

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 19:11-21

Topic

Jesus is coming again, not lowly and riding on a donkey,
but Kingly and riding on a magnificent white war horse

Title

"Back in the Saddle Again"

Introduction

They are the *where were you when* moments in history.

Those who were alive during President John F. Kennedy's assassination can often recall *where they were when* the tragic news was announced.

Other memorable *where were you when* moments are:

- The assassination of Robert F. Kennedy (July 6, 1968).
- The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.
- The verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial (June 12, 1994).
- The Apollo 11 moon landing (July 20, 1969).

As Christians we have a unique view of history. We have prophecy - which is history written, by God, in advance.

Instead of asking *where were you when?*, we can ask *where will you be when?*

There are two dramatic, prophetic events whose certainty demands we ask ourselves, and others, that question.

The first is the resurrection and rapture of the church. Jesus is coming, in the air, to take the believers of the church age home to the place He has been preparing for them in Heaven. He will raise the dead in Christ, then living believers will be transformed in a moment of time, faster than the twinkling of an eye. He's promised to do it *before* the seven-year Tribulation on the earth; and He says it is imminent - it could happen at anytime.

Where will you be when that happens? In Heaven, with the Lord... Or left behind?

The second prophetic event is the one we will read about in our text. It is the one all history is moving towards. It is the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth, ending the Tribulation.

Where will you be when Jesus comes to establish His kingdom on the earth?

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Will You Accompany The King When He Comes?, or #2 Will You Be In The Company Of The Kings When They're Killed?

#1 Will You Accompany The King When He Comes?

(v11-16)

The Green Bay Packers have the most famous waiting list in sports, with more than 100,000 names waiting for season tickets. The team's website says the wait is 30 years.

It is a common custom in Green Bay and other Wisconsin cities to put a baby's name on the list as soon as the birth certificate is obtained.

Your guaranteed access to the greatest future events in all of human history is free; all you need to do is get saved, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

- Once you're saved, you'll be resurrected or raptured when Jesus comes for the church.
- Once you're saved, you'll accompany the Lord from Heaven to earth in His Second Coming.

Rev 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

There's a scene in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* where Shadowfax appears for the first time. He is the magnificent lord of all horses. I crack-up at it; but something like that is going to happen as the Lord returns.

We're told that Jesus is called "Faithful and True." These seem to be shout-outs as the Lord appears. I mean, He *is* faithful and true; but those witnessing His return call it out.

- "Faithful" captures the fact that His coming has been the unwavering plan of God from eternity past. Promising in the Garden of Eden to save lost humanity, God the Father has worked providentially throughout history; and Jesus never, ever wavered in His commitment to go to the Cross.
- "True" can mean a lot of things, but with regard to Jesus' Second Coming, it establishes that the plan of God was the only possible way for men to be saved, and for the universe to be restored. Jesus is not "a" way to forgiveness; He is "**the** Way," the only true way, for sin to be atoned for, and for you to be justified, sanctified, and glorified.

It is "right" for Him to "judge" the nations and "make war" with them. By the end of the Tribulation these men and women have determined their fate by their individual personal decision to reject God's free offer of salvation. Besides that, their wickedness is extreme.

This dramatic display of judgment comes *only at the end* of a long time of grace, patience, and mercy. There is no rush to judgment.

Rev 19:12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

John had undoubtedly looked into Jesus' eyes many times in the three-and-one-half years he had followed the Lord. Not once did he describe them as a "flame of fire." This is Jesus unveiled. He is still in a body; it's a glorified human body. But it's infused with His divine power, and John can see it in Jesus' eyes.

We will each look into those eyes. At what is called in the Bible "the reward seat of Jesus," our works on the earth - and especially the motives behind them - will be judged.

They will "be revealed by fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work" (First Corinthians 3).

Could this fire be Jesus' gaze - His eyes as a flame of fire?

To be "crowned with many crowns" speaks of victory after victory. Think of all that Jesus has triumphed over: sin and death and the grave and the devil.

Apparently upon him there is writing, a "name." We can't help but be curious about the "name written that no one knew except Himself."

Maybe it is an endearing name. Albert Barnes said, "This cannot here mean that no one could read the name, but the idea is, that no one but Himself could fully understand its import. It involved a depth of meaning, and a degree of sacredness, and a relation to the Father, which He alone could apprehend in its true import."

Jesus has so, so many names in the Bible. Commentators generally agree He has more than two hundred names. One site, www.christiananswers.net, has an alphabetical list of **900 names**, complete with the Scripture references.

It's a great devotional to discover some of His names. Each of them describes some aspect of His nature or character or mission or methods.

It seems there must be one name known only to the trinity - an intimate name that only the Father and the Spirit may rightfully use.

Rev 19:13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

This is not the blood He shed on the Cross at Calvary. If you were to look at this forensically you see that this is the blood spatter of His enemies.

The first direct reference to this rider is that He is “called the Word of God.” ***It’s Jesus.***

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Only Jesus can be called “the Word.” Jesus is God come in human flesh to declare and to reveal the character and nature of God to us.

