

LESSON 10

THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

BY RAY C. STEDMAN

Chapter 19 of Revelation brings us to the climax of this great book -- the Second Coming of Jesus, the glorious appearing of our Lord. It is fitting that we should consider this on Palm Sunday, when we celebrate the Lord's so-called Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. He would not have called it a triumphal entry for he wept as he came down the mountainside. But this Second Coming described in the book of Revelation is the true Triumphal Entry. Last week we ended our study in the midst of a great Hallelujah Chorus in heaven. I mentioned at the time that this is the first appearance of the word "Hallelujah" in Revelation. But even more remarkably, this is the first appearance of the word "Hallelujah" in the whole New Testament! There are many Hallelujahs in the Psalms, and indeed in much of the Old Testament, but it is rather striking that there is no mention of anyone in the New Testament singing "Hallelujah" until this remarkable scene in Revelation 19. Here, at last, heaven breaks into praise and rejoicing over the judgment of Mystery Babylon the Great, the harlot church which claimed to be the queen, the true wife of the Lamb of God. She is destroyed by God himself just before the appearance of Christ.

Now this great chorus comes to a crescendo to announce the true bride of Christ.

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

"Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) {Rev 19:6-8 NIV}

We have now come to the wedding of the Lamb, where he claims his Bride for himself. We will see this bride again in Chapters 21 and 22, under the figure of a great city which is called "the bride, the wife of the Lamb." It is here, however, that the wedding of Jesus and his bride takes place.

Most of the commentators identify the bride as the church, because the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 says that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless," {Eph 5:25-27 NIV}. Though the term "bride" is not employed there it seems to be descriptive of our Lord's bridegroom relationship with the church. Other Scriptures lead me to believe that the bride includes the church but, beyond that, it includes all the glorified and redeemed saints of all ages. Jesus speaks of this wedding supper of the Lamb when, in Matthew 8:11, he says: "many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast [*the wedding feast*] with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Thus, Old Testament saints are part of the bride as well. In Chapters 21 and 22, when the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, comes down from God out of heaven, "prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" {Rev 21:2 NIV}, and labeled the "bride of the Lamb," it will have twelve gates named for the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve foundations named for the twelve apostles. So there is a blending

of Old Testament and New Testament saints in the bride of the Lamb.

When it says in Verse 7 that the “bride has made herself ready,” this seems to infer that the judgment seat of Christ is now over. There are passages in Paul’s letters where he speaks of this judgment seat. In Second Corinthians 5:10 he says, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad,” {2 Cor 5:10 NIV}. This is a time of evaluation. It is not to settle destiny but to determine the degree of reward. It is a time when our service for the Lord during these days on earth is evaluated, and we are shown what was done in reliance on the Spirit and what was done in the energy of the flesh. According to the apostle, those deeds done for self-glorification or in the energy of the flesh for selfish purposes are all “burned with fire,” and all that is left are the “righteous deeds of the saints.” That is what we have here. We are told “fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear,” and, “the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.” So here the bride has made herself ready by means of the judgment seat of Christ. Even her righteous deeds are washed in the blood of the Lamb so that the garments she wears are bright and clean white linen.

The importance of this occasion is seen in Verses 9 and 10:

Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” {Rev 19:9-10 NIV}

It is a great honor to be invited to this wedding feast. That invitation is the gospel which goes out to all men and women everywhere, in every age, inviting them to the wedding feast of the Lamb to be part of the bride of Christ. This links with the parable told by our Lord in Matthew 22. A great king, said Jesus, made a wedding banquet for his son. He sent invitations out to certain ones but they refused to come. This seems to refer to the nation

Israel. When Jesus presented himself to the nation at the Triumphal Entry, riding down the Mount of Olives on a donkey as Zechariah had predicted, [“Behold your king comes unto you, meek and lowly, and riding on a donkey,” {cf, Zech 9:9}] the people received him but the leadership of the nation rejected him and thus refused to come into the banquet hall. Then the king sent his messengers out into all the highways and byways, and he appealed to anyone, good or bad, to come to the wedding feast, {cf, Matt 22:2-14}. When many came he gave them wedding garments that they might be suitably clothed for the feast. This is clearly a picture of the great event we have before us here.

The Spirit of God has been calling men and women throughout the Christian centuries, and before that in Old Testament times, and now even through the tribulation period, inviting them to come and join this wonderful scene of the wedding supper of the Lamb. What a privilege it will be to see the great Bridegroom himself, and to be a part of his beloved bride, to share in the intimacy of fellowship with the Lord Jesus! Each individual member of that bride will be able to feel that the Lord himself is their peculiar possession.

I often think of the words of Samuel Rutherford, that great Scottish saint who wrote in the 18th century,

*The Bride eyes not her garments,
But her dear Bridegroom’s face.
And I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of Grace.
Not at the crown he giveth,
But on his pierced hands,
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Emmanuel’s land.*

It is almost impossible to describe adequately the beauty of this scene and to make it real to our hearts. What a wonderful, blessed thing it is to be invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! So incredible is it that the angel adds, “These are the true words of God.”

