

“*The Coming Warrior and the Final Battle*” – Revelation Part 16
Revelation 19:11-21

Ray Bakke shares a story from WWII: “I knew a Glasgow professor named MacDonald who, along with a Scottish chaplain, had bailed out of an airplane behind German lines. They were put in a prison camp. A high wire fence separated the Americans from the British, making it next to impossible for the two sides to communicate. MacDonald was put in the American barracks and the chaplain was housed with the Brits. Unknown to the guards, the Americans had a homemade radio and were able to get news from the outside, something more precious than food in a prison camp. Every day, MacDonald would take a headline or two to the fence and share it with the chaplain in the ancient Gaelic language, indecipherable to the Germans.

One day, news came over the little radio that the German High Command had surrendered and the war was over. MacDonald took the news to his friend, then watched him disappear into the British barracks. A moment later, a roar of celebration came from the barracks. Life in that camp was transformed. Men walked around singing and shouting, waving at the guards, even laughing at the dogs. When the German guards finally heard the news three nights later, they fled into the dark, leaving the gates unlocked. The next morning, Brits and Americans walked out as free men. Yet they had truly been set free three days earlier by the news that the war was over.” [P]

One amazing thing about having God’s Word is that we not only know some of the struggles we will face in this world; we have also been told the outcome of the final battle. We know that good will triumph over evil, truth will win out over the lie, and Christ will reign forever. There is cheering in our camp, even though the guards and dogs may still be seen, for we know that they will soon be gone and the gates to glory will be opened.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to his fiancé from a German prison, observed: “*A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened ‘from the outside,’ is not a bad picture of Advent*” – the season of longing and anticipation for the One who comes. We cannot open the door, but there will be One who *will come* and open it for us. That will be the greatest freedom we have ever known.

Here in the 19th chapter of Revelation, we are told of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Far from being something Christ-followers should dread, the coming of our conquering King should be something we long for and pray for. The Church needs to remember that as we prepare to enter Advent in a couple weeks – that we do not merely look back to our Savior’s humble birth; even more so, it is a time to anticipate his glorious return.

The Bible calls it “the blessed hope.” Titus 2:11-13 – *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness, and to live self-controlled, upright lives in this present age, while we wait for **the blessed hope** — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”* The second coming of Christ is our great hope!

Christ Jesus, the One called Faithful and True, will come! He will come as the Warrior of Heaven to put an end to the kingdom of evil and this fallen world as we know it. The *return of Christ* is not bad news for the *redeemed of Christ*. No! As those who dwell in a world racked by evil, it’s the greatest news we could possibly receive.

So, let’s look at what the Word says about the final battle and the second coming of Christ.

The *first* thing we need to know: **Christ will come with great power**. What an astounding picture John paints for us. All the armies of the world gather to fight against Christ and his army. It’s a terrifying scene from the perspective of earth. All the forces of evil gather in one place to make war against God and his kingdom.

John offers this imagery back in ch. 16 – *“Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty ... to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon”* (16:13-16).

But as we read on, expecting to find a detailed account of a horrific battle pitting army against army, we witness something quite different – a battle unlike any other that has ever been fought – a battle that is over before it ever began. Listen again to how John describes the final confrontation between the armies of the world and the army of God (vs. 19-21):

*“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 it the false prophet ... The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 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.”*

It's not even a contest. The omnipotent Christ seizes the beast and the false prophet and hurls them into the lake of fire. Then the rest are destroyed by the “sword” coming out of Christ's mouth; that is, *He simply speaks the Word and the war is won*. Evil defeated. Justice enacted. Righteousness to reign forevermore.

Here is the mystery of God: The empire of evil has been permitted to make it appear that they are more powerful than the kingdom of God. God has permitted it to look as though good has been overpowered, only to have it win in the end! We hear the shout of triumph back in Rev. 11:15 – *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

In fact, knowing the victory is sure, Jesus does something just a few verses earlier in our chapter – he sends out the wedding invitations for him and his bride! Listen to this: *“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad ... For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready ... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding of the Lamb! (Rev. 19:6-9)*. This announcement comes just verses before Christ comes on the clouds to conquer! On the eve of Armageddon, we get the wedding invitation! And guess what, Church? We are his bride! Jesus can send out this joyful proclamation in full assurance, even as the world wages war against him, because He knows the truth – the battle is already won! [P]

Long ago, the Psalmist proclaimed the Lord's warning: *“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his Anointed ... The One enthroned in heaven laughs ... Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord and celebrate his rule with trembling ... Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” (Ps. 2:1-12)*. In short, their efforts are in vain, for it is futile to fight against the King of Kings.

