

Text: Revelation 19:11-16

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war in righteousness. ¹² His eyes are like blazing flames, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one knows except he himself. ¹³ He is also clothed in a garment that had been dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies in heaven, which were clothed with white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will shepherd them with an iron staff. He himself is going to trample the winepress of the fierce anger of the Almighty God. ¹⁶ On his garment and on his thigh this name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Series Theme: “The Son of God Goes Forth to War”

Sermon theme: “Victory”

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

Today we celebrate the victory of our great champion, Jesus, whose picture we see in this reading. But it would be worth our time to consider another picture. An artist by the name of Albert Ryder created a memorable painting he titled, “The Race Track.” It now hangs in Cleveland’s Museum of Art. Its subtitle reads, “Death on a Pale Horse.” The Horseman is the only rider on the track and is brandishing a huge scythe above his head as he rides. On the ground alongside the horse and rider is a huge snake. One noticeable thing about the rider and the horse is that they are going clockwise around the track. They are going the wrong way. One obvious reason is that the “death rider” wants to pick off all the riders as they race toward the finish. We know that death gets every one. That pale rider, death, is coming after me. He will run down your friends and family. He has you in his sights also. And he always wins. Or so it would seem to us in this world.

But now, let’s go back to that picture that John gave us moments ago in Revelation. The rider on a white horse is King of kings and Lord of lords. We might be a bit afraid of him because he seems threatening with eyes of blazing fire and a sharp sword coming from his mouth, and because he treads the winepress of of the fierce anger of the Almighty God. And we notice his power. He is able to overcome all. He is victorious. He seems to be the final picture of the warrior of God that we have been picturing all during Lent. Today we celebrate our Savior’s victory over death and Satan. It is a day to celebrate Victory!

It is the victory our Savior has won. He is the greatest warrior ever. The last we saw him on Good Friday he had just declared it is finished. Then he voluntarily gave up his life. His body went limp, his heart stopped. And many form the question on their lips: How can he be victorious if he is dead?

1. Our hero is not dead, but alive having defeated death

Look again: **“I saw heaven standing open, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and he judges and makes war in righteousness.”**

One thing we notice in this revelation given to St. John is that this rider is not painted in a piece of art or sculpted out of marble or made of bronze poured into a mold. He is very

page 2 much alive and powerful and actively at war. He has the host of heaven following him.

And by now we surely know who this rider is. He is Jesus. And what a tremendous picture of him we see. He is no longer captive, humiliated by soldiers; he is not bowed with pain, nor is he beaten or whipped. His body is not in a grave. As St. Paul wrote, and you can almost hear the exclamation in his words, “**Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.**”

And that is what today, Easter Day, is all about. Victory! Death has actually been conquered. Now it is true that Jesus did die. There is no doubt of that. His captors made sure of it when they pierced his heart to make sure he was dead. Two of his secret followers placed him in a tomb and it was sealed with the Roman governors signet ring. But the blood that Jesus shed cleanses us from sin, and not only ours but the sins of the whole world. The victory was complete and total when Jesus said, “It is finished.”

When we see him put into the tomb, it is reasonable to think that there is one more enemy to be conquered. What about death, if Jesus has died? Is death really conquered? Paul says in 1 Cor. 15, “**The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**” On Easter morning none of his followers had seen anyone leave a grave empty on his own power. Some of them misinterpreted his empty tomb thinking someone had taken him. But in fact, his empty grave means he has defeated death, for he came back from death to life. So now, he claims victory over that enemy also.

Jesus met death face to face. He allowed death to put him in chains just as he allowed the soldiers to arrest him and take him prisoner. He died voluntarily, of his own free will. Every lamb that had been sacrificed in Israel’s altars for the previous fourteen centuries had foreshadowed, promised and predicted the sacrifice of the true Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. Jesus who is truly God and truly man is the perfectly obedient Son of God. He obeyed all of God’s commands that we could never obey. And he did it in action, in word and in thought. He was pure. Furthermore he was the only one who was big enough, as true God, who could give his life as the sacrifice for the sin and guilt of all humanity from Adam until the Last Day. But Jesus did something no one else could have done. He killed death. He arose. He proved that not only can he bring someone like Lazarus back from the dead. He himself conquered death. He is stronger than the grave. He was and is alive. He is the victorious rider on the white horse.

There is no doubt. The Bible gives us at least a dozen different accounts of Jesus’ appearances to his believers. One of those happened when more than 500 believers were present at one time. Most of the gospel accounts including Paul’s account of the resurrection were written during the lifetime of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. If it were not true those people would have had plenty of time to speak out or to write against what people were saying about Jesus’ resurrection. If it had not truly happened you would have thought that the Jews and the Romans both would have written against the gospel accounts. But the truth is, so many had witnessed the fact that Jesus was alive after he had been put in the tomb, that there was no use trying to refute it. Jesus actually rose miraculously from the grave.

