

The Return of the King

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Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Well, I was listening closely to see how many of you were very heartfelt when you said, thanks be to God, at the end of those Bible readings that Pat was reading. It's one of those Bible passages that have lots of confusing symbols and images in them, and you wonder, what is going on here?

There's violence in it as well. How can I say, thanks be to God? And I want to thank David for giving me this passage today. As well. David is next week doing the new heaven and the new earth in just about seven or eight verses.

The glorious vision, it's joyful, very, very happy. And David's saying, thanks be to God right now, I think. But this passage, as you dig into it, is a marvelous passage.

It is a passage that Christians have, there are things in it that Christians have divided over. And certain aspects of it in trying to interpret it. But all Christians can see in this vision very clearly how glorious Jesus is.

You have this picture of Jesus being the one who is above everything. It is a picture of vision that fills the whole universe. It is his goodness and his glory that we see.

[1 : 27] It fills this last scene on earth, which is the scene of human history at the end, which takes place from Jesus coming to earth until his coming in great glory.

The last chapter of humanity and of the world. God's glory in Jesus fills it. On family day, on Monday, Catherine, the boys and I went and saw a very deep movie.

It was called Batman Lego Movie. And it was lots of fun. Lego Batman Movie. It has lots of clever lines in it. And often poking fun at Batman itself, the whole franchise, and also movies in general, and the techniques that they do.

Lots of throwaway lines. At the very end of the movie, not that I want to give anything away for those of you who want to see it, but at the very end of the movie, Batman has this line where he says, everything's sort of wrapped up, and he says, white, every important movie has to end with a white screen.

And it goes white, and that's the end. That is a picture of our passage today, in a way. Because what dominates this passage that we heard is white.

[2 : 43] There are two white symbols, a white horse, and there is a white throne. And Jesus is on both of them. The white horse is a symbol that Jesus makes war against all evil.

And we're going to see that played out for the rest of chapter 19 and the first half of chapter 20. And then the last part of the passage, from chapter 20, verse 7 on, is dominated by Jesus' final judgment, where he finally takes away all evil, all sin, everything that corrupts the world.

It is the end of all things, with that white throne. And Jesus is the key figure. He dominates the scene of this happening of the last chapter of human history.

And I want to look at this. So if you turn to your Bibles in chapter 19, verse 11, look there, and you'll see that John sees heaven open.

Now remember when all these visions started back in chapter 4, there was a door to heaven that opened. And you're able to see Jesus on the throne. Well here, heaven itself, all of heaven opens wide to John.

[4 : 00] And what fills that vision of all of heaven is Jesus on a white horse. It says, Behold, a white horse. And there is one sitting on it.

It's like John's a little bit surprised. He might be expecting to have seen a lamb, because you've just come away from the supper of the lamb. But here it is, a white horse.

And that horse is very symbolic in John's time. Everyone knew that it was a symbol of what conquering generals and emperors would ride a white horse back to their city to show that they had

won a great victory in battle.

It was a sign of victory and of power and greatness in battle. And so what John is seeing here is that Jesus is the conquering warrior who has already utterly defeated sin, death, Satan, and all that is opposed to God.

And he comes from heaven to make war on evil in all of its forms. And this is what we see for the next number of verses.

[5 : 10] All of us deal with evil and its effect. And so this is so important for us to see, so relevant to us. Each of you have been in some way deeply affected by evil in some form, whether it's broken relationships or hurts in your lives, betrayals in your relationships, fears of what might happen.

There's a loss of security that you may have felt. You have been touched by sickness or death in some way. And all of us, all of us, have been affected by our own sin before God in our lives and relationships.

That evil is powerful. It has the final word against us unless Jesus comes from heaven to make war against all forms of evil.

And that is what Jesus won for us. This is the gospel. He took all sin and evil upon himself on a cross and he died in our place. And he is the victor on the white horse because he rose again in great power.

He conquered sin and death. This is what we celebrate on Easter. And just a few minutes ago, in the Nicene Creed, we confessed a line which I love.

