exercised in heaven in that moment.

By the angelic host, as they witnessed the Son of God, the object of their eternal adoration, their unending praise subjected to such cruelty by the creatures he had created.

The Son of God with infinite power emptied himself and received the ridicule of men and women. For sure, it's a fixed image in the eyes and the memory of the Apostle John.

[1 : 23] For you and I, there's indelible images that we encounter in life that are etched in our memories. They're fixed and fastened. Perhaps it's the moment you beheld your bride adorned in white as she proceeded down that center aisle.

It may be the sight of the crying newborn in the delivery room. For others, it may be the loss of a loved one seized by the permanent grip of death. You may have a scene from a movie, an image from a news outlet, a moment of heartbreak or triumph.

We all have them and they hold these places in our memory that can never be displaced or forgotten. For the Apostle John, I'm guessing, that image of Jesus was fixed for him.

He would never be able to shed the sight of what he beheld that day. There suspended in the air hung Jesus of Nazareth, beaten, bloodied, marred, and fastened upon a cross.

For John, the image was seared and forever embedded in his memory. How does one stand and endure the suffering of a friend, especially one who loved him so dearly?

[2 : 40] For John, it was arguably a permanent picture of Jesus, the vulnerable victim. Yes, John would behold him risen, but the risen Jesus still resembled the one that entered the city on the back of the colt, physically.

But it would all change when he found himself on the island of Patmos. In chapter 1 of the book of Revelation, he had already caught a glimpse of not Jesus the victim, but Jesus the victor.

And he personally attests that he fell as though dead upon seeing him. The text that has been read for us this morning is an amplification of chapter 1.

It is an awesome picture. Terrifying. One that is arguably unrivaled in the entirety of the Bible. That Jesus is no longer a victim, but rather a victor.

It is here that the Son of God will be fully and totally vindicated. And along with him, his army which trails him. Namely, you and I.

[3 : 50] This morning with God's help, may we behold Jesus. Jesus no longer a victim of the cross, but the victor wearing the crown.

And as we get underway this morning, I want to emphasize a thematic thread that has been running through the book of Revelation. Namely, the one of war. Being students of the Bible, when reading Revelation, you can't really deny there's immense conflict going on.

It's an ongoing battle. There's casualties on both sides, actually. Good and evil are suffering losses. It's back and forth. You see it in chapter... I mean, I don't want to point all of them, but probably the most relevant one is chapter 17, verse 14.

There's a congregation of armies that are mounted. And it reads, they will make war on the Lamb. And the Lamb will conquer them.

Chapter 16, verse 16. It is an assembly of kings from the whole world. Assembling for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

[4 : 58] 13, verse 7. A beast is allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. So when we come to chapter 19 and into 20, what we see is the war will end.

It is the last battle. It will be the final scene. All conflict must cease going into chapter 21. So entering these verses, I like to frame our time together under three phrases.

Who He is, what He does, and why it matters. Who He is, what He does, and why it matters. Who He is.

John sees heaven open, and behold a white horse. Though the white horse carries significance, it is actually the rider on the white horse that our attention is drawn toward.

From the outset, we need to get a handle on the identity and the character of the rider on this white horse. Because without knowing the identity and the character of the rider, what unfolds afterwards will make no sense at all.

[6 : 00] In other words, who He is will determine what He does. It is the character of the rider that will inform how we read what unfolds. So who is this rider?

Well, the text doesn't even explicitly name Him as Jesus. Rather paints a portrait of characteristics that make it undeniably Jesus for those who are able to piece together the puzzle, the clues.

He is called both faithful and true. He is faithful to God's task given to Him, exercising it in all truthfulness. He is both a judge and the commander of an army.

He is both the judicial and executive branches of our government. His eyes are like flame of fire, asserting this omniscience, seeing all and knowing all. And He is not crowned with just a singular crown, but He is actually crowned with many crowns.

He is king without rival, as opposed to the others who were bearing crowns in Revelation. There are imitators of kings. Chapter 12, verse 3.

[7 : 07] Chapter 13, verse 1. There were posing kings, but they were no king compared to this king. He has a name that nobody knows.

Verse 12, which may be emblematic of His transcendence. But the text goes on, if you had to call Him something, if you had to give Him an earthly human name, let's just call Him, according to verse 16, the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords.

There's a sense where even naming Him Jesus would seem out of place. We know from Matthew's Gospel that the name of Jesus was given because it meant He would save His people from His sins, highlighting His journey from the cradle to the cross to the grave.

