

# The Return of the King (Early Morning Service)

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, finally, we're coming to the end of Revelation. This is not the last sermon on this book and sermon series, but it is the beginning of the end.
- This really should be the moment that you've all been waiting for, I think. And that's because the text today that we have before us is really about the victory of our Lord. And I heard you say at the end of both of these readings, thanks be to God.
- And I know you meant that. So this reading is one of the most vivid in all of Revelation. It may even be one of the most vivid in all of Scripture. And the vividness of the imagery is caused by the contrast between good and evil, light and darkness, and judgment by death, not death by judgment.
- The contrast in this reading is sharp. The competition is real. And the victory, however, is clear and exclusive. It belongs to the Lord.
- His is the glory. And that's what this is all about, our Lord's victory. The battles and war come to a head and to an end. And the conflict highlights our Lord's glory.
- [ 1 : 1 6 ] Victory and glory are the climax made real in this reading. And so last week, we had two images out of a funeral and a wedding reception.
- One event caused both, which was the fall of Babylon. This week, we have two images out of a horse and a throne. And the same person is seated on both.
- Who is that person? I think you know. At the end of not just the day, but at the end of life, we want to know the name of the one who is on the horse and the throne.
- And his name isn't the only one that's important, since we also want to know that our name is actually known by the one who sits on the horse and the throne. And so let's take a look at this revelation of Christ through these two images.
- That is, of a white horse in chapter 19, verse 11, and a white throne in chapter 20, verse 11. First then, the white horse. After the funeral and wedding supper of the last reading, the scene changes from death and peace to conflict again.
- [ 2 : 2 5 ] Our Lord made his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey. But now our Lord makes his victory march from heaven on a horse. The horse is like the throne in the next chapter, which is white.
- Why does John include this detail, and why is the horse and the throne white? White in Revelation usually refers to the garments or robes of the saints.
- But in chapter 6, verse 2, we read this. A white horse and its rider had a bow and a crown was given to him. And he came out conquering and to conquer.
- And so then again, in chapter 19, verse 11, John saw a white horse. While white symbolizes light and purity, now it also symbolizes glory and victory.
- And this scene highlights both the name and the nature of this conflict, this judgment, and this rule of our Lord. So let's look at these two things really briefly. First, the names of our Lord, and then the nature of this conflict.

- [ 3 : 31 ] The names of Christ on the horse are four. Four names. The first one is faithful and true. Do you see that? Revelation is telling us we can count on Christ who is faithful and right. Christ is not only right or true, he is reliable to us. That's what it means to be faithful and true. The second name is, we'll all call it, no name. John revealed Jesus this way. Sorry. This isn't a neutral or innovative brand at your local grocer. The no name brand. No. John says this, a name no one knows but himself. This means in some sense that we can't box Christ in. He's beyond description. Yet, if you think he's not with us, the next name that's given to the one on the horse is the word of God. John revealed this to us in his first gospel, and it hasn't changed since. The Lord reveals his truth verbally, by word to us, as well as visually, as we've seen throughout Revelation.
- [ 4 : 38 ] God's pattern of justice and judgment and grace and mercy in the world is by his truth that he reveals to us, showing us, but also telling us in word. And then finally, the fourth name of the one who's on the horse is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Revelation declares Christ on the white horse the victory, the victor. But he does this by not only conquering, but owning the kings and the lords as his possessions. Christ, the victor, uses all and loses nothing as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Those are the four names, though it's not an exhaustive list, we know, as Christ who is the victor. The nature of this conflict, it's actually a gathering. The gathering of our Lord is for a great supper of God in verse 17, but also a great slaying in verse 21. At first I thought these two natures of this conflict of our Lord's victory were separate from one another, but they don't actually happen apart even though they follow one another.
- [ 5 : 55 ] What does a supper and a slaying have to do with one another then? Let me remind you of Psalm 23. Starting at verse 4, you'll remember, it reads like this. You, that is the Lord, are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Look at verse 15 in today's passage about the rod. And then it proceeds from there. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. So here in Revelation, we have this two kind of full nature of this conflict and yet a supper. Now granted, in today's reading, the birds are the ones who are supping on the Lord's enemies. But the beast and kings of the earth geared up for battle in verse 19 find something quite surprising. It's pretty anticlimactic. There's actually no battle. Verse 20, towards the end, tells us that the beast and kings were thrown, or maybe dethroned, kind of a nice play on words in there, into a lake of fire.
- [ 6 : 59 ] All ready for battle, and like that, it's over. Well, the battle was won on the cross by the sword from the Lord's mouth, which is the word of Christ, or the declaration of the gospel. And so he defeats the beasts, kings, and all who fail to accept and believe that Jesus is Lord. And so you see, the battle belongs to the Lord. The nature of the battle and victory, I don't think, is exactly what we think. It's all about God's word brought to bear on our life. And by his word, all things are judged. He was judged when he died on the cross wrongly as someone who was blasphemous or a sinner. But now he is victorious in this scene by word, which is the sword.

It's interesting to note as we transition from the white horse then to the white throne, but probably not incidental. I wonder if you know where the seeds of the English Reformation started.

[ 8 : 04 ] It started in a white horse inn in Cambridge, where the reformers, that is, Thomas Cranmer, were then pouring over, actually, Luther's documents, his theology, his commentaries, his sermons.