[6 : 31] We said this. We said, Jesus came down from heaven for us and for our salvation. When we say that, we're saying, he invaded the earth and he wars against sin and evil to win salvation for us.

So that victory, that work, is actually for you and I, you and me, the people who are sitting in this room, Jesus accomplished that victory for you.

And it's not only a gift that you have received in the past. Jesus is actively saving you now. He wars against evil in your life. And I hope that there are some people here who don't know Jesus as their savior yet.

And you are thinking about who this Jesus is because he is actively calling you to this salvation as well. It's not just an event that happened in Palestine 2,000 years ago, but this passage tells us that Jesus is actively working against evil in your life and calling you to himself to save you.

He fiercely loves you. And he directs his wrath, we see in this passage, against anything that corrupts and destroys or pulls us away from the God who created us.

[7 : 52] And I want us to look at who this one is that does this incredible work for us. Look at chapter 20, verses 11 through 16 as we keep going.

What John sees here are attributes of Jesus, the warrior for us that is true for all time. And it is true for you today. They come from all over the Bible and we have time to just touch on them.

There's quite a few of them. Look at verse 11. Jesus is called faithful and true. And this is so relevant to us today because we live in a world of deceit and lies.

I don't know if you know this, but dictionaries put out words of the year. Did you know this? I don't know if people spend time looking into this, but last year there were a couple different dictionaries. One dictionary said that the word of the year is fake news. Fake news. And certainly if you think about the last three or four months, that has dominated conversations that didn't exist before.

[8 : 58] And the word means news that are completely made up and designed to deceive readers, to increase traffic to your website or to whatever blog you're in and profit from it.

And that in a sense really defines a lot of what happens in our world. There is a great deal of deception that takes place for the benefit of the person who is deceiving.

And it is so important. In fact, we have a desperate need in this world for one to come from heaven who is utterly faithful, who is utterly true.

And in Jesus, we see and know God himself. His words are truth. He cuts through all the lies in our world. And we know the truth of this in our lives as we claim his promises, as we pray to him, as we bring before him the needs of the world, as we bring before him our praises and thanks and blessing.

We see and know that God is true and that he is faithful. Now verse 12 says this about Jesus. It continues by saying his eye is a flame of fire.

[10:10] In other words, there is nothing that Jesus' eyes cannot penetrate in this world. Our hearts and our minds are really laid open before Jesus.

There is no place to hide. He knows the thoughts of our hearts and our minds. And we know that he understands ourselves better than we know ourselves.

That is what that image tells us. This is the one who comes to make war against evil for us. And then on his head, further in verse 12, are diadems.

And that means many crowns. They are symbols that he owns and controls every square inch of this earth. And he rules every place, even the dark places in this world, the dark places in your own life.

This is a symbol that says Jesus rules those places. And he goes on in verse 12 to see that a name is written that no one knows but Jesus himself.

[11:14] And that is quite a line to read. And as you go a little bit further in verse 13, he also has a name that is the word of God. So you see that both things are true.

And that is said because we can only know what Jesus chooses to reveal to us. And he reveals God himself. He reveals God's truth.

And what that line says is that he is not someone that people could make up. Our finite minds cannot grasp everything about him. He is unsearchable in a number of ways.

The Bible tells us some of them. It says that the riches of God's grace are unsearchable. It says that his greatness and his love are unsearchable.

It also says that his judgments and his wisdom are unsearchable. Greater than our greatest kindness. His judgment and his wisdom.

[12:13] And I think heaven will be an adventure for us in exploring these unsearchable riches of who God is. It is the name that we don't know fully yet.

And then verse 13, he wears a robe that is dipped in blood. Now the blood of Jesus as we've seen is the means by which robes are made white and clean.

That he conquered through his blood shed on the cross. By his death, that victory of the warrior actually comes into being. So in that death, we are liberated, we're forgiven, we're brought into relationships.

