

# THE RETURN OF THE KING

Revelation 19.11-21 | April 27, 2025

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What do you picture when you think of Jesus? The most common image for Jesus is what I call **Swedish Jesus**: he's got long flowing blonde hair, rosy red cheeks, a moody stare, a perfectly manicured beard, and perfect backlighting so that he glows. He looks like the 5th member of ABBA.

Is that what you picture? In the ridiculous and stupid movie Talledega Nights, Ricky Bobby prays to the 8lb, 6oz tiny baby Jesus. He likes praying to the Christmas Jesus best. And it's so stupid, as if you can choose what Jesus is like, or which Jesus you want to pray to. But I also think it is accidentally insightful. It satirizes how people remake Jesus into their own image. Create a picture that does not really fit with reality. Tiny Baby Jesus isn't all that different from praying to Swedish Jesus.

For many of us, our general image and perception of Jesus is what Charles Wesley in his hymn would call **Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild**. He's mild-mannered, kind, nice and soft. Like so many paintings he's snuggling with sheep or sitting with children. He couldn't hurt a fly. He's more lamb than lion. We picture Jesus in his incarnation. In his interactions with children and the vulnerable. And that's true: Jesus was gentle with the hurting. He welcomed sinners and outcasts. He cared for the poor and oppressed. But that's not the full picture. Our picture of Jesus needs more than that. Revelation 19 is rounding out and correcting our picture of Jesus. Jesus is gentle and lowly, but he's also a Warrior King. He is both lamb and lion.

And it's important we don't limit him or remake Jesus into whatever we want him to be. We can't be like Ricky Bobby — choosing part of Jesus. But that our perception of Jesus comes from biblical revelation, not human imagination. That we receive all that the scripture has to say of who Jesus is. Not just Jesus in his incarnation but Jesus in glory as well.

In Revelation 12-17, we were shown a series of threats and villains in this cosmic war we find ourselves in. One at a time we are introduced to these super villains. We were introduced to the great dragon, Satan. And his beast and false prophet. And the great prostitute, the harlot, Babylon. All these symbolic, evil villains, threats against Christ and his church.

Revelation 19 & 20 gives us a series of images of the victory of Christ over all these enemies. These are a series of snapshots of triumph, different angles and metaphors and images to show the coming triumph of Jesus. Earlier in ch 19, Jesus' victory was portrayed as a wedding. Jesus will come for his bride. And today, Jesus' victory is portrayed as a war. And we must allow this image to shape how we worship and wait for Jesus.

Our text has 2 halves: First John sees the warrior King, then he sees the battle.

## 1. King Jesus Will Return in Glory and Power

Here we have one of the most amazing and glorious descriptions of Jesus. A favourite passage of many.

The first thing we need to realize in the flow of Revelation: the Lamb has suddenly become Mighty Warrior dressed for battle riding a white horse, leading an army.

Revelation loves to mix its metaphors and morph its images. Because no single metaphor can contain its message. Remember Revelation 5? John weeps because no one can open the scroll in God's hand. The Elder says "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals". So we expect a mighty Lion. A conquering warrior King. So John looks. He **beholds**, and what does he see? Not a conquering Lion. No a warrior King. But a Lamb, not a sheep, a lamb, slaughtered but now standing. The conquering Lion is really a slaughtered and standing Lamb. The way that Jesus Conquered is by his sacrificial death and resurrection.

But NOW in Rev 19. The Lamb that was slain returns as the warrior king. We know this is the Lamb because the Rider is given the exact same title as the Lamb in v.16 "**King of Kings and Lord of Lords**". Remember in Rev 17, the Beast and all his kings waged war on the Lamb? "**And the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.**" (Rev 17:14) That's what we are seeing here. The slaughtered Lamb is the Mighty Warrior.

The Lion is a Lamb. The Lamb is Warrior King.

So this section is bringing together so much imagery from Revelation and the OT Prophets to depict the glory and power of Jesus, returning as warrior king to rescue his people and destroy his enemies.

What's the first thing we see? It's his ride. **Behold, a White Horse!** The white horse is exciting because it was associated with victory. When Julius Caesar returned victorious to Rome, it was granted him by the Senate that he ride in triumph through the city in a chariot drawn by white horses.<sup>1</sup> The white horse symbolizes majesty, rule, and victory.