What if a person has no knowledge of Jesus?

God can be known, to an extent, from creation. In Romans 1:20 we read, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

The Bible also declares that God has put "eternity in our hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

It seems to me to be the testimony of Scripture that God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to be lifted-up on the Cross in order to draw "all men to Himself" (Jesus' words from John 12:32).

That doesn't mean all men are universally saved; they are not. Jesus is the savior of all men, potentially; but only of those who, in fact, believe in Him.

What about those who have never heard of Jesus? Can they be saved?

We subscribe to a position on salvation that is sometimes called "the wider hope."

Salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus. We affirm that God, in His grace, grants every individual a genuine opportunity to be saved, without excluding anyone.

Within our wider hope camp there are several suggestions as to how this is accomplished for those who have never heard the Gospel. My current position is one that has a long history in the church - that God will somehow, by His providence, get the message of salvation to any person who responds to creation and/or the eternity stirring the heart, who is seeking Him.

The Holy Spirit is, after all, in the world, and His ministry is to reveal Jesus to every heart.

Let's not fry our brains trying to figure that out. Let's let God be God and do His work. You and I are not among those who have never heard. The Gospel is being preached to us, even now.

Revelation 19:14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

You've heard the old joke, "I went to a fight and a hockey game broke out!" Well, at the Second Coming of Jesus we are coming back with Him "clothed" in the "fine linen" wedding garments to our marriage supper but a fight breaks out.

Not to worry. We won't do any actual fighting.

Revelation 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Paul writes that at His return Jesus Christ will destroy the antichrist with the breath of his mouth (Second Thessalonians 2:8). These, then, are metaphors for the spiritual power wielded by Jesus. His very words "strike the nations."

In the Greek of Revelation the verb to rule is *poimainein*, which signifies "to shepherd." The Lord rules the nations as a shepherd-king who with this rod both protects his own people and destroys his enemies.

The rod of the shepherd is an amazing tool. When the shepherd is afield with his flock in the high country he carries a minimum of equipment. In the Middle East the shepherd carries only a rod and staff. As far as I can tell, the rod has three uses:

1. First, it is used for protection. The shepherd spends hours practicing with this club learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep.
2. Second, it is used to discipline the sheep. If the shepherd saw a sheep wandering away from its own, or approaching poisonous weeds, or getting too close to danger of one sort or another, the club would go whistling through the air to send the wayward animal scurrying back to the bunch.
3. Third, the rod is used to examine and count the sheep. In the terminology of the Old Testament this was referred to as passing "under the rod:"

Ezekiel 20:37 And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:

This meant not only coming under the owner's control and authority, but also to be subject to his most careful, intimate and firsthand examination. A sheep that passed "under the rod" was one which had been counted and looked over with great care to make sure all was well with it.

The "winepress" is a terrifying image of judgment. It seems to be borrowed from this passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 63:2 Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?

Isaiah 63:3 "I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes.

Like grapes being crushed in a vat, so will the armies of men be defeated by the Lord.

In the mean time the Scripture speaks of **our** feet this way:

Romans 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!"

Today the Lord has multiplied millions of feet on the earth as believers share their testimony. In the end His feet will stomp those who fully and finally refuse to believe.

Revelation 19:16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Here are just three ways of many suggestions to understand this imagery:

1. Jewish scholars insist that the word translated “thigh” would in Hebrew be the word *banner*. Thus they see Jesus with a long, flowing banner upon which is written “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”
2. It could be that the reference to His “thigh” is a reference to the sword that would be strapped to the soldier’s thigh. (This seems unlikely, since Jesus doesn't really need physical weapons. His sword is the Word).
3. It might be that Jesus has a tattoo. *Why not?*

Jesus doesn't need a name tag; everyone is going to know it's Him. His role is what is being designated. He's coming as King of kings and as Lord of lords. He's coming to plant the flag.

The believers of the church age - the church - are among those who accompany Jesus.

Where will you be when that happens? You can accompany Jesus if you get saved before you die, or before the rapture.

Otherwise you will be left behind.

Most of us know we will accompany the Lord.

We have confidence that, should we die, we will be absent from our bodies, and present with the Lord. Think on that for a moment. Is it not **the** most tremendous comfort?

We believe the rapture is imminent. Remember, the rapture is like a bridegroom fetching his bride at a time unknown to her. Thus she lives in joyous, romantic anticipation.

We really ought to be happy campers as we are journeying in these temporary tents on our way home.

#2 Will You Be In The Company Of The Kings When They're Killed?

(v17-21)

Repetition is often instructive when studying a passage of Scripture.

The word "flesh" is repeated six times in these next verses. It has a very literal meaning. It refers to the skin and muscles of the Lord's enemies at His Second Coming. Their flesh will be eaten by scavenger birds. It will be a feast for them as they pick away at the carcasses of the fallen.

We also talk about nonbelievers figuratively as bringing forth the works of the flesh. We mean that they produce awful things from their unredeemed human nature. In one famous passage the works of the flesh are described like this:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

Galatians 5:21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Jesus returns to establish the kingdom of God. These “will not inherit” it. They are of the flesh having never received the Lord as their Savior.