He brings all of it into fulfillment by the blood of this warrior. We are made right with God only by the cross. And then verse 15, from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

The nations look powerful around us. Our own does in many ways. But Jesus' word is powerful. Creation springs to existence by his word. And nations rise and fall with one word of Jesus.

[13:23] And he rules, he literally shepherds the nations with a rod of iron is how it's put here. And this is a prophecy from Psalm 2.

It means that no evil can hinder his good purposes, his saving work, his war against evil in the nations. It actually will take place.

Nothing will stop it. And then verse 15, at the end of this passage, it says, he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. Well, this is Jesus' fierce love.

It is the flip side of loving us and coming for us and protecting us. It means that his love is a settled wrath that will destroy all that opposes his good purposes for us.

It is the necessary part of a love that saves us. It destroys evil that corrupts and separates us. And finally, you know, this is quite a list.

[14:23] It's almost overwhelming, but he says in verse 16, the most visible thing about this person who is riding this white horse is something that is written. It's written on his robe and on his thigh, the most visible place of this person on the horse.

And it says, Jesus is called faithful and true. Or it says, on that horse, on his person is written, king of kings and lord of lords.

Now notice that all the names for Jesus here, faithful and true, the word of God and king of kings are the words for God himself. You cannot escape that this warrior king, Jesus, is God with all of his power coming against evil in this world and in our lives for us and for our salvation.

So what do we do with this incredible vision, this powerful vision of Jesus? What does it mean for us today? And you might be asking, why does it take so long for me to experience completely, a complete victory by Jesus?

Why does it take so long? Why are things the way they are in the world? Why do I sometimes feel forsaken by God or overwhelmed by evil in my personal life?

[15:43] Have I failed God? Does he judge me? And is it worth the sacrifice to keep standing up for God? I might feel alone in this world.

All of these things are things we go through because of the influence of evil in our life. But this vision says that Jesus battles with overwhelming power for you and for your salvation because he loves you.

I think that the apostle Paul must have felt those things that I was just saying. Because he said in Romans 8, if this God, the God that we've been hearing about, this Jesus that John has been describing, if he is for us, who can be against us?

Who is to condemn? And I think Paul felt condemned. Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

And you know, that word interceding is not just Jesus praying for us, but it is Jesus making war on evil for us. That's why Paul goes on to say, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[16:57] Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Who loved us on the cross and won that victory. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor any power nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see what this is saying to you and to me that no matter what happens in the world around you, no matter what evil comes to you that you encounter, you can never be separated from the place of blessing, the place of safety which is God and his love for you.

And I want you to see that this passage in Revelation is telling us that it's not a passive place of hiding from evil and hoping that nothing's going to touch you in this world but it is actually an active place of serving him.

Look at verse 14. It's a picture of God's people and it is a picture of following actively. Armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure were following him on white horses as well.

[18:22] That's a picture of the church. It's a picture of the people of God. It's a picture of you today. As you follow the warrior king who is so powerful for you, you understand, you begin to see that no one can really be against you.

It is a place of safety following him actively. This white rider who wins the victory for us. And so this puts all the events in the world, all the events that happen in your life, all the things that you experience, all political powers and spiritual powers in right perspective.

It shows us that all of it is under Jesus Christ himself. and there's two angels that reveal how complete Jesus' authority is.

That it's authority over the physical, the people in our lives and in the world. It's authority over all spiritual evil and power in this world as well.

And the first thing you see in verses 17 through 21 is that Jesus, this angel, comes and shows that he conquers all people and human systems that oppose him.

[19:35] So look at that in verses 17 through 21. The first angel shows a vision of a gruesome feast. It's called the Supper of God. It's a very different supper from the Supper of the Lamb.

Because in it the political powers, the beasts, and then the kings and armies make war on Jesus and against his army, which is the church, they make war on God's people who worship him.

And it looks like it's going to be a massive battle. But it's an anticlimax. Because at the end, there is no contest. The beast and the false prophet that symbolize all people and nations organized against God, they are thrown into a lake of fire.

