

## Revelation 19:11-16

### *The Rider on the White Horse*

<sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>He is also clothed in a garment that had been dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup>The armies in heaven, which were clothed with white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>On his garment and on his thigh this name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## Victory!

### I.

It hangs in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The piece is by Albert Ryder. It is entitled “The Race Track.” Its subtitle reads: “Death on a Pale Horse.” If you can’t see it on the screen, there is a link in the PDF version of this sermon on Holy Trinity’s website to take you there. <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1928.8>

The horseman is alone on the track and is wielding a huge scythe. On the ground alongside the track is a big snake. One of the first things you might notice if you watch many horse races at all is that the rider is going clockwise—the wrong way.

Perhaps the rider is going the “wrong” direction so that he can pick off everyone else as they race toward the finish line. He will get everyone. That pale rider is Death, also mentioned in the book of Revelation. Death is coming after you and me. He has your friends and family in his sights. He is going to catch you. He always wins.

At least...so it would seem. So it appears to us all here in this world.

### II.

The picture of a rider on a horse in *our* lesson today from Revelation is a bit different. He is on a white horse. The rider of the white horse is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He certainly might seem a *little* bit scary and threatening, since he is pictured with eyes like blazing flames and he has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth. “He...is going to trample the winepress of the fierce anger of the Almighty God” (Revelation 19:15, EHV).

Notice his power. He is able to overcome all. He is victorious. He seems to be the final image of the warrior we have been thinking about all Lent. Today is Easter Sunday. Today is the day we celebrate our Lord’s victory over Satan and over death.

But wait...we last left him on Good Friday hanging on a cross. He had just declared: “It is finished!” (John 19:30, EHV). Then he voluntarily had given up his life. His body went limp. His heart stopped.

Some might wonder: “How can he be victorious if he is dead?”

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” (Revelation 19:11, EHV). One of the things we notice in this revelation given to John is that the rider is not a statue. He is not carved in marble or made of bronze. He is alive and powerful. He is actively at war—with the host of heaven following him.

We know who this is: Jesus! What a grand picture of him! No longer is he a captive humiliated by soldiers. No longer is he beaten and whipped. His head is not bowed. His body is not in a grave. As Saint Paul wrote: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, EHV).

That’s what this Easter day is all about—Victory! Death has actually been conquered. Jesus had

certainly died. As a matter of fact, after he was already dead, the professional soldiers stabbed him in the heart to make sure he was dead. His body was then placed in a grave and sealed tight.

The blood that Jesus shed cleanses us from sin; not just ours, but the sins of the whole world. That victory was clear when Jesus said: “It is finished.”

There is still one more foe to be vanquished: Death. Paul writes: “Death is the last enemy to be done away with” (1 Corinthians 15:26, EHV). Jesus’ empty tomb makes it clear that he is more powerful than death. He claims victory over that last enemy.

Jesus met death up close. He let death grab hold of him, just as he permitted the soldiers to take him away in the garden. He volunteered to die. Every lamb that had been sacrificed on Jewish altars for the previous 1,400 years had foreshadowed, promised, and predicted the death of the Lamb of God. The God-man, Jesus, paid the penalty as the perfect, law-keeping human and as the only one who has ever lived who was big enough—because he is *also* true God—to make the perfect sacrifice to cover the sin and guilt of the entire world.

Jesus did something no one else has ever done: he *killed* death! He arose. He is stronger than the grave. Jesus was alive! Jesus *is* alive! The mighty rider on the white horse is a victorious rider.

There is no doubt. The Bible lists over a dozen different appearances of the risen Lord Jesus, including one time when there were 500 people present. Most of the gospel accounts, including St. Paul’s account of the resurrection, were written during the lifetime of thousands of people who were alive at the time of the first Easter. If it were not true, they would have said so and written so.

*Then* Christianity would have become just another fairy tale. If it had *not* happened, you would have expected books written by the Jewish leaders and the Romans that would have refuted the gospel accounts. But so many knew—either from personal experience or from what they heard directly from people who had experienced it firsthand. Jesus actually rose miraculously from the grave.

### III.

How important that is to all of us. You know death is coming for you, too, don’t you? We try our best to push it away. We spend more than a trillion dollars a year in the US alone to try to treat cancers, heart disease, and some of the more common threats to life. We have been—more or less—willing to nearly completely shut down our economy to mitigate the risk from this year’s new health threat.

But we can’t stop it. Death comes. Medically death arrives when the heart stops and the brainwaves irreversibly cease. There is no cure.

Except one. The empty tomb of Jesus proves his words about death are true: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies” (John 11:25, EHV).

That’s you. That’s me. We will rise because the One who conquered death said so. We must close our eyes in death, as Jesus did, and fall asleep—only to rise glorious. We must put off the mortal, perishable bodies and rise with immortal and imperishable bodies, just as Paul says: “In a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:52-53, EHV).

Paul’s words bring us back to our victorious Lord riding the white horse. He has power to do as he promised.

“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. <sup>13</sup>He is also clothed in a garment that had been dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup>The armies in heaven, which were clothed with white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>On his garment and on his thigh this name is written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:12-16, EHV).

Sometimes we think of our Lord Jesus as meek and mild. We remember mainly the pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and holding children on his lap while he urges the disciples to let the little children come.

Those are *not* inaccurate pictures, but there is another picture of Jesus, too. The words of our text are the last picture of Jesus the Bible gives us. Why does God want *this* image of Jesus to be on our brain?

The awesome power of Jesus is portrayed with the sharp sword and the iron staff, as he carries out the fierce anger of the Almighty God. Notice that his robe is “dipped in blood.” When you heard that, you might have thought it was a reference to his own blood, shed on the cross. But the reference of trampling the winepress of God’s fierce anger helps us understand that it is a very graphic picture of the battle with his enemies. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah had been inspired to write of Jesus: “Why is your clothing so red? Why are your garments like those of someone who has been trampling grapes in a winepress?” (Isaiah 63:2, EHV). The One robed in splendor proclaimed: “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples there was no one with me. So I stomped on them in my anger, and I trampled them in my wrath, and their juice splattered on my garments. I stained all my clothing” (Isaiah 63:3, EHV).

Why this anger and judgment? Jesus shed his innocent blood to wash away the sins of the world and rose again to demonstrate his power over death. These victories he freely gives to humanity. He reconciled the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). He promised that all who believe in God’s gift of his own Son would not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

What of those who refused his gracious gifts? Consider what Jesus taught in the parable of the wedding banquet. There was one guest who refused to wear the wedding garment freely given by the King. “The king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Matthew 22:13, EHV).

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.

On earth there are those who continue to refuse to honor him. They will be judged.

We also are here, but you and I are believers—heirs of heaven, children of God by his grace. We will rise from death and join the hosts of heaven in praise of our gracious Lord.

In heaven every voice—angels and humans together—will join in giving praise to the rider on the white horse who has used his power for us. He has cleansed us with his blood and covered us with his righteousness.

To our heavenly Father we look just like Jesus. See how much he loves us!

At the moment of our death the fear will be gone. The ugliness will be gone. The guilt and sin from the past are *already* gone. Those last minutes before our souls leave this body will change from thoughts focused on *this* life to an inexpressible joy. The splendid and beautiful land of heaven will explode into view. Our souls will come into the presence of this victorious Warrior who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

When he comes again in glory on the clouds of heaven, he will raise us from our graves. We will have perfect, eternal bodies. There will be peace and joy and love forevermore.

Here is the picture God gives at the end of the Bible: “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. <sup>4</sup>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” (Revelation 21:3-4, EHV).

You and I 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. Easter makes for a beautiful picture—it is the final victory. Amen.