

The Glorious Victory of Christ

Revelation 19:17-21

Sunday, January 29, 2017

We are now going to finish the last section of Revelation 19. If the Lord does not return or take us home yet, by God's grace we will be able to finish the remaining three exciting chapters of this wonderful book.

We have been looking at this book mostly from a negative perspective because of the judgments and plagues and trouble that are described in most of the chapters. At some points we even see the antiTrinity composed of Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet gaining upper hand over the believers. This has caused the martyred saints to utter this great cry, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Now that we are in Revelation 19, we see God's answer to that cry. Chapter 19 is about the second coming of Christ, the final great event that the saints of all ages are waiting for. This is the culmination of God's redemptive plan that His people have been anticipating throughout all of history. Some scholars are even willing to say that the second coming of Christ is the *climax* and the rest that happens after He comes, such as the destruction of his enemies at Armageddon, the millennium, final confinement of Satan to hell, and the judgment before the Great White Throne, the new heaven and earth, are only additional matters after the climax.

So today, we are going to continue to look at this great chapter about the Second Coming of Christ and see our mighty Lord destroy His enemies. But before we go to our text, let me give you a little **survey** of this wonderful doctrine of the Second Coming Christ. I will do this by answering three questions:

1. What are the different terms that refer to the Second Coming?

- In the NT the most frequently used term for the coming of Christ is **Parousia**, meaning "coming" or "arrival." It is used fifteen times of Christ's coming again at the end of the age. For example, Mt. 24:3 - "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"
- A second term used in the NT for Christ's second coming is **apokalupsis**, where we get the English word Apocalypse. This word means literally "revelation." Paul speaks of waiting for "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). At present the Lord Jesus is hidden from sight. But when He returns, He will be revealed and, according to Rev 1:7, *every eye will see him, even those who pierced him...*
- Another term that is used in the NT for Christ's second coming is **epiphaneia**, meaning "manifestation" or "appearance" (2 Thess. 2:8 - *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.*). The *Enhanced Strong Dictionary* says that often the word epiphaneia is used of "the glorious manifestation of the gods, and especially of their [coming] to help."

- The same event may be referred to with some combination using the word “**day**,” e.g., “the day of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:2), “the day of the Lord Jesus” or simply the day of Christ (2Co 1:14; 1Co 1:8; Phil. 1:6; 2:16). Sometimes this day is referred to as “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30) or even “the day of wrath” or “the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9). Sometimes it is called “the last day” (Jn. 6:39), “the great day” (Jude 6), “that day” (2 Thess. 1:10), or simply “the day” (Rom. 13:12). The phrase “the day” points to the fact of how critical this time is going to be. It is truly the consummation of God’s purpose throughout the history of the world. It is the time of God’s decisive and final intervention in history to destroy all evil. On that day all people will be judged and God’s will will be done perfectly. But “the day of the Lord” is not only negative; it also positive and speaks of the Lord’s mighty deliverance of His children.

2. What will be the manner of the Second Coming?

- The Second coming of Christ is going to be a *personal* return. He himself will return. He will not come by proxy.
- It is going to be visible. Unbelievers as well as believers will see, for “every eye will see Him” (Rev 1:7).
- It will not be a secret or silent event. His coming will be “with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1Th 4:16). Paul wrote also wrote in 1Co 15:51, “*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*”
- The coming of Christ will be as sudden and unexpected as the coming of a thief (1Th 5:2,4; 2Pe 3:10). This will be more so for those who live in darkness. Preoccupied with worldly affairs, unbelievers will be surprised like those on whom the Flood came or those who were destroyed in Sodom (Lk. 17:26-30, 34).
- No one will be able to determine the exact date Christ will come back again. Mt 24:36 “*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*” Acts 1:7, “*It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.*”
- But though we cannot know exactly when Jesus’ coming will occur, we are informed of certain signs that will precede it. “The gospel must first be preached to all nations” (Mk. 13:10.). There will be an increase in wickedness and a growing cold of love (Mt. 24:12), and widespread apostasy (Mt. 24:10; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:3f.). The antichrist will appear in the world scene and with the support of the false prophet and empowered by Satan, deceive the unbelievers.

A few years just before Jesus returns, there is going to be tribulation in this world. Jesus said in Mk 13:19-20 *For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved [or survive].*

Widespread calamities will strike, e.g., wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines (vv. 7f.), and signs in the heavens (vv. 24f.). We read also of persecutions of believers (v. 9). Many of the details of these troublesome

years are described in the Book of Revelation, from chapter 6 up to chapter 18.

3. Will Christ come before the Tribulation?

Some of you may be wondering where the rapture will happen in connection with the Tribulation. As I mentioned before, the timing of Christ's return in connection with the Tribulation is not very clear in Scripture. There is great debate among teachers of prophecy regarding this.