Battle over. And the rest are slain simply by a word from Jesus. His authority, this is symbolizing, is awesome. It is complete. It is impossible to resist in the end.

And then, in chapter 20, verses 1 through 3, a second angel shows Jesus' power over all spiritual evil. And so, in those verses, he seizes and binds Satan.

[20:42] He throws him in a pit for a thousand years that he might not deceive the nations any longer. And after that, it says that he must be released for a little while. Now, in looking at that, we see a very important thing.

And that is that there is not a close spiritual struggle between Jesus and Satan. It's not Star Wars, the force, and that which is evil and good coming against each other.

And we don't know who will win out. We hope we know what the end of the movie is going to be. No, we know the end of the story. Satan is very powerful and his work in the world has a terrible evil to it.

But compared to Jesus, Satan's power is like a grain of sand. And Jesus' power is like the beach. That is the difference.

That's what Revelation has been telling us. This is who it is that has won our salvation. And then the question that I know has come up for some of you is what about those 1,000 years?

[21 : 49] What does that mean? Well, lots of ink has been written about this in the last 200 years. And some are saying, some in the last 200 years have said that it's 1,000 years that is to come.

It hasn't happened yet. It will come someday. But for most of church history, it was understood that this was the time of history between Jesus coming and his coming again in power.

And initially, it was very popular to think of those 1,000 years as a literal 1,000 years. And that was very popular until about the year 1001.

People began to change their mind at that point. And they began to see that it was symbolic as all of the other numbers in Revelation are symbolic. And it really was a symbol for a long period of time that is finite.

It's that period of time since Jesus brought salvation to us. And Peter says that to the Lord, one day is as 1,000 years. And 1,000 years is one day.

[22 : 54] The Lord's not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but he is patient towards you. He's not wishing you that any should perish, but that all should receive repentance.

And so this is the nature of this time. It is a time of God's patience. It is a time for repentance, a time when God is calling people to turn to the one who saves them, who is for their greatest good, who brings life in the face of evil.

And it is a time when Satan is bound. Now, the only time that you see this word Satan being bound in the Bible, other than this, is in the Gospels. And it's in the situation where Jesus has been casting demons out.

And the Pharisees come to him and say, it's by Satan that you're driving out Satan. And Jesus silences them with logic. He said, how can Satan drive out Satan? It would be civil war.

It doesn't make sense. But he says, here's what has to happen. that no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man.

[24 : 06] Then indeed, he may plunder his house. So what Jesus was doing in his ministry was he was bringing people into his kingdom and he was plundering Satan's house.

And this church now continues that ministry. And it can only happen because Jesus binds Satan.

Yes, Jesus continues to bring evil into the world and deceives the world, but he no longer rules it as he did.

This is a period of time in which we as a church, this is our mission as a church, are plundering Satan's house while he is bound. And we plunder Satan's house as we share with people the good news of Jesus and his light, which is a light for all nations, breaks through all deception.

And that happens every time people are brought from spiritual darkness into the light of knowing the true and living God. Plundering happens each time a person is released from the prison of sin into the freedom of worshiping Jesus.

Satan's house is plundered and people know that Jesus is the victor who is for them. Now if you're a Christian today, this section goes on to say that you actually reign with Christ.

[25 : 30] What does that mean to reign with Christ? Well you do it by loving people and telling them that Jesus is for them and for their salvation. Look at verse 6.

Jesus says there's a blessing and we need to really pay attention to those blessings when they come in Revelation. He says, blessed are you. It's chapter 21 verse 6.

Or sorry, chapter 20 verse 6. And there's a great blessing here. It says, 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.

Jesus tells you that you reign with him, that you have a first resurrection. And Jesus said something about this in John 5. He said, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life.

[26 : 30] He doesn't come into judgment. He has already passed from death to life. And that life of serving Jesus, that blessed life, serving him by the resurrection power of Jesus, is this resurrection life.

