

On August 14th, 1914, The Daily News published an article written by British author H.G. Wells—it was entitled “*The War That Will End War.*” Wells’ article was directed at the World War that had just begun two weeks earlier. He writes,

This is already the vastest war in history. It is a war not of nations, but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age... For this is now a war for peace. It aims straight at disarmament. It aims at a settlement that shall stop this sort of thing for ever... This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war—it is the last war!

If it weren’t for the grim facts of history, Wells’ optimism could be heartwarming and inspiring. From July of 1914 until November of 1918, this war of mankind was waged. In total, there were 41 million casualties: 23 million wounded and 18 million deaths. Let me take a moment to put this number in perspective—18 million dead. At the time, this number was the equivalent combined populations of Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

The war to end all wars? World War I was followed by World War II. In fact, many other wars were waged in the 20th century making it the bloodiest century in the history of humanity.¹ Spanish American George Santayana once quipped “*Only the dead have seen the end of war.*”

I know this isn’t the rosier of sermon introductions—beginning with

war and death—but I began as I did because of our text this morning.

Our five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—are attuned to physical realities, but *Revelation* reminds us that we are also surrounded by unseen, spiritual realities.² *Revelation* gives us insight into the age-old conflict that exists between God and Satan. And while the war against sin, death, and the devil has already been won—through the death and resurrection of Jesus—we continue to experience the effects of an enemy that is unwilling to concede defeat.

The war has been won, but the *Last Battle* has yet to take place. This morning we’re going to look at Revelation 19:11-21 and next Sunday we will look at Revelation 20—together these texts give us a window into this *Last Battle*. At this time I’d like to invite you to open your Bible with me to Revelation 19:11-21 and follow along as I read.

“**11** 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 wages war. **12** 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. **13** He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. **14** The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. **15** Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron sceptre.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. **16** On

¹ Some have estimated as many as 187 million deaths were caused by war in the 20th century.

² Ephesians 6:12.

his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 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, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.”

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”

The final vision in *Revelation* is of heaven coming down and God making His home among us—the marriage of heaven and earth. But before this can be so, God’s enemies—and evil itself—must be dealt with in a final way, hence the Last Battle.³

³ While I didn’t have room to include it in my sermon, one of the most striking features of Rev. 19:11-21 is the absence of Old Testament references. To this point, most of John’s images are drawn from the Old Testament, but in vs. 11-21 John draws upon the descriptions and images he has used earlier in the letter: a white horse (6:2); “Faithful and True” (1:5; 3:14); eyes like blazing fire (1:14); treads the winepress of God’s fury (14:19-20); King of kings and Lord of lords (17:14, in reverse order); the beast (13; 17); the kings of the earth (17:12-14); the mark of the beast (13:15); lake of burning sulphur (14:10); sword coming out of Jesus’ mouth (1:16). C.f. Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, 271-273.

⁴ C.f. Rev. 4:1; 11:19; and 15:5.

John begins in verse 11 saying, “*I saw heaven standing open;*” this is the fourth time that the verb “*open*” is used to describe heaven.⁴

We’re not meant to understand this word “open” in terms of its opposite, “closed”, as though God has walled Himself off in heaven. We are mistaken when we assume that heaven—and God Himself—are far off. Acts 17:27 reminds us that God is not far from any of us.

We are meant to understand heaven as God’s realm, but keep in mind that we live in a multi-dimensional universe; heaven is but one of those dimensions. When we pray to our Father in heaven, our prayers don’t travel to the outer reaches of the universe—we pray to the One who is all around us.

But like a door one cannot see through, a veil exists between this realm and God’s realm. God is completely other, He is so much more than we are, and for these reasons, in order to know God, He must make Himself known. We cannot think our way from earth to heaven; God must reveal Himself.

Revelation wasn’t written to satisfy human curiosity about how history will unfold. *Revelation* wasn’t written in order to describe—in great detail—what heaven will look like. Heaven was *opened*,

which is to say, God lifted the veil—He *opened* John’s eyes—and what filled his vision was Jesus. In many respects, heaven is less about a place and more about the Persons of Father, Son, and Spirit; while heaven is a destination, it’s more about a relationship.