But in this passage, you find nothing of that sort. The blood which stains His robe, which you may presume, is His own. But it's actually not.

Set against the backdrop of Isaiah 63, it's the blood of His enemies that stain His robe. He is not bleeding. It's His enemies that will bleed.

[8 : 22] Here we find a warrior wielding a weapon, the Lord, a man of war that Moses sung about in Exodus 15. It is with these things in mind that we must see or understand and interpret what He is about to do.

Because what He, what unfolds would not make any sense unless you have a sense of the character of the one who is about to bring things about. Who He is.

Secondly, what He does. The text tells us a few things. According to verse 11, in righteousness He will judge and He will make war.

According to verse 15, He will strike down the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron. Further, in that verse, He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

He is a king in a kingdom in rebellion. He is a captain of a ship where some of the crew has declared mutiny. We see it in our modern world when regimes are threatened from within.

[9 : 38] The governing authorities will go to extraordinary lengths to squash rebellions and to end uprisings. Kings and governments we consider which are evil will do this.

Surely, it's not too far-fetched to expect that a true and just king will do the same. The imagery is so vivid. He is striking down the nations. He is ruling them with a rod of iron.

In reality, He's actually crushing them and unleashing anger and the fury of God. The scene is horrific. There are actually two gatherings taking place.

The first gathering is found in verse 17. It's an invitation by the angels to the birds overhead to gather. The second gathering you see in verse 19.

The beasts and the kings of the earth with their armies gather to make war. Two gatherings are taking place. You can picture it. Heaven is open. An army is assembled.

[10 : 37] There He is, the rider on the white horse with a robe stained in blood with His army behind Him. Below, assembled, is an army that probably none can number.

And overhead, birds are gathering. Presumably, the two largest militaries that I've ever assembled are about to engage in battle. It would be a battle of battles unlike any movie you may have watched.

As you read this, there's a tension. There's an anxiety. Possibly, an uncertainty. But as we've read, the Bible gives us none of that.

It's actually an anti-climax of sorts. The writer says nothing about the battle itself. You would expect the account to follow verse 19.

The casualty, the loss, the engagement, the formation, whatever you would imagine should take place after verse 19.

[11 : 49] But instead, you're simply given an outcome. No details are given about the battle save two things. One, the beast was captured along with the false prophet.

Together, they were thrown alive into the lake of fire. Secondly, none of the others survived. None of the others survived because they were all slain by the rider on the white horse.

The absence of details probably confronts you and I. But having read verses 11 to 16, what outcome did you really expect?

The battlefield becomes a banquet table. The corpses becomes a supper meal for the birds that have gathered overhead. All the birds, the Bible tells us, gorge themselves with their flesh.

It is no coincidence that another meal is mentioned following the one that was the marriage supper of the Lamb in 1909. there's two meals actually taking place.

[13 : 01] 19 chapter 9, there's a marriage banquet. And then in 1921, the birds are dining on the bodies and the corpses of the slain.

One commentator proposed the provocative yet accurate sermon title, Will You Be the Eater or the E10. The victory is so thorough, universal, and total.

It's thorough and total in the sense that none are left standing. It's universal in the sense that the judgment of the rider is indiscriminate. The invitation is given to birds to eat of both kings and peasants, wealthy and poor, powerful and weak.

None are exempt, none are spared, none are left standing. And so we're given this picture, this rider on this white horse, this battle scene.

It's one of the most intense in the Bible. And the question that you and I are probably confronted with is why is it this harsh?

[14 : 17] You may have heard it expressed by those around you. well, I thought your God is a God of love. Then He would spare all from this judgment.

Right? Why must there be a judgment? He's actually quite intolerant of those who don't agree with Him. Those who oppose Him. It sounds reasonable given the severity of this text.

But I want us to pause and consider three things about divine judgment. Do I believe it? Yes. Does the Bible affirm it?

Yes. Do I need to be apologetic when the unbelieving world scoffs at it? No, not at all. I'm not going to give you philosophical reasons, but I want to provide you with thinking points that I believe are all rooted in this text and really in all of Scripture.

Part of the fear pertaining to judgment may stem from the nature of the judge. From the outset of the text, we spent time discussing the nature and the character of who this rider is on the white horse.

[15 : 33] It is God Himself in Christ. Because for you and I, one worry is what if the judge is unfair? What if the judge has personal interests?

will this judge actually judge impartially or will he be tempted with bribery? The text actually repeatedly emphasizes that his judgments are both just and true.

