

I Saw Heaven Opened: The Coming Of The Divine Warrior

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Date: 10 March 2013

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[0 : 00] As we continue making our way through the last book of the Bible, we come to the opening scene of the final act of the drama that is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We are now closing in on the grand finale, which thankfully is not the end, but the beginning of what will never end.

Our text is Revelation chapter 19 verses 11 to 21. If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of this word?

And I saw heaven opened.

And behold, a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice, he judges and makes war.

[1 : 04] His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many diadems. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God.

The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

He will rule them with a rod of iron. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun who cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair. This is a gory part now.

Come, gather together for the great supper of God so that you may eat the flesh of kings and generals and mighty men of horses and their riders and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.

[2 : 10] Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.

With these signs, he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with a sword that came out of the mouth of the rider of the horse and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Spirit of the living God. We believe that you bothered inspiring this text and this book for a purpose. And I pray in your mercy and grace that you would help us understand that purpose this morning.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. I saw heaven opened and behold.

It's too blandly rendered in some versions as there before me was. Behold is a command, not a declaration. Behold is the imperative form of the verb to see.

[3 : 30] It means to look. And I saw heaven opened and look. The whole of the last book of the Bible is built around opened and look.

I saw heaven opened and look. Oh my. Look. Look. In this text, John is given the fulfillment of a promise which Jesus made to his first band of disciples.

Jesus had found a man named Philip and said to him, follow me. Jesus loves finding people. Philip then goes find his friend Nathanael and says to him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.

Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph. Nathanael says, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip says, come and see. Jesus spots Philip and Nathanael coming toward him.

And then he says of Nathanael, behold, look, an Israelite in whom there is no guile. Nathanael is surprised. And he says to Jesus, how do you know me? He will discover that Jesus knows everyone.

[4 : 39] Jesus says to Nathanael, before Philip called you, I saw you sitting under the fig tree. Jesus sees everyone. Nathanael responds like dude.

Not how the text actually reads. He says, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. And Jesus responds, because I said I saw you sitting under the fig tree, you believe you will see greater things than these.

And then he says, listen, you shall see heaven opened. Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven open.

And look, it is a command.

And look. It turns out to be the second most frequent command of the book. And the most frequent command of the book is do not be afraid. And as we have seen, we live into not being afraid when we live into look.

[6 : 03] I saw heaven opened and look. And what does John see? Heaven itself is opened wide.

And look, a person. This is why the last title of the last book of the Bible is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ.

The book is all about a person. The apocalypse of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ. And in this closing scene of the closing act of the final drama, we see Jesus of Nazareth in a way we have never seen him before.

The symbolism, the symbolism, the symbolism, the symbolism, the imagery is telling us that Jesus is a warrior. The lamb who was slain now presents himself as a great warrior.

The bridegroom who's coming for his bride. The bridegroom who's coming for his bride now presents himself as a great warrior. As the divine warrior. But as I trust you can see, when we read the text, he comes not to fight a battle.

[7 : 17] He is a warrior, but he does not come to fight. Yes, John says that he comes with the armies of heaven. And yes, he says the beast and the kings of the earth gather to make war with Jesus.

The beast is dragon manipulated political power that is opposed to God in his ways. Kings of the earth is an expression in Revelation that refers to kings and queens who ignore God in his ways. Yes, John says that they assemble to make war. But as you can see in the text, the war is not fought. The battle is not fought.

Armageddon, as it is called, is not fought. As New Testament scholar Paul Barnett puts it, this text is describing a complete anticlimax. He comes, but not to fight.

The battle is not fought. How I wish I could speak to the whole world and tell the whole world, you do not need to be afraid of Armageddon because Armageddon never happens.

[8 : 29] For two reasons. First, as we see so clearly in Revelation 19, Jesus simply shows up. He simply shows up, wheels his sword, which is his word.

He speaks and it is all over. He is a very powerful warrior. So powerful that all he has to do is speak.

And when he shows up and speaks, the beast is finished. And so are all those who are in cahoots with the beast. Jesus shows up. No more fighting. And the second reason the battle is never fought is that it does not need to be fought.

The battle for the world has already been fought and won on Good Friday, which is why for all the horror, Good Friday is Good Friday.

The battle for the world is won and fought on a Roman cross on a hill called Calvary. At the cross, says the Apostle Paul, Jesus, the Lamb disarms the rulers and authorities at the cross.

[9 : 42] He triumphs over them. The battle for the world has been fought and won long before Jesus finds John on the island of Patmos. Armageddon was fought 8033 and already won.

Now, this is why missionary Amy Carmichael in the last century would regularly exhort other missionaries. We do not work toward the victory. We work from the victory. It's already won.