He's called **Faithful and True**: as Jesus described himself to the Laodiceans in 3:14. Jesus is faithful and true. Every hero you have, either in real life or in the Bible, will fail you and let you down. The great kings of the Bible like David and Solomon, really made a mess of things. Your own mentors and heroes will fail you and disappoint you. But Jesus is the Hero and King who will never fail you. He is faithful and true.

And (v.11) **in Righteousness he judges and makes war**. Most wars are unjust and unrighteous. But unlike the war-mongers and tyrants of our world today, Jesus is a king who always acts righteously > that is, he does the right, moral and good thing. His war is righteous. His justice is perfect.

(v.12) **His eyes are like a flame of fire**: Just as they were described in 1:14. Meaning: his judgment is not superficial or skin-deep. His vision is penetrating, pure, and true. He sees fully and rightly. He's not deceived by false appearances. His vision is pure and penetrating.

**On his head are many diadems** : as we saw with the Beast in ch. 13, diadems represent authority. The dragon had 7 diadems, the beast had 10 diadems, this Rider has *many*. (too many to name!) Jesus comes with full authority. Unmatched authority. Unstoppable power.

**He has a name written which no one knows but himself**. It's not that we don't know what to call him. Many of his names are given in this very text: Word of God. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But the fact that he has a name which no one knows tells us that we cannot know him exhaustively. We cannot limit him. The vast and glorious descriptions that we do have, the superlative names that he

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb*, p.119, 270.

has, even they are not enough to contain and fully describe him. There's always more. Our language and our knowledge reaches its limits and still there is more. We can know Jesus truly, our knowledge is true and accurate. But we cannot know him fully. We can't exhaust him. We can't reach the limits.

In ancient times, there was this idea that to know someone's name is to have some measure of control over them. In Genesis 32, the One who wrestled with Jacob would not disclose his name, nor did the angel to Samson's parents in Judges 13. Knowing someone's name would be like in a football game, having the other teams playbook and knowing their play calls. That knowledge gives you power and control. That Jesus has a name that no one knows but himself, also means that he cannot be controlled or contained.

But then in v.13 we are told 1 of his names: He is called **The Word of God**. Reminiscent of John 1. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

And notice his clothing in v.13: You learn so much about someone by what they wear. Here, Jesus **wears a robe dipped in blood**. Here's the big question...Whose blood? You would think it is the blood of his enemies. That makes sense, but the battle hasn't started yet. And his army isn't bloodied at all. Whose blood is it? **It's his own blood**. He's the slaughtered Lamb after all, by whose blood is ransomed people for God (Rev 5). The king wins victory by shedding blood. But unlike other conquering kings, this King's victory comes first through the shedding of his own blood.

And with him in v.14 are the **Armies of Heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure...following him on white horses**. You might assume that this is an army of angels but it isn't. Where else have we seen an army with the Lamb, dressed in white? Revelation 7: the 144,000 from the 12 tribes (reminiscent of the book of Numbers counting out the military from the 12 tribes). And the 144,000 are really the countless multitude from all nations who worship the Lamb. And they are dressed in white robes, because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Then in chap 14 We see them standing again with the Lamb victorious and singing. And now they are coming with him in the final battle to overthrow evil forever. This army in white is the church, the people saved by the blood of the Lamb.

Notice the intentional contrast in clothing. What is the Rider on the white horse wearing? **A robe covered in blood**. I've argued that it's his own blood. It's the blood of his sacrifice. And what his army dressed in? White and pure robes. How are they white? We were told back in chapter 7: they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.

This is so critical. Don't miss this. This is the message of Revelation. This is the gospel: Jesus is bloodied and his people are not. Here's the connection: They are dressed in white, clean and pure... *because* he is bloodied. Jesus is bloodied so that his people could be made white and clean and pure. What a picture of the gospel! The gospel does NOT say: clean yourself up and be like Jesus. BUT be cleaned by the blood of Jesus.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so that by faith in him, we receive his righteousness and are forgiven, restored, made clean and whole. Jesus wears a bloody robe and his army is dressed in fine linen, white and pure.