Page 3 That is monumentally important for all of us. We know that death, the rider on the pale horse wants to cut us down with his scythe. We try to avoid it. We are afraid. Yes, we are afraid that this corona virus will infect us, could we be one of those who succumbs to death even while a high percentage of people recover? Health care facilities all over our country, indeed around the world are spending trillions of dollars trying to combat this virus and reduce the death toll. But we can spend all the wealth in the world and we still cannot stop death. Medically, when the heart stops and the brain waves cease irreversibly, death comes. There is not cure.

But the empty tomb of Jesus proves that his words are true, **“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though he dies (John 11:25).** Those who believe in Jesus. You and me. WE will rise because the one who conquered death has said so. We will close our eyes in death as Jesus died, but we will rise from the grave with glorified bodies. We must put off the mortal, perishable bodies and rise with immortal and imperishable bodies as St. Paul tells us: **“In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52,53).**

Here St. Paul’s words bring us back to the victorious rider on the white horse. He has the power to do what he promised.

2. Our living hero has all authority on the day of judgment.

His eyes are like blazing flames, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him, which no one knows except he himself.¹³ He is also clothed in a garment that had been dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.¹⁴ The armies in heaven, which were clothed with white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses.¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will shepherd them with an iron staff. He himself is going to trample the winepress of the fierce anger of the Almighty God.¹⁶ On his garment and on his thigh this name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

If we ever had the idea that Jesus was too weak, or too soft or too kind to take on tough enemies, understand that this is the last picture of Jesus we have in the Bible. There are references to the incredible white throne and Jesus sitting on it amidst the glory and grandeur of heaven. But here in Revelation 19, THIS is the image that God wants emblazoned in our minds. Why?

The absolute power of Jesus is portrayed by the sharp sword and the iron scepter, as he carries out the fierce justice of the Father. Notice, his robe is dipped in blood. When you heard that perhaps you thought that this was a reference to his own blood shed on the cross. But John tells us that Jesus is treading the “wine press of God’s fury,” which helps us understand that this is a very graphic picture of Jesus battle against his enemies. Seven centuries earlier the prophet Isaiah had been inspired to write about Jesus: **“Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? The one robed in splendor proclaimed: “I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their**

page 4 **blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing**” (Isaiah 63:3).

But why this anger and judgment? Jesus gave himself over to death and shed his innocent blood to pay for the sins of the world and rose again to demonstrate his power over death. These victories are gifts of his grace that he gives to every human being. He reconciled the world to himself. He promised that whoever believes in him as the Son of the Father will not perish but have everlasting life. But what about those who refused his gracious gifts? Remember what Jesus taught in the parable of the wedding banquet. There was the man who came into the banquet but refused to wear the wedding garment that the king freely gave. He was bound hand and foot and thrown into “**darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Matt 22:13).

Sure and certain judgment will come to Satan and all the rebellious host of hell. They have worked against the King of kings and Lord of lords. They were the first who rebelled against him. But those who refused his gifts, who mocked our Savior and his people, will also be judged. As the psalmist wrote long ago, those who “**band together against the Lord and against his anointed (Ps. 2:2)** will be judged by the one who is pictured riding the white horse. He will “**Break them with a rod of iron and dash them to pieces like pottery (psalm 2:9)**. Here we have Easter and judgment day pictured with only an instant between them.

Yet we know that

3. Those who are with the rider are safe forever, Alleluia!

On earth there are those who refuse to honor him and they will be judged. We are also here, but we put our trust in God and his promises. We are his children and heirs of heaven by his grace. We will rise from death and join the hosts of heaven praising our gracious Lord. In heaven, every voice both human and angel will join to give praise to the rider on the white horse who has used his power on our behalf. He has cleansed us with his blood and covered us in the robe of his righteousness. As far as God is concerned we look just like Jesus. This is how much he loves us!

At the moment of our death the fear will be gone. The ugliness will be gone. The sin and guilt from the past are already gone. The hopelessness the wondering—those last few minutes before our souls leave our bodies will change from thoughts about this life to an inexpressible joy. And suddenly heaven will come into our view. And we will be in the presence of our victorious warrior who is King of kings and Lord of lords. When he comes again on the clouds of heaven, he will raise our bodies from our graves to be reunited with our souls. Our bodies will be perfect, ageless, eternal. Imagine what that will be like. There we will experience God love and peace and joy forever.

Here is the picture God gives us at the end of the Bible: **And from the throne I heard a loud voice that said, “Look! God’s dwelling is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away.”** (Rev. 21:3, 4).

The Bible says we will be kings and queens who will serve joyfully under the King of kings and Lord of lords, the great rider on the white horse. Can’t you just see it? Isn’t Easter grand? The Son of God has gone forth to war and now he has gained the final victory. Alleluia! Amen.