15.3, 16.7, 19.2, 19.9, 19.11. This judge is unlike any other judge you encounter on this earth.

interestingly, in Isaiah chapter 11, which is strongly alluded in this passage, Isaiah chapter 11 is the promise of a Davidic king, which ultimately culminates in Christ.

And this king exercises judgment. And Isaiah 11 says something interesting about his judgment. It writes, the prophet writes, he shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear.

[16 : 48] But with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. It is as if the prophet is telling you the judgment that you face is unlike every other judge on this world.

We judge with what we see. We judge by what we hear. We judge by the evidence we could conjure up or present.

This judge, namely the rider on the right horse, judges righteously with equity, knowing all things, discerning the intention of the heart, knowing all its outcomes.

He will be impartial and offer a fair trial. See, the character of the judge determines everything about the sentence. If you go to trial with a judge whose character and integrity are questionable, the sentence will not be fair.

So when we come to Revelation 19, when you consider the question, why must there be judgment? You must account for the nature of the one doing the judging.

[18 : 05] Secondly, judgment is vindication not only for the judge, but for his people. Theologian Hans Borsma in his book, Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross, argues that if there were no belief in divine judgment, we are left to judge ourselves.

It is this very act that perpetuates the ongoing violence. We live in a day where this is readily evident. Lives are given, lives are taken, civil wars are ongoing, rebellions are planned, regimes are being toppled.

And one of the underlying reasons is that humanity has taken it upon themselves to be their own judge. If I can amass a large enough group that judges against something, I could start my own little war.

And it is because there is no belief in final judgment that we are in a frenzy trying to bring our own judgments to bear in this life. I'm not saying that we should be opposed to what is evil in our day and age, for we should be adamantly holding out justice.

But when it comes to the end of the limits of our protest, we must confidently and in faith take God at his words when he asserts, vengeance is mine.

[19 : 26] I will repay. Well, why doesn't God just simply forgive it all? If he truly loves all, then he will just forgive all. We love the idea when we're included, but hate the idea when we're excluded.

What if there's no judgment? What if there's no enforcement of the law? What if we were all set free? No government would ever, could ever, run on such a policy?

Growing up in North America, we're privileged in ways we're not even aware of. We told ideas of forgiveness at no cost that we ourselves cannot even forgive. We embrace ideas such as turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, yet we operate with these values.

But what happens when we're victimized? It's easy to say forgive, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile when you're in a position of privilege. But what if you're a Syrian Christian who has watched the plundering of your home, the murder of your family, and they experience the most horrific acts of exploitation?

What if you're the North African Christian migrant whose family has just expended all their earthly possessions in order to purchase the opportunity to venture to a stable country, only to be placed in an overcrowded raft!

[20 : 48] Destined to sink on the Mediterranean. Is this what you would tell the young South Asian Christian family who sold their young girl into an industry where she would be violated repeatedly, enslaved, imprisoned?

And I use these examples and you say, oh, they're extreme. In your anger, they are. And you're enraged.

But the reality is they're real and they're true depictions of our world. To these victims, divine judgment, will be their only vindication.

It's important to grasp, for some, for many, in this life, divine judgment will serve as their only vindication.

This is how Revelation 19 opens. It's actually so astounding. The hallelujah choruses. They're celebrating, they're praising God, but what for?

[21 : 54] 19 verse 2. He has not only judged truly and justly, but he has avenged the blood of his servants.

when God judges, there's a vindication that is accomplished for his people. In the same way when you read about a horrific crime being committed, the suspect is tried and sentenced.

There is a sense of relief in both society because they have been justly tried and sentenced, but there is a sense of vindication for the victim and their family.

Why must there be judgment? judgment because it will prove to be vindication for the judge as well as for his people. Thirdly, genuine love manifests itself in anger and judgment.

Genuine love manifests itself in anger and judgment. God is loving. Yes, he actually is described as love. We are able to understand love most fully when we come to know God.

[23 : 04] God, yet even love expresses itself in anger. Does it not? When harm, unjust harm comes upon a loved one, is there not anger that stirs up in your heart?

If you were unmoved, I would actually question your love. When the marriage covenant has been severed because of infidelity, anger would be a rightful response.

Anger itself is not a sin, but the Bible warns us in our anger we should not sin. See, anger is the right response when a loved one is hurt by the effects of sin and evil.

Does it spell any thought that this Jesus in Revelation is not the Jesus in the Gospels? I only need to take you to John chapter 11. You may be familiar with the one occasion where Jesus weeps or cries.