Well, let's turn now to this white throne. Chapter 20 is filled with many images. The largest is the last one, which is the white throne in verse 11.

There are many thrones in Revelation, but this is the really big one. This is our Lord's throne, and to some dread, but to others, delight. It is of great height, and we'll get to that, but let's first go to the great depths.

There is nothing lower than a pit that we'll see here, literally and figuratively, when we're down in the dumps, we call it the pits, don't we?

But imagine a pit which is bottomless. It's not really a pit at all, is it? In this conflict and war, Satan finally gets his due.

[ 9 : 10 ] An age or 1,000 years of restricted influence for Satan, as we see in verse 3. He's thrown into a bottomless pit. John saw that.

And at the same time, he sees the reality and truth of our Lord's victory and glory by death and resurrection. This victory and glory has a duration, which I think, and others, though not all who've written on this, is actually between Christ's first coming and his second coming.

In that age, which is 1,000 years, not literally, but an age, we note this. Just four things about this age. It's important to see that. First, that is, Satan is bound, in verse 2.

The second is that the nations are no longer deceived because of Christ's word and revelation of himself. The third thing that happens in this age is that people are then alive to Christ and reign with him at the end of verse 4.

And then the fourth thing about this age is this sharing of the first resurrection. That is the resurrection of Christ. But also then awaiting the general resurrection, which will come later.

[ 10 : 29 ] This is in verses 5 and 6. Sorry, I know I'm actually taking six minutes to go over 1,000 years. Lord, a day is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years is like a day, but today it's just six minutes.

Well, this is the implication of our Lord's life, his death and resurrection. This is the hot white hope of heaven. Achieved, driven, and guaranteed by the climactic victory of our Lord as he died and rose again and ascended into heaven.

It is a lived experience now, but will be fully realized and consummated when our Lord returns. This is this age that's described here.

Because of this, and you can appreciate this, John explodes into a doxology when he declares this in verse 6. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in this first resurrection.

In other words, his victory. This is the language of victory as we reign with Christ. Not in an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly one, which is sometimes called the heavenly places.

[ 11 : 39 ] Remember Jesus' words to Pilate here when we think about this reign with our Lord, our victorious Lord. As he says, my kingdom is not of this world. And so the priests of God and Christ reign with our Lord now and forever.

That's the first thing. Let me come to the end now, which is names. We start at the beginning with the names of our Lord. We come now to the names that are actually in the book of life. This whole thing that precedes this is not for our pride, but for humility in case we're inclined in that direction when we're thinking about the victory of our Lord.

But let's look at the following. There's a last battle and a final judgment. First then, the last battle. Satan is bound and exposed by Jesus in his first coming, this last battle.

Satan then is released for another battle and like earlier, this one is really anticlimactic. The second coming of Jesus brings this on and when or after this happens, sorry, or when or after the thousand years are entered, this will ensue.

Listen to what happens. Literally there it says, there's this great word of contrast, but, but, fire came down and consumed them.

[ 12 : 59 ] Who did the fire consume? The devil, beasts, and false prophet. They're all suited up for this battle and like that, immediately, this is what happens. Satan then suffers the consequences, finally, of his defeat, not just then, but the defeat on the cross the day Christ died on Good Friday.

This is the consequence of the cross. The defeat of Satan now played out seen by John in this revelation. That's the last battle. Sorry, it's not as long as the ones you've seen in the Lord of the Rings or the Chronicles of Narnia, but it happens just like that.

That's the way John sees it. That's the last battle and then the final judgment. We come to, finally, the white throne of victory. The one who was judged on Good Friday is the one who now judges.

Jesus knew his role and his right to make this judgment. Listen to Jesus' words in the Gospel of John chapter 5. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Jesus knows he has this right and role. See the Lord on his white throne now, his throne of grace, but his throne of judgment as well.

[ 14 : 21 ] And he has this book which is called the Book of Life, not the Book of Death, but a book with names in it. And how does a name get into this book? No more than belief in the one who knows these names.

He whose names are faithful and true. The Word of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the one who knows his name only. But also, he knows the names that are in this book.

Deeds maybe are a part of this. That's there, what we have done. But also, those deeds and only because of the fruit of knowing the name of Jesus. And what's in a name?

In other words, I think what is being said here is like Luke puts it in his gospel. Does Jesus know your name? That's how our name actually gets in there.

It means actually that we haven't hid ourselves like Adam and Eve have from the Lord but actually disclosed ourselves, taken off any kind of pretense and presumption, exposed ourselves to him, and know that because of our belief in him, our sins are forgiven.

[ 15 : 31 ] We're freed for service in him. Not by our works, but works that he's prepared in advance for us to do. And only because of that is how our name gets in that book.

And that's the difference maker. The difference between the victory of our Lord and this lake of fire which is there for some. So where does this leave us? There's no direct application or command to the reader in these passages other than where revelation starts.

And I want you to go back to this and remember these words with me. Back in chapter 1 verse 4 we read, Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it for the time is near.

And so in this passage today we have this blessing as well. Reading this way, chapter 20 verse 6. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection over such the second death has no power but they will be priests of God and of Christ and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

What a great blessing that is. The church, you and I, are the priests of God and of Christ on earth as it is in heaven. And that means we intercede for the world to Christ in prayer.

[ 16 : 51 ] There's an application for us and it means that we represent Christ to this world in which we live by word and deed. It is a task that requires both humility and endurance like our Lord's.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.