With eyes wide open, John saw Jesus but the vision didn’t immediately square with what he had previously known. Remember, John had been a part of Jesus’ inner core of disciples—for three years, John followed Jesus wherever He went. And in that time, John came to know Jesus the wise Teacher, Jesus the compassionate Healer, Jesus the gracious Forgiver, and Jesus the sacrificial Leader who laid down His life on the cross. Revelation 19 shows another side of Jesus.

Think back with me to Bethlehem and to Jesus’ birth. Born in a barn of sorts, Jesus was laid to rest in a feeding trough—a humble beginning.

Shortly thereafter, we see Jesus and his parents on the run. Do you remember the story? Wise men came from the East, announcing the sign they had seen in the sky—a new star had appeared. These learned men told King Herod that this star announced the birth of new king born in Israel; they asked where he might be that they might worship him.

King Herod played it cool in their presence, but inwardly he burned with a murderous rage. Herod issued an execution order to root out this newborn rival: all boys, in the vicinity of Bethlehem, under the age of two, were to be executed. God warned Jesus’ parents about this execution order and they fled from Israel to live for a time as refugees in Egypt.

Do you remember Jesus coming into Jerusalem that final time? He rode in on a donkey and an adoring crowd sang His praises. But within a week’s time, another crowd hooted and hollered as Jesus was nailed to a cross, His blood falling to the ground, each breath an agony.

These are familiar snapshots: baby Jesus, meek and mild; toddler Jesus, on the run; adult Jesus, hanging on the cross. But none of these images prepares us for what we find in Revelation 19. John saw Jesus like he had never seen Him before. Jesus, seated on a horse, ready for war. His eyes blazing like fire. Multiple crowns stacked up on His head. A sword coming out of His mouth, and an army at His side.

When we see this image of Jesus, we tend to rush to particular questions: *What’s going to happen at the Last Battle? When will it take place? How will the victory be achieved?*

It’s worth noting that Revelation 19 doesn’t actually describe the battle. The focal point is **Jesus—the Divine Warrior**—not the strategy, not battle, not the enemy. John’s sole concern is to describe Jesus, and then, to proclaim His victory. When heaven was opened, what stood at the centre was a Person—the Lord Jesus Christ.

When things are swirling around us—difficulty, confusion, opposition—we rush to our own set of questions: *What? When? How? God, **what** are you going to do about this mess? **When** are you going to intervene? And **how**?* I have asked God these questions many times; some times He has answered my questions, other times He has brushed them aside. But in every occasion, God asks me a

question that is of interest to Him: *“Mark, do you see Jesus? What is He saying? What is He doing? Look to Him; listen to Him.”*

This morning, with the help of Revelation 19, I want to take a closer look at Jesus.

1. The first thing we notice—vs. 11—is that **Jesus is addressed by a title: “Faithful and True”**. This title might sound familiar—Jesus was similarly described in Revelation 1:4-5, and 3:14. Jesus is the faithful and true representation of God. When we listen to Jesus we hear the words of God, when we look to Jesus we see the character and action of God. Vs. 11 tells us what Jesus is doing: He is heading into the Last Battle—this battle will put an end to evil and establish justice. Jesus is Faithful and True, His judgement is trustworthy.

2. Second, John describes Jesus saying, **“His eyes are like blazing fire”** (vs. 12). This is the third time that Jesus’ eyes are described in this way.⁵ This image communicates the depths to which Jesus sees—and knows—what’s really going on.

illus: A good friend of mine, Ray Matheson, spent a number of years acting as the Dean of Men at Canadian Bible College, now Ambrose University. What does a “Dean of Men” do? Among other things, he spent time with students, got to know them, made decisions about room-mate assignments, dealt with conflict in the dorms, and at times, enforced the rules that students broke...like sneaking out after curfew.