It means worshipping him. It means being his priest in the world in the midst of evil and chaos and opposition. And then the second resurrection that we all look forward to is the resurrection of the body.

But our life now is the life of reigning, of serving him in his power. Well, there's our life. That is the life of the church.

This is the life of following that Jesus as victor. This is what shows, this is how we are shown that Jesus is powerful as he makes war against evil.

But our passage ends with an image of final judgment. It tells us that one day Jesus will put all evil to an end. He will lift away from the universe and all creation anything that opposes God, anything that corrupts and brings pain and death and evil to us.

[27 : 42] And this is something that people throughout the Bible have longed for. The judgment of God. We long for things to be made right. And John shares this with us in this vision.

In verses 7 through 10, we see this incredible scene where all that opposes God, they're all revealed to come against the church called the Beloved City in the camp of saints.

So all human and spiritual satanic power of the earth that opposes God are brought together and it looks as though they are coming to make war against God and the church.

But actually we see here that they are being brought together in order to be judged. And we see another view of God's complete rule. There's no battle again.

They are simply consumed and banished forever. It's a vivid picture and symbol of the truth that God will one day lift away all evil from the world and the universe.

[28 : 38] You see, it shows us that evil has an expiration date and God has determined when that is. And that's why this ending of the passage is dominated by Jesus on the throne.

Jesus is on the white throne and you can see that his presence fills the scene so completely that there's no room for earth and sky. Verse 11 there.

No room for earth and sky. It's the last day of human history. Finally, the ultimate but hidden reality that defines our lives as Christians of Jesus on the throne. It's made known to everybody.

Jesus is on the throne ruling all and every person who has ever lived comes before that throne in verse 12. And look at what happens.

Books will be opened. Books are opened. That's a powerful symbol because they say that the thoughts and the works of every person who has ever lived are put in those books.

[29 : 39] And the question is are they consistent with the life of the holy God, the one who's judging? And because it is right judgment, those books do condemn all of us.

And because of sin and our involvement in evil that we all share, no person actually deserves the life with the only holy God. but if you trust the Jesus, the Jesus who is the warrior king for you, this book on your life that would condemn you is actually filled with the works of Jesus for you.

The one who sits upon the throne has written his works into your life. And he writes your name in another book, the book of God's grace called the book of life.

And that is the book that defines everything. To be in that book of life is life. And to not to be there is death.

And it shows us that there are in the end two paths to take in life. It is the most important thing in our life, those two paths. The path to Jesus, the lamb who is slain for you, the one who has won salvation for you and fights for your salvation, or the path to death with all those who oppose God.

[30 : 57] And so we come away from this passage knowing that Jesus is our only hope in life and in death. It is our sure hope. It's a bright, white, shining hope that Jesus has won and is winning our salvation for you.

And that one day all that we have been saved from, all evil, all sin, all death and pain, Jesus will consume and banish away.

In this, we rejoice and we will see the result of that next week in all its glory. But now there is a call by God here to build our lives more and more on the foundation of salvation that Jesus has laid for us.

Let that book of life shape your life now. Your name has been put there by the warrior king who fights against evil for you.

But I think also it's a call for us to persevere and pray and to invite those people in our lives who do not know Jesus yet, that do not know his saving work in their lives.

[32 : 06] This is a hard thing for us as we look at judgment in Revelation. We think of those who we love, who are opposed to God right now. It's hard to know the truth of judgment when that is the case.

But we need to know that we ourselves cannot judge them. Only Jesus has eyes of fire that can know their hearts and his judgments, his mercy is greater than our greatest kindness.

Our ministry is all about trusting that God's justice is just and it is true. And that ministry goes on that we are priests to them as we witness to the Savior King Jesus.

To witness to him in our lives, in our prayers, and in our words. We are to be priests to those in our lives. And that's because with all our hearts, with all that we are, we want everyone to be able to read this passage and say, thanks be to God.

Come Lord Jesus. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Peace. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.