Heaven is opened and Jesus, the warrior comes not to fight a battle. He's already won the battle.

He comes now to bring into full realization the consequences of his victory.

Jesus, the warrior rides out of heaven to lock up the enemies of God, the real enemies of God, the behind the scenes enemies of God. He comes to lock up the beast from the sea and the false

prophet, the beast from the earth.

In the next scene in Revelation 20, we're going to see him lock up the dragon who has been messing with these beasts. And in the next scene, we're going to see Jesus lock up death and Hades itself. Which helps us understand that gory part of this text in Revelation 19, the supper of God.

[10:57] John, here's an angel calling the birds to come to eat up the flesh at God's supper. Well, it's gory. It seems John is saying there are two suppers. There is the marriage supper of the lamb and then there is this gory supper of God.

John seems to be telling us that every human being's destiny is a supper. Either with the lamb or with those whom he has defeated.

I saw heaven open and look. A person, a warrior, a lamb warrior, the bridegroom warrior, the divine warrior. So let us take some time now and listen to how John describes Jesus, the warrior.

We'll go through this text. And then at the end, I would like to then make three observations, critical observations for understanding Jesus, the warrior. So we're going to walk through the text, look at how John describes the warrior and then come back and make three critical observations.

Now, I need to tell you that I will not only be speaking to us in this building. I'm also trying to speak into the discussion that is taking place in cyberspace as a result of a recent skit put on by Saturday Night Live.

[12:13] I have thought about playing this tape for us, but as I thought about it, it would distract us too much. In the skit, Jesus is walking up the hill carrying his own cross.

He's going up onto the hill to be crucified. And at one point, he grabs an automatic rifle and he aims it at his enemies. The skit is entitled, Did Jesus Uncrossed?

And it is trying to speak to director Quentin Tarantino, who has this penchant for taking tragedy and turning them into seeking revenge. And this skit is a way of imagining what Tarantino would do with Jesus' crucifixion, that he would take Jesus away from his cross, give him an automatic rifle and aim it at his enemies.

Now, a very thoughtful blogger, realizing how offensive this would be to Christians, and realizing that a firestorm of outrage would be ignited by it, argues that nevertheless, this image of Jesus with the rifle, aiming it at his enemies, rejecting the cross, that this image actually is what many Christians in our time are doing to Jesus.

They are decrossing him, uncrossing him, taking away his cross and wanting to make him into a macho warrior. The blogger then quotes a preacher who, when recently asked, what do you see to be the greatest challenge for young Christians in the next 10 years, said this.

[13:46] Some emergent types want to recast Jesus as a limp wrist hippie in a dress with a lot of product in his hair, who drank decap and made pithy Zen statements about life while shopping for the perfect pair of shoes.

He goes on. In Revelation, Jesus is a pride fighter with a tattoo down his leg, a sword in his hand, and the commitment to make somebody bleed.

This is a guy I can worship. I cannot worship the hippie diaper halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up. I fear some are becoming more cultural than Christian.

And without a big Jesus who has authority and hates sin as revealed in the Bible, we will have less and less Christians. Now. Listen to John.

Describe Jesus, the warrior. The one who sits on the horse is called faithful. John tells us about this Jesus earlier in the book when he refers to Jesus as the faithful witness.

[14:55] This warrior is faithful throughout his whole life and ministry. Jesus Christ is faithful. He's faithful to his father. He's faithful to his father's purposes. He's faithful to his father's will through the night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He agonizes not my will, but your will be done. He's faithful when all of his followers desert him and leave him alone. He's faithful when the authorities seek to string him up. Jesus could have come down from that cross.

You know that, don't you? He could have come down. He could have avoided the whole thing. He could have compromised with all those powers around him and taken the easy way to start him. But he remained faithful at the cross.

Jesus is faithful to his father and to us. To his promises to us. To his promises to be with us and for us when we, too, are under pressure.

He who sits on the horse is called true, John says in verse 11. He is, after all, the truth. I am the way, the truth, and the life, he says on the way to the cross.

[15:59] This word true means reliable or genuine. True as over against phony or fake. True as in the real deal.

True God and true human. As about 60 young adults and I and Abe Hahn were grappling with last Wednesday night. Looking at Jesus as the real deal.

The real human and the real God. The implication being that if we stay close to him, we, too, will be true. We, too, will be the real deal. We, too, will become truly human.

He who sits on the horse has eyes like a flame of fire, says John, verse 12. Eyes give us away.

Look into one another's eyes and we know what's going on in our souls.

My doctor will look at the lab test. He looks at the blood test, the cholesterol levels, the blood sugar levels, and then looks into my eyes.