John is so moved by this that he falls down to worship the angel and is immediately rebuked. The angel says, “No, do not do that. I am merely another servant of the King. I am like you, one of those who

bear the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” And how do you do that? The very spirit of prophecy itself tells us how, for the angel adds, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” All prophecy points only to Jesus. It is not designed to give us a calendar of the last days, though some read it like that. No, the spirit, the essence, of prophecy is to bear witness to Jesus. He is the central figure of all Scripture. It is not events which we are to focus on, but the One who brings them to pass, the Lord Jesus himself. Thus we are instructed here by the angel to focus our attention upon him.

In Verses 11-16 we come to the great climax of all history. This is the once far-off divine event toward which all human events since the beginning of time have moved -- the unveiling of the presence of Jesus in power and great glory. It is the most prophesied event in the Bible. Three different times in this book, at the end of each of the series of judgments -- the opening of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls of wrath -- we have been brought to the very edge of this event, and each time the Spirit of Truth has brought us back again to see in more intensified form what God is doing in the world of that day. But now at last we come to the event itself.

This is what Paul calls, in Second Thessalonians, “the splendor of his coming” {2 Th 2:8 NIV}, or literally, in the actual Greek, “the outshining of his presence.” Jesus came as a thief for his church at the beginning of the last week. He took them away unexpectedly, suddenly, as a thief takes treasure out of a house. Since then he has been, as we have seen, invisibly present with the church behind the scenes throughout the whole seven-year period, directing its events. From time to time the book has shown him to us -- meeting with the 144,000 on Mount Zion and directing various activities that take place upon the earth. But now his invisible presence is made visible, as he himself described it in the great Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” {Matt 24:30 NIV}

The first chapter of Revelation also refers to that,

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. {Rev 1:7 NIV}

Now we read of this actual coming in Verse 11 and following:

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 [diadems]. He has a name written on him that no one but he himself knows. 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.

{Rev 19:11-16 NIV}

This is not the Lone Ranger on Silver, though that fiction may be based on this theme. This Rider on a White Horse is identified for us by four different names:

The first is found in Verse 11: There he is called “Faithful and True.” It is in that capacity that he comes “to judge and to make war” but all in perfect justice. There are just causes for the correction of evil and the punishment of evildoers despite the campaign against capital punishment today. Our Lord comes to execute perfect justice in judging and making war. At last, as Scripture has long promised, all the wrongs done on earth will be made right; all the cheats and scams that we are familiar with today will be exposed and corrected; all drugs that blow the minds of people will be eliminated; all crime will be brought to an end; all hatred among mankind will cease, for Jesus comes to judge the earth and to right all matters.

Another name is found in Verse 12: “His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns, and he has a name written on him that no one knows but himself.” That unknown name is linked to the blazing eyes and the many diadems on his head. “Blazing eyes” speak of full discernment, penetrating knowledge. “Many diadems” speak of full authority. The two together picture omniscience and omnipotence, but each vested in a man. That is

the point of this text. The wonder of Jesus is that it is as man that he manifests all the fullness of God, for he is both God and man. His name, his unknown name, reveals that. What this suggests is that no one knows the full extent of that mysterious union of God and man. All that is meant by that marvelous revelation, that there is vested in a man the full authority, power, omniscience and omnipotence of God, is something that no one fully knows. We shall be discovering new aspects of that throughout eternity. That is why heaven seems to be constantly breaking out with new praises and new wonders at what our Lord is like.

In Verse 13 there is still another name: "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God." That Word of God is associated with the robe dipped in blood and with the armies of heaven following him, as well as with the sharp sword that comes out of his mouth. Some commentators refer to the "robe dipped in blood" as descriptive of the cross, of the sacrifice of Jesus. I do not take it that way. I think it refers to a remarkable dialogue found in the 63rd chapter of Isaiah, a dialog between the prophet and the Warrior-Messiah. As Isaiah is shown the coming of Christ, it is as though he is standing in Jerusalem looking toward the south, toward Edom, and he sees a great warrior coming with garments stained red. He asks the question:

**Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah,
with his garments stained crimson?**

**Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward
in the greatness of his strength? {Isa 63:1a NIV}**

The warrior answers,

**"It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to
save." {Isa 63:1b NIB}**

The prophet asks again:

**Why are your garments red, like those of one
treading the winepress? {Isa 63:2 NIV}**

The warrior replies,

**"I have trodden the winepress alone; from the
nations no one was with me.**

**I trampled them in my anger and trod them
down in my wrath; their blood spattered my
garments, and I stained all my clothing.**

**For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and
the year of my redemption has come." {Isa 63:3-4
NIV}**

The sharp sword which the prophet sees here in the mouth of Jesus is the Word of God. In the opening vision of this book John saw the Lord Jesus with a double-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. It is a symbol, of course, of the power of the Word, and here it portrays power to smite the nations -- to destroy them if necessary.