- **The Pre-tribulational:** The view that the rapture will occur before the seven-year tribulation. The church is removed from the earth for seven years, and then returns with the Lord at the end of the tribulation. John MacArthur holds this view.
- Then there is the so-called **Pre-wrath:** The view that the rapture happens sometime during the second half of tribulation; This view stresses that the first part of the tribulation is the antichrist's wrath on the world, while the second part is God's wrath. It is the later that the church is saved from.
- Then there is also the view called **Post-tribulational:** The belief that the rapture happens after the tribulation. The church is raptured, and then returns to the earth immediately to reign with the Lord in the kingdom. This is held by John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Douglas Moo.

My view is the posttribulational and I explained in one of our studies before why I changed my view from pretrib to posttrib. However, I want to be clear about this. I don't want to be dogmatic about this nor do I use this as a test of orthodoxy. I will not say that because someone holds a view that is different from mine that that person is not a Christian. This is one instance wherein believers need to learn to be humble and to be gracious to one other, especially in this topic of eschatology.

So that's our little doctrinal survey of the Second Coming of Christ. Now let's go to our text. Last week, we were in Rev 19:11-16 and we looked at the glorious description of Christ the coming conqueror. Today, we are going to look at Rev 19:17-21 and find out about the **glorious victory of Christ over His enemies**.

An Outline

1. The invitation to the birds of prey (vv 17-18)
2. The vision of the assembled armies (v 19)
3. The destruction by the conquering Christ (vv 20-21)

1. The invitation to the birds of prey (vv 17-18)

Once again an angel plays a key role in Revelation. John said, "*Then I saw an angel standing in the sun.*" This may mean that from the vantage point of John, the position of the angel was possibly in front of the sun and it was partially eclipsing it as the moon partially covers the sun in an eclipse.

The angel has positioned himself in a prominent place so that all the birds of prey could see and hear him. Once he calls out to the birds with a loud voice, all the birds that fly directly overhead will be able to see and hear him.

Now *with a loud voice* [the angel] *called to all the birds that fly directly overhead: "Come, gather for the great supper of God.* These birds are birds of prey such as eagles and vultures. But they may also include any flying bird. The Lord could easily change their natures so that they, like the birds of prey, will eat flesh.

The phrase "*great supper of God*" refers to that event when these birds are going to eat the flesh of the millions who will be slain by Jesus at Armageddon. The great supper is a radical contrast to the "the wedding supper of the Lamb" seen in Rev 19:9. The wedding supper of the Lamb is a wonderful fellowship and glorious destiny of the believers. The "great supper of God" symbolizes the destruction of Christ's enemies.

This invitation to the birds to a great supper is also found in Ezek 39:17.

"As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field: 'Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood.

In the NT, you will also find an interesting statement where Jesus mentions something about birds during the time of His second coming. At His Second Coming Jesus said that there would be corpses and birds of prey. Mt 24:27-28 reads:

27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Every time I read Mt 24:28, I wondered what it meant. I thought at first that this must not be literal but have some symbolic meaning to it. But if taken in a literal sense it means that Jesus is talking about the habits of vultures and how corpses attract them. At least that idea of corpses and vultures is consistent with what Revelation 19 tells us regarding birds being invited to the great supper of God where the food will be corpses of humans.

You may be wondering, "Where are all these birds going to come from?"

Now I got this idea from John MacArthur regarding an amazing discovery the Israelis made about the birds in Israel. The Israelis had such a major problem regarding their pilots and their planes. They realized that more lives were lost because of the birds that were colliding with their planes in flight. They even feared losing airliners going into Tel Aviv because so many birds were around the Tel Aviv Airport. There were sea birds, sea gulls and other birds around the sea. In one instance, a bird crashed into the cockpit of a plane in flight and literally decapitated the head of a pilot. And they realized that they were going to have to do something about this problem. And so they got some people together to study the whole problem. And what they did was they developed gliders and they started to fly with the birds. And they came across some amazing discoveries.

First of all, all the birds from Western Europe and all the way to Siberia, all the large birds from that area migrate south every year. And all of them migrate through Israel. Millions and millions of them. You say why? Because in their migration they need food, for one. And there's no food east of there

because it is utterly barren desert. And there's no food west of there because it is the sea. And so they fly down the narrow strip of Israel. And different bird groups come and millions and millions of them come, all flying through Israel for food.

There's another reason birds always fly through Israel, because Israel has thermals (an upward current of warm air) and the birds come in and can literally glide right down the thermals and until the thermals dissipate across the north of Africa. And so the birds come for the food and ride the thermals.