[16:58] Jesus' eyes are like a flame of fire, meaning that his eyes are pure, meaning that his eyes are radiant, meaning that his eyes penetrate.

They go deep into the deepest recesses of our being and meaning that Jesus' eyes are purifying. When he looks at us with those eyes, he purifies any guilt and shame and he burns his holiness deep inside of us.

Oh, if we could just keep our eyes on those eyes. He who sat on a horse had many diadems, says John, verse 12.

Now, what is John meaning by using this kind of imagery? Many diadems. Diadem or crowns are symbols of victory. He already has symbols of victory on his head.

On his head, he has many diadems, meaning he's won many victories. Now, as I try to show in my book on this text, you can read that later for more detail. Jesus is here making a huge statement about Jesus, the warrior.

[18:01] Many diadem on one head. In chapter 12, he refers to the great dragon who has seven diadem on seven heads. In chapter 13, he refers to this beast from the sea, this religious dragon manipulated, a rigid dragon manipulated religious power as having 10 diadem on seven heads.

Jesus has more than 10 diadem, but on one head, meaning that he's got this integrated, consolidated kingdom. When he wins victories, it doesn't have to have many heads, just one head. All these people under one head. Many diadem. Although Jesus' enemies have won a number of victories, Jesus has won many more. And I'm one of those victories.

He won me. And you are one of those victories. Anytime Jesus Christ wins a human being from the power of sin and evil and death, that's another victory, another diadem on his head.

He emerges out of heaven with billions of diadem on his head. He who sat on the horse has a name written on it, which no one knows except himself, says John, verse 12.

[19:12] Now, what's all this about? Name in the Bible is a way of referring to a person's nature and character. If you knew a person's name, you knew something about the person's identity and destiny.

That Jesus has a name no one knows except himself, says, that although he has already told us who he is, there is more to tell.

Although he has revealed himself to us, there's more to reveal. Although we already know him by many names, many of those names we sang this morning, son of God, son of man, Messiah, Christ, savior of the world, bread of life, light of the world.

On it goes. There's still another name. Name. This is a way of saying no one is ever going to get a full grasp on Jesus Christ. None of us is ever going to figure him out.

There's always something more to discover about him. Isn't that good? He who sits on the horse is the word of God, says John, verse 13.

[20:12] Literally, it's the logos of God. This is the same word John used in the opening section of the gospel. It bears his name. In the beginning was the word. In the beginning was the logos.

The logos was with God. The logos was God. And the logos became flesh and dwelt among us. In the Greek world, the logos refers to the source of creation and to the integrating principle of creation.

In the Jewish world, the logos refers to the agent of creation and to God's self-expression. The way I like to read the opening chapter of John is in the beginning was the self-expression.

And the self-expression was with God. And the self-expression was God. Of course, when God expresses God's self, that self-expression is God.

And the self-expression became flesh and dwelt among us. God's self became flesh and dwelt among us. Which is why I've been calling this warrior the divine warrior.

[21 : 12] This is God who is on this horse. This is the logos who is on the horse. This is the self-expression of God who is on the horse. No wonder this battle is never fought. Who is going to stand against this word?

We'll come back to that in a moment. He who sits on the horse will rule the nations with a rod of iron, John says, verse 15. Now, we encountered this expression, rod of iron, earlier in the book. It's an echo of Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is the psalm where God says of his son that the son will be king. And God says, you will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

Now, as we noted, when we looked at this in Revelation chapter 12, this word rod would trigger the image of shepherd. Psalm 23, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

And that's why some of your versions then render this text as not rule the nations, but shepherd the nations. He will shepherd the nations with a rod of iron. It has to be a strong and unbreakable iron.

[22 : 17] It has to be strong because the nations are so stubborn. And because it's not easy to lead the nations into the paths of righteousness. And this this rod has to be strong because we're so stubborn.

His sheep are so stubborn and it's not easy for him to lead us in the ways of justice and mercy and grace. And. He who sits on the horse is called king of kings and lord of lords, says John, verse 16. Most translations render that name when all capital letters, king of kings and lord of lords. Of course. It's an arresting name.

And I'm afraid that in the church we're so used to this. This name that it doesn't arrest us anymore. So. So. So let me say it again in a way that arrests us.

Jesus of Nazareth. Is king over any king or queen you can name. Jesus of Nazareth is lord over any lord or lady you can name.

[23 : 23] Jesus of Nazareth is sovereign over any mayor you can name. Jesus is sovereign over any premier or prime minister you can name.

Jesus is sovereign over any governor or president you can name. Jesus is sovereign over any institution or any corporation you can name. Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth.

In first century Rome. As Caesar entered the Senate chamber all were to rise and they were to shout. They had to shout. You are king of kings and lord of lords.

