

All Things New: King of Kings and Lord of Lords

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Deuteronomy 10:12-21; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Revelation 19:11-21

Our final Scripture reading today is Revelation 19:11-21. May God bless the reading of His holy, perfect, and sacred Word. “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. 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 an iron scepter.” 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 in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” 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 worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”

- Titles don’t mean what they used to in society
 - Still some have meaning – doctor, “the honorable” judge, certain military ranks, principal – some people avoid them, some people like them a lot – we rarely use polite titles
 - Sometimes we avoid titles because we immediately get labeled – Reverend is my title, but it sounds snooty – but Pastor brings images into mind too that can conjure up stereotypes
 - Ultimately, titles tell us something about what a person has studied or done, or who they are as a person
- Today’s passage is full of titles for Jesus – they not only tell us who He is, but He goes about proving them as He takes down those who thrive on violence

- We are entering a new part of the vision – as we remember from our previous studies, Babylon the Great has been brought to ruin – we’ve seen God bring an end to the decadence and hedonism and luxury that the world has chased after
- Now we come to the end of the beast and the false prophet – which stood for violent war, tyranny, aggression, and oppression
- John looks into heaven and sees a white horse with a rider
 - Note that John never names the rider as Jesus – it’s because the titles and the descriptions all mean something unique
 - The rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.
 - Sometimes we hear, how can you reconcile the wars God commands in the Old Testament with the loving Jesus of the New Testament? There is no real difference when you look closely. God throughout the Old Testament era shows great love, kindness and mercy to Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus comes as servant to save us and to show us the way, but He will also come again as the Warrior Judge
 - Even in the New Testament, Jesus shows righteous anger often. He doesn’t take a whip, He makes a whip of cords to drive out the moneychangers and merchants who are defiling the temple. He calls out the Pharisees harshly, calling them children of the devil, for all their oppression of others while playing at being godly people – Jesus’ nonviolence was still confrontational about injustice.
 - His names are Faithful and True. That means that the justice He doles out will be impartial, with all the facts from every angle. He is faithful to His word, faithful to His people, faithful to His promises. And one of those promises is to forever vanquish His peoples’ enemies. He will make war on those who will oppose righteousness.
 - His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. The fire is judgment – refining the good so it is pure, and burning up the dross. The crowns here are not the victory crowns He had before – now these are the royal coronation crowns of the nations – the image is of the chosen ruler coming to claim His kingdom and reign

- He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.
 - If Jesus' first titles tell us of His fidelity to us and His promises, the second title – the title that only Jesus knows – reminds us that God is transcendent, beyond knowable – even the Christian raised to glory and living in God's Kingdom will never know or understand all the unfathomable mysteries of God – God chooses to reveal Himself to us, but we only can know what He reveals – what a wonderful thing that we will always have more to discover about the great God we serve!
- He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.
 - First, let's look at the name – the Word of God – while there has been some speculation that the apostle John is not the author of Revelation, the only books that include this idea of Jesus as the Word of God are found in John's gospel and 1st John – John seems to be the unique disciple that God has revealed this idea to
 - Jesus is the Word of God – He is the communication of God, the way that God makes Himself known to us – the Father speaks to us through the Son and reveals Himself through Him – God is accomplishing His purposes here in Revelation through Jesus. When we read the Scriptures, we are getting to know Jesus, the Word of God living and active, through the written Word of God
 - Now what about this blood-dipped robe? This is the blood of God's enemies. This is a sign that Jesus is on conquest. The time for choosing is past. The time for coming to Christ in faith is gone. The time for the Kingdom to come is here.
- Now show up the armies of heaven
 - Who are these armies? It is not the angels – it's us, the faithful
 - How can we tell? Remember last week that we discussed the wedding of Jesus and His people the church – the bride of Christ was wearing fine linen – that's how the armies of heaven are dressed
 - The armies are riding white horses like Jesus
 - All the saints, old and new, long departed and those coming to Christ right now and countless others, are the war party behind Jesus the conqueror