Jesus promised this coming day when he walked the earth 2,000 years ago: *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man. All the nations of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory”* (Mat. 24:30).

Which leads us to the *second* point: **Christ will come with great glory**. The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod*. The word refers to something that is heavy in weight. We speak of something being weighty in importance. It is a word that is the opposite of being light and frivolous. To have glory means something has weight and importance. It is real as opposed to something that is merely fantasy. The appearance of Christ will be with great glory. The whole world will feel the weight of his power and presence.

I mentioned a verse a few weeks ago that still resonates: *“The secret power of lawlessness is at work... But then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming”* (2 Thes. 2:8). The weight of Christ’s glory will crush the Deceiver and his armies. They will not be able to *stand* before his presence, let alone wage war against him. [P]

When Jesus was put on trial by the religious leaders of his day with intent to crucify him, the high priest asked him if he was indeed the Son of God. Jesus answered, *“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Mk 14:62). What will it be like for those who plotted Jesus’ death to face him at the splendor of his coming? What will it be like for the Lawless One and his followers – for those who have refused to give Jesus, the Lamb slain for the world – any place in their lives? They will know the sword of his mouth; the weight of his glory.

Back in chapter 5, we heard the question: *“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”* John weeps because no one is found worthy ... until he hears a voice say, *“Do not weep! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed! He is able to open the scroll!”* (2, 5).

In chap. 13:4, we hear a different question: *“Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against him?”* The answer is revealed in our scripture today: *“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True ... His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns”* (19:11-12). His blazing eyes

signify divinity; his many crowns signify supremacy. The *glory* of his presence and the *word* of his mouth are how he puts an end to the Enemy. Nothing else is needed. [Pause]

Christ comes with *great power* ... with *great glory* ... **Christ comes with great people**. Look at v. 14 – “*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.*” Often, when we hear of the armies of heaven, we think angels. But this army is not simply comprised of angels. This verse refers to God’s people – to the saints triumphant. How do we know?

For starters, they are described as those “dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”

Remember the wedding invitation that went out a few verses earlier? Here is the rest of that verse describing the Bride of Christ, His Church: “*Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.*” And in case it wasn’t completely clear, John adds an explanation: “*Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people*” (19:8).

One of the amazing revelations of scripture is that Christ not only comes with great glory, but that we will experience his glory! Jesus, the Faithful and True Witness, promised back in Rev. 3:21 – “*To the one who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*” Those who are redeemed, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, who overcome the deceptions of this world, will share in his glorified life!

Even more, we will share in his victory! He raises us that we might join him for the final battle. Rev. 17:14 affirms this, where the beast & the kings of this world will attempt to wage war against the Lamb, “*but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*”

This is the day that the whole created world is waiting for. Romans 8:18 – “*The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.*” That includes you and me, if the Lamb is the Lord of our lives. On the day Christ returns, the children of God will be revealed and all of creation will be set right – “*liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God*” (21). All will be made new – including us. We are *restored* in him, so that we can *reign* with him.

Child of God, you may see yourself as unworthy, but here is how the Father sees you:

“*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,*

that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

One of the leaders of the early church was Polycarp, who became bishop of Smyrna. He was put on trial by the authorities of his day and told to deny his faith in Christ. He looked at his accusers and replied, *“For forty-six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong: how then can I revile my King, my Savior?”* Because of his refusal to deny his Savior, they immediately took him out and put him to death. When Christian historians later wrote about his death, they observed: *“Polycarp was martyred – Statius Quadratus being proconsul of Asia, but Jesus Christ being King forever!”* They recognized that even though this humble follower of Christ had been rejected by the world, he was highly esteemed by God, and nothing could change that since Jesus Christ is King forever.

This is how it will be for all those who follow after Christ, even if it means death itself. How fitting – that those who overcame the world *through their martyrdom* will one day share in Christ’s final triumph over evil. This is the promise given to suffering, grieving Christians who first received this letter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is the promise given to those who tarry in this world today. *Endure*, people of God ... *Endure*, bride of Christ ... for you will share in his glory, in his victory, and in his kingdom forever.

In an earlier letter, John wrote these words to the church: *“And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming”* (1 John 2:28). Bride of Christ, let us continue in him until he comes on the clouds – the all-glorious One – our conquering King, Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.