John chapter 11. His beloved friend, Lazarus, has died. And there, Jesus converses with both Mary and Martha, his sisters.

[24 : 23] And in verse 33 of John chapter 11, when Jesus saw Mary weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and greatly troubled.

And he said, where have you laid him? They said, Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept. The Jews said, oh, see how he loved him. But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

Verse 38, then Jesus deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and the stone lay against it. And what's interesting is the ESV is actually helpful because most commentators will write when what incites Jesus to cry is not sorrow.

Because he knows what he is about to do. He is about to raise Lazarus back to life. Rather, Jesus cries because he's indignant.

He's angry. furious by what death has done to the humanity he has created.

[25 : 40] In his anger, Jesus in that moment took on the identity of the one mounted on the horse. He judged death. He reversed the effects of sin, human fallenness, and evil.

He raised Lazarus back to life. It was a foretaste of what would happen in Revelation 19. See, Revelation 19 is divine love demonstrating itself in righteous anger to accomplish what will be promised in Revelation 21.

If you want to remove the tears, the mourning, the crying, you must remove the cause of all of them. This is Revelation 19. Love has every right to be angry.

Divine love has every right to act righteously and judge when it threatens the objects of his love. Who he is, what he does, and lastly, why it matters.

The end of history, as we know, is coming to a close. I've alluded to it already in Revelation 21 and 22. What happens in Revelation 21 and 22, require what transpires in Revelation 19 and 20.

[26 : 57] But do you want to know what's the most surprising thing about this text? It's not this contrasting vision of Jesus. For that is surprising, but it's not the most surprising.

The most surprising thing about this text, I believe, is the one who executes the wrath of God is also the one who endured the wrath of God.

Let me say that again. The one who executes the wrath of God, the one who is mounted on this white horse with the fiery eyes, with the sword in his mouth, given the name King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one who executes this wrath, who accomplishes this, is actually the very one who endured the same wrath.

The one treading the winepress of the fury of God the Almighty is the same one the prophet writes, stricken, smitten by God, afflicted, pierced, crushed, oppressed, poured out his soul to death.

What occurred on the cross is helpfully summarized by the Westminster Confession. the Lord Jesus by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his father and purchased not only reconciliation but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the father hath given to him.

[28 : 39] See, you only have to glance earlier in chapter 19 to behold a meal that is entirely different. It's a wedding, it's a celebration, the bride is ready and the bridegroom has arrived. It's noteworthy that the groom is not declared to be a king, a general, a lion, or anything glorious of sorts.

Rather, he is declared to be the lamb, the very image that embodies the one on the white horse, the one who was sacrificially slain for his people.

And it is the same one who not only executes this judgment, but received this judgment that turns to you this morning and invites you as if saying, I've gone through that wrath and you don't want to experience it.

I've been there. I've done that. And you will not survive. And so he comes to you and the invitation is given.

Come. Come. Come. in your mailbox is that wedding invitation. Attached is that card. RSVP. How many are coming to this marriage banquet?

[30 : 09] Not because he needs to calculate how much money he needs to feed everyone, but because he wants to reserve a place for you. Prepared before the foundation of the world, the Bible tells us.

He's taking all these RSVP cards and he's throwing them into this giant book namely the Lamb's book of life. His victory is your victory.

His triumph your triumph. His gain your gain. His wedding will be your wedding. And the invitation is verse 9 chapter 19 verse 9 blessed are those who are invited.

I mean it's interesting it doesn't say blessed are those who are coming. because the invitation is out there. Repent.

Turn to this king. Kiss the son the psalmist said. Lest he consume you in his anger. And so this morning as we reflect on this passage realize who he is.

[31 : 28] What he's done and what it means because of what he's because he endured the wrath of God on your behalf.

He is able to invite you to be spared from that judgment. Let's pray. Father we come to you this morning and we it is terrifying.

No movie no scientific fiction no imagination will rival what will transpire to those who are opposed to you.

And so Father I pray that as the psalmist has pleaded that we will kiss the son in submission in repentance in allegiance in honor.

And Father as we come to your meal table that you've prepared for us. You have stated in your word that one day you will partake in this meal with us.

[32 : 54] And as we do so this morning would it be a reminder what you have accomplished on our behalf. What you have spared us from and what you are leading us to.

We thank you. We pray these things for Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. It would be accurate to think of the Christian faith in terms of getting home for dinner.

The table. The ultimate end of life. from Revelation 19 we have seen two tables at the end of time when Luke was recording the institution of the Bible.

The Bible.