Students knew that Ray loved them, but, at times they trembled in his presence. When Ray called someone into his office for a meeting, many students assumed the worst. Ray was sharp; he kept his ear to the ground to find out what was happening. But he knew that there was more going on than he was aware of, and so, in nearly every student meeting he held, Ray would ask the following question: *“Is there anything you’d like to tell me?”* Ray’s question would prompt a guilty student to wonder, *“Does Ray know what I’ve done?”* Without fail, eyes would get wide, palms would get sweaty, and voices would crack.

A few years ago, Naomi and I were getting the kids ready to go out for the afternoon. As parents we try to think ahead of our kids, to anticipate what they’re going to need, want, or ask. It was a beautiful day, sunny and warm, we were going to be gone for the afternoon but planned to come home to make dinner.

Knowing my daughter’s tendencies, I anticipated that the moment we left the house Anna would begin suggesting that we go out for dinner instead of coming home to eat. I didn’t want to listen to the hounding and so I decided to cut things off at the pass. I sat Anna down and said, *“Sweetie, we’re going to be leaving in a few minutes and you’re probably going to ask if we can go out for dinner; I want you to know in advance that the answer is “no”—we’re coming home for dinner—so please don’t ask.”*

It was the cutest thing...Anna’s eyes got really wide and she said, *“Dad, can you read minds?”* I assured her that I had the powers of observation but nothing more.

⁵ C.f. Revelation 1:14, and 2:18.

Jesus, on the other hand, has eyes blazing like fire. Not only does Jesus see everything, His sight penetrates—He sees things as they are, not as they appear to be. **Jesus sees you**—your dreams and despairs, your successes and failures, what you have gained and lost, your joys and your woundedness. **Jesus knows you**—He knows what makes you tick, what you’re afraid of, what you’re pursuing. And **Jesus loves you**—the real you—the person you are when nobody else is looking, the person that nobody else sees.

And while what I’ve just said is true of Jesus, it’s not the thrust of this image—eyes blazing like fire. For John’s first audience it meant that Jesus saw how Rome was using, oppressing, and destroying people. Jesus’ eyes are like blazing fire; He sees to the heart of things—He sees lvl for what it is. And what Jesus sees will either be commended, or judged.

3. Third, vs. 12, on Jesus’ head are many crowns. Earlier, in Revelation 13, we were introduced to a seven-headed beast that serves as a metaphor for the violent, Roman Empire. We were told that this beast wears 10 crowns, symbolizing the breadth of Rome’s power—Caesar did not rule over a city or country, he ruled a vast empire.

The kings of surrounding nations bowed before him; they knew that they sat on their thrones at Caesar’s pleasure—their crowns were effectively his. When Jesus walked this earth, the only crown John ever saw Him wear was a crown of thorns, but here in heaven, John saw the risen, ascended, and glorious Christ—a King, yes, a Conquerer—wearing many crowns. And so the hymn goes: *Crown Him with many Crowns, the Lamb upon His throne!*

4. Fourth, vs. 13 tells us that **Jesus is dressed in a robe dipped in blood.** As I have said many times before, Revelation uses images, numbers, and symbols to communicate profound truth about God. What are we to make of Jesus’ robe?

Note that Jesus’ robe is bloody before the *Last Battle* even begins; the blood is His own, the blood He shed at the cross. Note also the contrast between Jesus and His army. John’s imagery is striking—Jesus wears a robe dipped in blood, but He leads an army dressed in fine linen, white and clean (vs. 14).

In Isaiah 1:18 we read, “*Come now, let us settle the matter; ’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’”* The the clothes His army wears are white, symbolizing righteousness, purity, and holiness—at the cross, Jesus shed His blood so that we could be made clean, and right with God.

5. Fifth, in vs. 13, **Jesus is addressed by another title: “the Word of God.”** Alongside *Revelation*, John wrote a Gospel account that chronicled the life of Jesus. In John 1, he described Jesus in the following way: “*In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*”

What our English Bibles translate as “Word” comes from the Greek word “logos,” which is a philosophically charged word. Ancient Greek philosophers sought answers to the deep questions of life; they wanted to discover the ultimate reality that existed behind what we

can see and touch. “Logos” was the term they coined to describe this ultimate reality.