I mean how are we going to break it to Caesar? You are emperor. But you are not sovereign. There is a king over you.

There is a lord over you. Who will be around long after you retire. And Caesar. If you would just bow down to this king. And do it this king's way.

[24 : 21] Your empire would truly be a great empire. Now the three critical observations. For understanding Jesus the divine warrior.

Three observations. Observation one. His armies. Did you notice the way John describes the armies of this warrior? Third. Verse 14.

Clothed in linen. White and clean. Clothed in fine linen. Not military fatigue. There may be a need for that kind of army.

And when it happens. When it comes to those times. When we have to outfit that kind of army. We all grieve. Christian theologians and thoughtful ethicists throughout the century have tried to come up with just war theory.

And sometimes we get it. And sometimes we don't. But the army in Revelation 19 is different.

Jesus' army is different. Clothed in fine linen. Why? Because the army is his bride.

[25 : 26] 19. 7. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen. Bright and clean. And clothed in fine linen. Because the army.

Are his priests. The army riding on the horse with the divine warrior on the horse. Is an army of priests. And what do priests do?

Male and female. How do priests function in the world? They intercede. And they bless. They intercede for the world.

They pray for the world. They gather up the needs of the world. And carry them into the holy place. To the holy God. They gather up all the fears and longings of the world.

And they bring them into the throne of grace. They gather up the sins of the world. As though they were their own. And they bring those sins into the presence of the great high priest.

[26 : 20] Who can forgive them and cleanse them. What an army. Are we playing our part? Jesus' army fights.

If you have to use that verb. Jesus' army fights. To bring people into the presence of the living God. This army will do everything to pray for the welfare of the city.

And blesses. Priests emerge from the holy place with a blessing. Priests bless those who are in need.

Priests bless those who want to be free. Priests bless those who are looking for something more.

Priests bless those who curse them. Priests bless their enemies.

Priests. What an army. Are we doing our part? It's the only army he has. Full of priests. Second observation.

[27 : 19] His blood. And if you haven't been listening before. Now's the time. Sorry. Second observation. His robe. I got ahead of myself. His robe.

Verse 13. John says that Jesus the warrior's robe is dipped in blood. The robe is a king's robe. It's also a priest's robe. And it's dipped in blood.

Whose blood? That is the question. That is the question that is at the heart of the last book of the Bible. Whose blood? The divine warrior emerges with his robe dipped in blood.

Whose blood? Answer. His own. Exactly. From all we read in the last book of the Bible. And from all we read in the rest of the New Testament. The answer is clear.

Jesus the warrior's robe is dipped in his own blood. He does not come to make someone bleed. All the bleeding that needs to be done to win the world has been done on Good Friday.

[28 : 22] No one else's blood needs to be spilt. Oh, sometimes it does. We get caught in the crunch and his followers spill the blood. But Jesus does not come to make someone bleed.

Read the text for goodness sake. So verse 15. And he treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God.

Not he will tread the wine press. But he treads even now. Jesus robe is stained with blood because even now he is working out the wrath of God.

Revelation 14:20. The wine press was trodden outside the city and blood came out from the wine press. John is referring to the cross. It's outside the city.

Outside the city limits of Jerusalem. And where the lamb of God takes upon himself all the wrath of God against sin. And his robe is covered with blood.

[29 : 18] And it's his own blood. Jesus the warrior comes with his robe dipped in his blood. No one need shed anymore blood.

Third observation. His sword. John refers to it two times. Verse 15. And from his mouth a sharp sword. In verse 21.

The sword which came from his mouth of him who sat on the horse. From his mouth. See we've met this imagery before too. In the first chapter where Jesus manifests himself as the glorified son of man.

And out of his mouth comes the sharp two-edged sword. From his mouth. The sword comes from his mouth. Not in his hand. Too much of Christendom.

Has not paid attention to the text. It is the sword is not in his hand. Jesus the warrior has no sword in his hand.

[30 : 20] In his hand he's got the keys to death and Hades. In his hand he's got the messengers of the gospel. He does not have a sword in his hand. Because he does not need a sword in his hand.

That's why at the cross when Peter took out the sword. Jesus said put it back. I don't need your sword. Peter. Besides those who take up the sword will die by the sword.

Jesus does not wield a sword in his hand. The sword is in his mouth. Gross imagery to be sure. But clear imagery. Jesus sword is his word.

Not a metal instrument. But his word. Words of his word. He is the word. The only weapon. Jesus the warrior wheels is his word. And given the power of that word.

It's the only weapon he needs to have. I mean you know the text. I cite them a lot. In the beginning. What? God said.

[31 : 22] Said. Said. And there was light and mountains and seas. And whales. And men and women and boys and girls. Be gone.