They are mounted on white horses and so share in his victory. But when the time comes in vv.20-21, they do nothing. They contribute nothing to the victory, but are recipients of HIS victory. Why does Jesus bring his army if he doesn't need their help? They are not there to help him. They are present as a display of his untold glory. A prize of his saving grace, a picture of his mighty works of salvation.

Christ doesn't save us because he needs our help. He saves so that we can be a display of the glory of his grace. I'm not an asset. I'm a picture of his grace, his power, his salvation.

(v.15) **From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.** Just like in John's vision of Jesus in chapter 1. And we remember that the mouth is always associated with Words. So what this tells us is that Jesus' mighty weapon, with which he wages war against evil, is not actually a sword or military might. But he wages war with his Word.

Here, John is bringing together a number of OT prophetic texts that describe the coming victory of the messiah. Isaiah 11:4: **"with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.** (the result? The wolf shall dwell with the lamb....)

Psalms 2:9, YHWH God speaking to his Son, his anointed King about the wicked nations: **"You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."** The promised messiah would smash the enemies of God with his powerful word and bring justice and righteousness and peace to his people. Jesus will fulfill all these promises when he returns.

(v. 15) **He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.** An image from Isaiah 63. There the LORD is a warrior in a splattered red garment. It looks like he has been stomping on grapes at the winepress, but it is red from the blood of his enemies.

And Written on his robe and tattooed on his thigh is written: **King of Kings and Lord of Lords.** The Conquering Lion became a slaughtered Lamb. And the Slaughtered Lamb returns as a conquering Lion. A mighty Warrior. He who first came in weakness, humility and vulnerability, laid in a manger, adored by shepherds, raised by ordinary simple poor Galilean peasants... Will return as a warrior king on a white horse, our Hero come to rescue and restore. This is not Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This is warrior Jesus. This is the return of our conquering king.

There is a federal election tomorrow. As my Dad would say "vote early. Vote often." These days you cannot take ten steps without being bombarded with these ads. So constantly in your ear for the last month are candidates trying to show you why they are capable and their opponents are not.

I have opinions. I'm sure you do as well. But I promise this. No matter who is chosen, they will let us down. They will fail to deliver. There is 1 leader who can make things right. There is 1 man who will never fail you or disappoint you. There is one king who can bring justice, peace and goodness. There is one who is the ruler we truly need. And none can compare. Do not set your hope in politics, set your hope in Jesus Christ. Yes, go and vote but do not put a lot of stock in it. There is only one who can make things right and I wait for him. King Jesus will return in glory and power.

1. King Jesus Will Return in Glory and Power
2. **King Jesus Will Defeat His Enemies**

In chapters 12-17, we are introduced a series of terrifying enemies. Now in chapter 18-20, we are shown the systematic defeat of all these enemies in reverse order of how we met them. There was the dragon in ch 12, then the beast and false prophet in ch 13, then great prostitute in ch 17. She is defeated in ch 18 and now we read of the defeat of the beast and false prophet. The dragon will be defeated in ch 20.

And just as with the fall of Babylon in ch 18, an angel announces with a mighty voice. This time: He's announcing that it's dinner time. He's calling the kids for dinner. When we lived in BC we lived in a smaller house. We just had the upstairs so one floor, so I could yell and reach everyone. When we moved into our house, we have kids upstairs and downstairs, and it was dinner time, and I had to run upstairs to call kids for dinner and then run downstairs. Well I'm never doing that again. I went out and got a dinner bell that rings upstairs and downstairs. For a few days we re-enacted pavlov's dog and rang the bell and gave cookies to everyone who came. Now we ring that bell and they've been coming for dinner for the last 5.5 years.

Here, the angel is ringing the dinner bell. Who is he calling? All the birds. What is this dinner? It is **"the great supper of God"**. What's on the menu? The enemies of God who are lined up for battle against the Lamb and his army.