As the Israelis began to study these birds they discovered that each type of bird group always fly the same pattern at the same altitude at the same time of year. And so now they have trained all the pilots to fly at different altitudes at given periods of time from the migrating birds, and they have solved the problem. It's incredible.

Now, when the angel calls the birds of the that fly directly overhead, the birds will know the path well in going to Israel. Israel by that period will be filled with so many birds and they will come to the great supper of God.

Now, let's look at verse 18. This verse tells us more directly why the birds of prey are being invited. It is in order for them to eat the corpses of the slain enemies of Christ at the battle of Armageddon. Take note that the corpses include all classes of mankind and every status in life.

First, verse 18 says, *to eat the flesh of kings*, It's a terrible indignity for a king to lie unburied and for birds to eat his flesh. That's precisely what's going to happen. This is going to be the end of these last kings of the age. The birds are going to eat their flesh.

The birds will also eat *the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.*"

2. The vision of the assembled armies (v 19)

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

The *beast* is the leader of the assembled armies. The beast is the Antichrist (11:7; 13:1-8). He is the one who experienced a supernatural restoration from death and, with the support of the false prophet, was worshiped by all the unrepentant dwellers of earth.

the kings of the earth include the following:

- The "the kings from the east" found in Rev 16:12, *The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.*
- The kings also include the "ten kings" allied with the Beast. *Rev 17:12-14 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with*

- the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them,*
- The kings also include those mentioned in Rev 18:9 when the great city of Babylon fell. These are the kings *who committed sexual immorality with Babylon and lived in luxury.*

It is these specific kings of history, the kings of the earth at the endtime, which provide the ultimate fulfillment of Ps. 2:2-3:

*2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
3 "Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."*

The phrase "*the armies,*" consists of the entire number of earth dwellers or their representatives. This includes the followers and worshipers of the beast in Rev 13:3-4 who are further described in Rev 13:16 as "*the small and the great, both rich and poor, both free and slaved who have the mark of the beast on their right hand or forehead.*"

We may wonder how rational men could think of carrying out such an absurd plan such as to gather *to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.* This plan is sure to fail and yet these people try to attempt it. How could they do such a thing? The answer lies in this principle. "He who keeps on rejecting the truth, will be allowed by God to be deceived." Remember what Paul said in 2Th 2:10-12:

10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

And when you turn to Rev 16:14, you see what God allowed to happen to these unrepentant people. God allowed three unclean spirits like frogs, demonic spirits who perform signs to go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

And so the beast, the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered for military engagement against Christ and his armies at Armageddon. The next two verses tell us about the outcome of the battle.

3. The destruction by Christ (vv 20-21)

Verses 20-21 describe the victory of Christ the conqueror over the beast and his allies. Considering the momentous importance of this battle to world history, it is surprising that very few words are used to describe it. John includes no description of the course of the battle and no indication of any effective resistance. He simply notes

in v. 20, *And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet. ...* and v. 21 adds, *"and the rest were slain by the sword that come from the mouth of the Lord Jesus."*

Compared to the beast, the false prophet receives a longer description. He is the one who in the presence of the beast *had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image.*

Now the beast and the false prophet receive unique treatment. Rather than being killed, *These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.*

There are some who suppose that there is some discrepancy between the fate of the antichrist mentioned here and of the man of lawlessness in 2Th 2:8. Paul told the church at Thessalonica, *"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.*

In this verse in 2Thessalonians seems that Paul is saying that the beast or the antichrist is going to be killed. Then how come in Revelation, John says that He will be thrown alive. How do we reconcile these two seemingly opposite descriptions. The solution is this. The word "killed" in 2Th 2:8 in the Greek does not mean physical death. It could simply mean to "take away" or "to make an end of" usually in a violent way. And you can make an end of the antichrist and his evil acts, not necessarily by killing him but by simply removing him away from the scene of his actions.

In an instant, the beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire. Apparently, there has to be some kind of transformation that will happen to their bodies so that when they are thrown alive into the lake of fire, they are not consumed.

This is the first mention of the lake of fire. Any place separated from the presence of God is a hell of some kind, but this is the final form of that hell. This is the ultimate destination of Satan, his angels, and the unredeemed (Matthew 25:41 - *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*). The Lord Jesus Christ describes this place in Matthew 13:42 as a fiery furnace, a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Mark 9:48 our Lord says, that in that place *"their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."* Revelation 14:11 says of those who suffer there, *"The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest, day or night."*

And the first two to populate it are the Antichrist and the false prophet. They are the only two human beings in history to be thrown alive directly into the lake of fire. Some even say that they are the first to be incarcerated in hell. Perhaps because of the immensity of their sin against God, they are no longer going to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment. They are just immediately thrown to hell.