- We're quickly back to the description of Jesus - Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."
 - All these titles are references to the Old Testament promises of God and His messiah coming to rescue and redeem His people – Isaiah and Ezekiel, Amos and Jeremiah – a Jewish man like John and those members of the church who knew their biblical history would hear these words and associate them with the prophets
 - All of them refer to the coming of God to reign over His people eternally – judging the nations, judging the peoples, and establishing His permanent rule and reign
 - The pictures are powerful and seem scary, like God is going to be some tyrant, but that's not the case
 - We've established that God is faithful and true - God's iron first, God's fury, is directed towards evil and its due punishment – when we think of kings, we think of them oppressing the innocent – but this picture is of God pouring out His judgment on all that is evil, all that has defied righteousness
- Then we have the final title in the passage: On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.
 - What's fascinating about this title is that it only appears outside of Revelation in Paul's first letter to Timothy.
 - Occasionally God is referred to as the God of gods and Lord of Lords in the Old Testament. King of kings was a title that at least two rulers over Babylon gave themselves – Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler responsible for taking the Hebrews into exile, and Artaxerxes, a ruler of Persia who sent Ezra back to Jerusalem with a number of exiles to teach the Word of God
 - Jesus, however, is the only one who ever receives this particular title – King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Once again, where some earthly kings would give themselves titles to impress, Jesus truly earned the title and is now coming to claim His rights
 - Why is it written on His thigh? This was the place you placed your hand when you made a solemn oath to a ruler. When you identified your allegiance with an oath, this is what you'd do. When you take allegiance to Jesus, you are identifying Him as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Not just savior, not just the Lamb who died on your behalf, but your King and your Lord who has authority over you

- Now we come to the so-called battle of Armageddon.
 - An angel announces to the birds the great supper of God, where they will feast on all those who have remained steadfast in their disobedience against God
 - Here's what's fascinating about the battle – it's over before it's begun – there is no battle at all
 - The beast and false prophet are captured and thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur – the first time that eternal punishment is described this way in the Bible, by the way, though God's punishment on places throughout biblical history is described as burning sulfur too
 - The rest of the opposition is destroyed by Jesus – He singlehandedly defeats the enemy – the armies of heaven are not responsible for the defeat of evil, but Jesus!
- What does this mean for us?
 - First – We need to honor Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords if we expect to be in the heavenly army of God – our history as a nation is such that we do not think of kings and lords – we think of bosses telling us what to do, and that if we really can't stand one boss, we'll quit and work for another one – this is not the Kingdom way – to be a Christian means you have a King and Lord who is the person who directs your steps – He is a kind King and a loving Lord, but He expects your devotion and loyalty – a king's servant does what the king commands immediately – watch The Crown – He is faithful and true, He is the Word of God, so we don't have any reason to doubt His commands – we must be about our days asking what might honor Him most
 - Second – We must not be offended at the promise that God will avenge His people against the violent and bloodthirsty and oppressors of the world – our God is good, not nice, not pretty, but good – at the end of the age, the violent end up dying as they lived, in violence – the Jesus of our culture who is always kind and never provocative, who never rocks our boat, who never offends us, who is never confronting justice, is not the Jesus of the Bible and is not the King of Kings and Lord of Lords – only a privileged people would reject the Jesus who brings about perfect vengeance on the oppressor and the ungodly – the oppressed need to know that justice is coming
 - You need to know now which banquet you're a part of – either you're in the wedding feast of the lamb, or you're destined to be consumed as part of the great supper of God for the birds – no middle ground – you can live as a reconciler who knows Jesus' gift, or die as an oppressor

- As reconcilers who do not belong to the beast or the false prophet, we are called to speak out against injustice and oppression – and we have seen it this week. Most people now know the name of George Floyd, murdered on camera. In the same month, Ahmaud Arbery is murdered on camera...we've almost forgotten that one already. A black news crew is arrested live and on camera while covering the story, obeying police orders, while the same company's white news crew is left untouched. It is shocking, and it is the tip of the iceberg. We can no longer let it go unnoticed or chalk it up to a tragedy somewhere else. God is desperately concerned about justice for those who have no voice. Those of us who have a voice – are we willing to use it to stand up for those in our society that are oppressed? Will we not just stand up for them but stand beside them and get to know them?
 - God will bring final, appropriate, personal justice – it is not for us to take justice into our own hands – but it is for us to care for the least, the last, and the lost, the widow and orphan, those who have no voice or a diminished voice – may we not try to find reasons out of it but be crying out for justice – justice for those of other races, justice for the unborn, justice for those who are not heard
 - Here's the good news for us – the battle belongs to Jesus – we are His servants and vessels – He wins the battle for us
 - Is it hard sometimes to speak out against injustice? Yes. It's more than what we can do in ourselves. But because the Holy Spirit lives in believers, God can work through you to make His justice known and make it come about
 - Our job is not to end injustice; our job is to let the Holy Spirit work through us so that we might be God's hands and feet in setting things right where we are
 - He will win the battle, whether or not we win the day and make a difference we can see to help violence and oppression to end
- The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is coming to put an end to the sinful ways of this world. Will you be found standing in the armies of heaven? May it be so for all of us.