Revelation 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God,

An angel blocks out the sun on account of his own brilliance. He calls out to birds that have gathered in the Valley of Megiddo. All of the world's remaining scavenger birds come and fill the sky. They literally feast on the flesh of the fallen but we are to see the failure of the flesh from a spiritual standpoint.

The scene is presented with what one commentator called ‘repellant realism.’ It is purposely revolting and nauseating in order to emphasize how revolting and nauseating fallen man is in his natural state.

There must be something that would repel you, or nauseate you, if you came across it. Well, that is what our reaction ought to be to the things listed in Galatians, and any other work of the flesh.

The chapter opened with an invitation to the marriage supper. This is not that supper. This is a different supper. **Nonbelievers are the menu, not the guests.**

Revelation 19:18 "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."

God is no respecter of persons. In the end only one thing will matter: Do you know Jesus as your Savior? If not it makes no difference if you are great or small, free or slave, in the eyes of other nonbelievers.

Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

In any good action movie there is a final showdown between the hero and the villain. Somehow they find each other on the field of battle and they go at each other. In the movies, for dramatic effect, usually the villain almost defeats the hero but, in the end with some amazing maneuver, the hero wins out.

The Second Coming of Jesus is not like that. The villains are the "beast," who we call the antichrist, and those with him. They are easily overcome.

Revelation 19:20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The beast, a.k.a, the antichrist, and his false prophet will be the first two inhabitants of the Lake of Fire. They are judged and thrown there prior to the final Great White Throne judgment.

We'll see that the devil will be thrown into the Abyss for one thousand years before he is eternally confined in the Lake of Fire.

The Lake of Fire is the final eternal destination for all those who ultimately reject Jesus Christ. We normally refer to it as Hell but that is inaccurate. Let's look at a few terms to describe the destinations of the dead.

"Sheol" is a Hebrew word that describes the non-permanent place or temporary address of the disembodied souls of the dead. It is the same as the Greek word "Hades."

Prior to Jesus Christ's resurrection, both the souls of the evil and the righteous went there after death. It is translated "grave" 31 times, "hell" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times in King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

Sheol (Hades) has two compartments, separated by an impassable gulf.

1. One side was and is the holding cell of nonbelievers after they die.

2. The other side, called "Abraham's Bosom" in Luke 16:22, was for the comfort of the righteous after they died, while awaiting their entrance into Heaven.

I said "was" with regard to believers because the resurrection of Jesus changed their address.

When Christ died He descended into Sheol (Hades). When He was resurrected He led the righteous out of Sheol to Heaven. Since then, the souls and spirits of all of the saved people go directly to Heaven when they die. Abraham's Bosom is empty.

The lost still go to Sheol and join the lost of the Old Testament in torment on one side of the gulf when they die.

Then there is "Gehenna." It is translated "Hell" all 12 times in the KJV. It is used to refer to the *permanent* place for torment of the "... *soul and body* ..." (Matthew 10:28). It is a place of "... *fire that never shall be quenched*" (Mark 9:45).

In most of the references, it is clear from the context that those who enter Gehenna do so in bodies. For this to happen, it must occur *after* the resurrection of the damned at the Great White Throne judgment.

Gehenna **is** the Lake of Fire described in Revelation 19 and 20. It is presently uninhabited, but the Beast and the False Prophet will be cast into it at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:20).

One thousand years later Satan will be cast into it (Revelation 20:10) and will be followed shortly by the lost people of all previous time periods (Revelation 20:15).

They will all enter Gehenna together, in their resurrected bodies, where they will remain in torment for all eternity.

To summarize: Sheol (Hades) is the temporary place of torment for the souls and spirits of the nonbelievers who die. Prior to Christ's resurrection saints were kept and comforted in the now vacant part known as Abraham's Bosom.

There are also a few places like the Abyss, which are detention cells - prisons - for demons.

Gehenna is the Lake of Fire for the permanent place of torment of the souls of the wicked dead in their resurrected bodies.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:41 that the Lake of Fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. That is why we can honestly say that God never sends any man to the Lake of Fire; they go there of their own free will, having rejected Christ.

Revelation 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The “rest” are those on this battlefield.

You do not want to be in the company of these kings when the King of kings returns.

If this all seems fantastic to you, it shouldn't. There are something like eight-times as many references in the Bible to Jesus' Second Coming than there are to His first coming.

When Jesus ascended in to Heaven, and His disciples stood gawking upward, two men appeared to them, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

If you knew the future, wouldn't you do something with that knowledge?

Between April 1992 and April 2012, Apple's stock value increased by over 4000%. Don't you wish you had bought a few shares?

Or how about that property on the coast you could have bought years ago? What would it be worth today?

If you're not a believer, continuing to put-off coming to Christ is like refusing Apple stock... Or passing on that beach house... When you had perfect knowledge of the future.

Except that the stakes are so much higher.

Don't be foolish. Come to the Lord.