The lake of fire is not Hades. Hades is sometimes called hell in some translations but that is not yet the final hell. It is only a temporary place. [Hades is like city jail; hell is Bilibid prison.] The final hell is the lake of fire.

This lake of fire tells us one very important thing. It's good evidence that there's no such thing as annihilation of the ungodly. Some people say when the ungodly die, they're annihilated. That is wrong because according to Revelation 20:10, *"and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* This means that after the antichrist and false prophet were thrown to hell they didn't get annihilated. They were still there a thousand years later to be joined by Satan.

And John says this lake of fire *burns with sulfur*. Rev 21:8 also says that this is *"the lake that burns with fire and sulfur."* It's just to make a more graphic description. Sulfur is some kind of chemical that makes it explosively hot. Sulfur is an ingredient of gunpowder, and is used in making matches.

And that's what's going to happen to the rest of the people of the world, not just these two. The Antichrist and the false prophet have the privilege of being the first two to populate the final place of destruction, the eternal hell. But the rest of the world will follow. Rev 20:15 says, *"And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*

Going back to Rev 19, in verse 21 we read, *"And the rest were slain"* again emphasizes the unique treatment of the previous two in comparison with these. Unlike the Beast and the False Prophet, the rest of those who war against Christ are killed.

Although John does not mention, most probably, the destination of these souls is Hades, the very same place that the rich man went to in the story of our Lord Jesus in Luke 16:22-23.

Lk 16:22-23 The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

In Hades, the unbelievers undergo immediate torment while awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11). They will be in Hades awaiting judgment for the one thousand year period of the Millennial Kingdom.

Now how are the rest of the world of unbelievers killed? John says, *"by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse."*

The sword proceeding from the mouth of our Lord Jesus is a figure pointing to the powerful command of Jesus that could slay His enemies. With a word God could create a universe. And with a word the Lord could also destroy his enemies.

Two points of clarification:

1. What is going on here is not the final judgment of the ungodly. This is simply the execution of the ungodly sinners of the world who have sided with Satan during the time of the Tribulation. They are the ones who have sided with the Antichrist, who have taken his mark, who have worshiped him, who have continuously rejected the gospel. And Jesus comes down and kills them all.

2. The slaying of Christ's enemies will happen very quickly. There is no war here.

John Phillips has written, "Then suddenly it will be all over. In fact, there will be no war at all in the sense that we think of war, there will be just a word spoken from Him who sits astride the great white horse. Once He spoke a word to a fig tree and it withered away, once He spoke a word to howling winds and heaving waves and the storm cloud vanished and the waves fell still. Once He spoke to a legion of demons bursting at the seams of a poor man's soul and instantly they fled. And now He speaks a word and the war is over, the blasphemous loud-mouthed beast is stricken where he stands. The false prophet, the miracle working windbag from the pit is punctured and still. The pair of them are bundled up and hurled headlong into the everlasting flames. Another word and the panic-stricken armies reel and stagger and fall down dead, field marshals and generals, admirals and air commanders, soldiers and sailors, rank and file, one and all they fall and the vultures descend and cover the scene."

And then this statement closes the chapter, "*and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*"

The most graphic portrayal of Christ's second coming is found in Revelation 19:17-21. It describes the return of Jesus leading the armies in heaven to destroy His enemies, which will result in great physical destruction and many deaths. For those who are not Christ's own, it will be a terrifying and terrible event.

But again, as I said a while ago, that while the Second Coming of Christ will be a frightening prospect for unbelievers, this will be a time of great joy, vindication and anticipation for believers. So let me close this study with a positive note.

For the believer, the Second Coming of Christ is a blessed hope. Titus 2:13 says, that believers are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

This passage tells us that the "blessed hope" is the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. The word "**blessed**" can mean "happy" or "beneficial"; our hope is "blessed" in that Jesus' return will be an amazing, joyful experience for the believer in Christ. We will be blessed beyond measure when we see Christ. The trials of this life will be over, and we will see that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Here are other passages that speak of the blessedness that will happen to believers when Christ returns:

John 14:1-3 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

*Mk 13:26-27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and **gather***

his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

1Th 4:13-18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

*2Th 1:7 and **to grant relief to you who are afflicted** as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.*

- Relief from what? From sickness, problems, enemies, bullies, persecutors, insults, shame, poverty, loss of loved ones, failure, disappointments, troubles, frustrations, etc.
- When Christ returns, He will grant relief to the afflicted and so don't lose hope, don't kill yourself, don't escape, don't retaliate, don't get even. Keep holding on to your faith; continue to look to Jesus; trust in Him; rest in the sovereignty of God because it won't be long and we will see Jesus.

Let me close with this exhortation from Paul in light of the soon coming of Christ.

Romans 13:8-14 (NLT)

8 Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. 9 For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law.

11 This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. 13 Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.