So on one side: The Lamb/Warrior on his white horse with his army. On the other side: The Beast, the False Prophet and their armies. But before the battle, the Angel is calling the Birds to come for dinner. It's going to be a massacre. (This is apocalyptic smack talk - announcing your opponents defeat beforehand). This comes right out of Ezekiel 38-39. In Ezekiel's vision, there this mighty evil army led by a guy named Gog who is from Magog (which are made up names, no historical reference - its symbolic made up Super Villain). And Gog and his army line up to wage war on God and his people. But before the battle even begins, they all get taken out by the weather: rain and hail and fire. And then God calls the birds together to feast at the banquet that he has provided for them. It's gruesome and odd. It's like a horror film. But the point in Ezekiel is that God is mighty and trustworthy and will protect his people, even in the face of the most evil and frightening army imaginable. And it's not even close.

Here in Revelation we see the same symbolism and the message is the same: This is a symbolic picture of the victory of Jesus over all his enemies. If all the enemies of God could be lined up against Christ and his people.... Call the vultures... it's going to be a one-sided blood bath.

In the ancient world perhaps the greatest shame that you could suffer is to die and be left unburied. To have your dead corpse be eaten by the birds is to suffer utter humiliating defeat. There's no honour. No valour. No comeback or return. It's total defeat. That's the picture.

And look at the battle itself! In v.19 all the kings of the earth and their armies are lined up to make war with the Lamb. We're ready and expecting the big battle scene. This is avengers end game. But then there's no battle. v.20: The beast and false prophet are instantly captured and thrown into a lake of fire. And the enemy armies are instantly slain by the sword of his mouth. Jesus instantly defeats all his enemies by his powerful word. There's no contest. No battle. His army does nothing. His word does it all.

One of my favourite hymns is Martin Luther's *A Mighty Fortress is our God*:

*The Prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo!  
His doom is sure; One little Word shall fell him.*

Luther is right! The victory is won with a Word. A powerful word.

This chapter actually contains two supper invitations and between them a picture of our returning king. In vv.6-9, there is an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ will come to marry his bride. Blessed are those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. In vv.11-16 we have this glorious picture of the our returning King. Then in vv.17-18 there is another supper invitation. The birds are invited to gorge on the kings of the earth and all who war against Christ.

There are **2 feasts**. A feast of God's people, celebrating Christ saving his church. And the birds of the earth feasting on God's enemies. Everyone will be at one of these two symbolic suppers. You will eat at the king's banquet. Or be eaten in rebellion against the King. The choice before us all: eat or be eaten.

Today: you either rejoice at the return of the king, our saviour Jesus. Or you resist and rebel against him. And God in his grace, is giving us a powerful, grotesque, and unforgettable picture of what it looks like to persist in rebellion against Jesus.

So this text invites us to instead, accept the invitation to the better supper. Don't go to the war, go to the banquet. Don't resist Christ, worship him. Don't be his enemy, be his bride.

Choose the better feast. Worship Christ the King and welcome his rule and reign in your life.

For most of us, scenes of war and dead corpses seem so foreign. This passage may feel over-the-top. In our culture, we spend time, money, and energy to save the salamanders, so its hard to picture vultures feasting on dead corpses.

But I wonder if our peace and general prosperity has muted the message of this text. Perhaps we would receive it much differently if we were holding fast to Christ amidst tremendous suffering and opposition.

For the 7 churches that this letter was written to, several of them were facing death for following Jesus. In Smyrna some were about to be thrown into prison. Jesus calls them to be faithful unto death. Following Jesus faithfully may mean facing the sword. In Pergamum, Antipas, who was perhaps their pastor or an elder; he was a faithful witness and was killed, murdered, for holding fast to Christ. Others of the church were facing pressure, opposition and persecution. Life was hard. There were enemies and people who wanted to end them.

And many or perhaps a majority of Christians today are living in places where worshipping Jesus comes with a cost. They worship under the threat of prison or physical harm.

I think that for those who follow Jesus through suffering and fear... this picture of the King coming to triumph over his enemies is an incredible source of hope and courage.

Yes, you have enemies.

Yes, there are those who would run you through.

Yes, there is prison and punishment waiting for you.

Yes, the cost is great and your enemies are powerful.

BUT, look at the king! Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has conquered.

See the glorious Rider on the White horse.

See the victory of Jesus.

See his enemies utterly, completely defeated.

See his people rescued, protected, saved, and dressed in glorious white robes.

See Jesus, and hold fast.