What John does is co-opt their word and redefine it in light of Jesus. In essence, John is saying, “**Jesus is ultimate reality. He’s what’s really real.**” From the beginning, He stood along side God, and if He has eternally stood along side God, and all things have been created through Him, then He must be God. **Jesus is the Word of God, the ultimate reality, the invisible God made visible.**⁶ This connects back to what was said in verse 11. Jesus is the **faithful** and **true** representation of God—the clearest expression of His words, being, and action.

6. Sixth, vs. 15, “*Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword⁷ with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre.’*”

When heaven was opened, John saw Jesus on a war horse—a Divine Warrior—preparing for the *Last Battle*. Notice that the only weapon mentioned is a sword coming from Jesus’ mouth. What does this image mean?

All of us have been in situations—at home, school, or business—

⁶ C.f. John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:1-3.

⁷ C.f. Rev. 1:16; 2:12; Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12-13.

⁸ John 14:6.

⁹ We encounter this phrase earlier in Revelation 17:14.

where a frustrated person slams their hand on the table and says, “*Enough talk! It’s time to act!*” It’s our way of saying that talking doesn’t solve everything; we need to **do** something. This may be the case for us, but it’s not the case for God. When it comes to God, His speech **is** action—He need only speak the word and His word becomes reality. God’s word can create, build, expose, separate, or tear down. Whatever God speaks, springs into being.

God has invited the nations to cease their rebellion, to receive His Son, and return to Him. This call to repentance is both the promise of rescue, and, a pronouncement of judgement. In direct contrast to our politically correct culture, God doesn’t consider all paths to be equally good and valid. And despite what some would have us believe, all paths don’t lead to God. Jesus said, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*”⁸

When Jesus returns, He need only speak and the *Last Battle* is won—what He forgives, is made right and clean; whatever He deems lacking, stands condemned. On that day, no enemy will have the power to stand in opposition to His word.

7. Finally, vs. 16, “*On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.*”⁹ We are meant to hear this title in contrast to the way it was being used in the ancient world. In

John's day, whenever Caesar entered the Roman senate, he entered to the following shout: "*You are King of kings and Lord of lords!*"¹⁰

But we know different, don't we? All will be called to account for how we lived and who we lived for. Prime Ministers, Presidents, and Emperors possess power but one day they will be called to account for how they used it; God gives authority to leaders for a time and for a purpose. Eventually, all Empires will crumble, all Emperors will fall, and every knee will bow before Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Conclusion: As I said earlier, Revelation 19 doesn't actually describe the *Last Battle*. The focal point is Jesus—the Divine Warrior. The final verses of Revelation 19 close with the grim reality of judgement. Revelation 19 features two contrasting meals: (a) the first is the wedding supper of the Lamb—Pastor Brendan talked about this last week—a feast celebrating God's saving love; but (b) in vs. 17-18, we read about a second feast—the *great supper of God*—here the birds of the air feast on the bodies of those who, to their dying breath, wage war against God and His people.

Vs. 20 tells us that the beast and the false prophet will be judged and cast into the lake of fire; next week, we will look at chapter 20 and the judgement of Satan himself.

Earlier I quoted Santayana, saying, "*Only the dead have seen the end of war;*" but the thing is, he doesn't have it quite right. There will be a *Last Battle* that features Jesus. He will come, with a sword in His

mouth, speaking the truth, judging correctly, and putting evil in its place. His return will signal the end of an age and exorcise the world of its futile rebellion against God. The *Last Battle* will bring about disarmament; it will achieve a peace that will last for ever. This will not simply be "another battle," it will be the *Last Battle*, the final battle, and then the war to end all wars will be over.

And won't that be a glorious day?

Prayer

Worship

Benediction:

¹⁰ Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through The Book of Revelation*, 329. This same description was used by other kings, note Ezekiel 26:7; Ezra 7:12; and Daniel 2:37-38.