Have you ever been smitten by the Word of God? Some of us have had that experience. Some word from the Bible has caught our attention and awakened our conscience, and we are suddenly aware that God sees deeper into us than we thought he ever could. We become aware of how guilty we are. On the day of Pentecost the Jews who were listening to Peter's great message, at the end "were cut to the heart," {Acts 2:37 NIV}. They were smitten by the Word of God. I think also of that scene in Acts when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. When Peter, speaking by the Spirit, exposed their lies, they both dropped dead instantly. So, here, there are those who will be killed by the sword which comes from the Lord's mouth.

Accompanying our Lord are armies of saints and angels. The book of Jude quotes Enoch, the prophet, as saying, "I saw the Lord coming with tens of thousands of his saints," {cf, Jude 1:14 KJV}. We have already seen in 17:14 the promise that "his called, chosen, and faithful followers," will accompany him when he comes. This describes the church returning with the Lord when he appears in glory. But also armies of angels will accompany him. Several passages speak of the hosts of angels, the multiplied millions, who will return with the Lord. They too will be using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Verse 16 gives us the rider's fourth name: "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." This is linked with his ruling with an iron scepter. When our Lord comes he will rule over the nations. First he will destroy their evil ones, and then he will rule over the rest. The word "rule" is really "shepherd" -- "He will shepherd the nations with a rod, or a staff, of iron." You will recognize these words taken from Psalm 2. For the third time in Revelation there is reference to the promise of this Psalm:

**"I will set my king upon my holy hill of Zion
{Psa 2:6 KJV}**

“You will rule them with an iron scepter, you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” {Psa 2:8b NIV}

That “rod of iron” is a symbol of tough justice, of unbending, unwavering righteousness. It is the standard of God’s morality which he cannot lessen or diminish in any way. This is descriptive of the millennial years when righteousness will reign in all the earth. There will be sin and sinners present, but they cannot upset things; their evil will be immediately brought to justice. This characterizes that millennial day.

The effect of our Lord’s appearance upon the antichristian enemies we have been observing is given in Verses 17 on. Here we will learn what is meant by the phrase “he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.”

First, there is a call to a great slaughter.

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.” {Rev 19:17-18 NIV}

This is another description of the great campaign that is called the Battle of Armageddon. We have already seen that 200,000,000 soldiers from all the armies of the earth will gather into the land of Palestine. There are other descriptions of this in the prophets. Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe it in detail. Also, Joel 2, Daniel 11 and Isaiah 24 give us the development of this as the king of the north comes down into the land and is met by the king of the south, i.e., the armies of Egypt, coming against Israel. The conflict is settled only by the sudden destruction which comes from the appearance of Jesus himself.

The fate of these antichristian powers is given in these closing verses from 19 on:

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. {Rev 19:19-21 NIV}

It is almost incredible, is it not, that when Jesus reveals himself, and every eye sees him, that these leaders of the nations actually attempt to assault and attack the Lord himself: “They gather to make war against the Lord and his armies.” But it is an unequal contest. The beast and the prophet are immediately captured and thrown into the lake of fire, which in Chapters 21 and 22 is called “the second death.” It is a terrible symbol of eternal torment, a fire, an inward torment that burns on and on and never ends.

And the rest, we are told, are killed by the Word of God -- not by a physical weapon but by the simple word spoken. When our Lord was in the Garden of Gethsemane {cf, John 18:2-6}, as the soldiers approached him, he asked them, “Who is it you want?” They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” The Lord said, “I am he,” literally, “I AM”. It is recorded that they all fell backwards to the ground at that word. That is the power of the word. Our Lord could have walked out of the garden a free man had he chosen to do so. But he gave himself into their hands. He sacrificed himself, through the eternal Spirit. So, here, when he comes, one word from his lips takes care of the enemies of God.

Martin Luther’s great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, has a line that says that when the Lord confronts the devil, “one little word shall fell him.”

We have not yet seen the fate of the great dragon, Satan, this archenemy of God who has for centuries afflicted and tormented the peoples of earth. There is an unfortunate chapter break at this point for actually the account goes right on to tell us what happens next. We will see Satan bound and the millennial kingdom set up. All comes as an immediate result of the appearance of the Lord Jesus. But we will take this up in our next study.

I remind you again, as we come to the close of this message, that the essential purpose of prophecy is to testify of Jesus. He is the central figure of all life. We hear many religious ideas being spread abroad today. From Eastern religions to New Age philosophy to the cults, all of them are claiming to tell us how the universe is set up, how life

properly operates, and what to do in order to relate to whatever God there may be. But the test of all such faiths, and the question that every individual on earth has to answer, is, "What do you do with Jesus? What place in your religious view is there for Jesus?" Because he was here. The record of his life is unassailable. He came, he lived, he taught, he died, he rose again. All this has been established with unanswerable evidence. It is a fact. Therefore, any faith that offers to help man must deal with that fact. How does Jesus fit into your scheme? This is the question the Bible confronts us with. Jesus is the great issue of life. All life finds meaning only in him, and all hope for this broken world flows from the fact of his coming again into the world.

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