

Rev 19:11-21
A Tale of Two Feasts

One of the most famous opening lines of all literature is from Charles Dickens in his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Many of you already know what it is:

“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

This describes what is presented in Revelation 19 as we note the contrast between the Two supper feasts.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

9 Then he *said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ ”

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself.

13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS.”

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God,

18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”

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

20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

A larger quote from Dickens is insightful. ...

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period... Dickens, Charles

In this time between the first and second coming of Christ, we see the sinfulness of sin and we get glimpses of eternal glory as the Spirit works in our lives and through others. We get such a glimpse as we gather in worship.

In this Tale of Two Feasts, we see the best of times and the worst of times:

Keep in mind that the presentation of these future events is designed to influence how we live our lives NOW. The promised future should guide our present hope.

As Americans we like to live for the here and now, but as Christians we need to live with the end in mind. The entire letter of Revelation is a reminder to live with the ultimate end in mind.

THE BEST OF TIMES... The Marriage supper of the Lamb where, as a believer in Christ, you are a guest

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready...

9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' "

THE WORST OF TIMES... The supper of God where, as an unbeliever or follower of the beast, you are on the menu v. 17

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.

We have spent time on the first feast, so today we'll look at the second feast, or the 'great supper of God.'

BUT FIRST I need to return to the question from Christmas day as we looked at v. 11-16. The question that I put off was that of "Whose blood is on the robe of the rider on the white horse?"

The rider is understood to be Christ Himself.

Some say that the blood is that of Christ, the Lamb who was slain. Yes, Jesus did lay down his life and his blood was shed for the salvation of His Bride, so that is a plausible explanation.

Others point out that this image represents Isa.63: 1-3 where we see God judging the nations.

"With garments of crimson colors ... garments like the one who treads in the wine press ... their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments." Christ is here identified as that divine warrior. In Isa. 63:4, the warrior seeks "vengeance" and "redemption" on behalf of His people, and the same goal is implicit here.

Beale, G. K.; Campbell, David. Revelation: A Shorter Commentary (p. 412).

Although his followers are robed in pure white, his own robe is stained red with blood (19:13). This is not his own blood, shed to redeem his people, as we heard earlier in Revelation (1:5; 5:9; 7:14). These bloodstains display the violent slaughter of God's enemies, for Christ "will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (19:15). Dennis Johnson

The Isaiah imagery seems to fit the best with the total picture that is presented in these final chapters. The king of Kings and Lord of Lords is the one who is just and true in His righteous judgement.

This image of Jesus isn't one that fits neatly into our Sunday school stories and our "Enlightenment" view of Jesus as a good man and role model, the perfect picture of a gentleman who would never offend anyone.

This image is disturbing and perhaps even offensive to us.

We've grown so accustomed to His grace that we forget or don't want to consider His Justice. This image of Jesus covered with the blood of His enemies doesn't square with the modern view of Jesus as a quiet man of peace. This Revelation 19 image of Jesus is rejected as unloving and intolerant.

Let's remember something important when it comes to hard passages like this...Ultimately, God doesn't owe us explanations. HE IS NOT ON TRIAL. We owe Him explanations.

He IS God; WE ARE NOT.

Scripture is remarkably unapologetic about the reality of God being a righteous judge.

Years ago, I heard Tim Keller respond to this concern about a God of Judgement by citing Yale theologian Miroslav Volf. A Croatian, who watched his people suffer bitterly at the hands of Serbian aggressors. In his book, Exclusion and Embrace, Volf makes the point **that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance. The only way to non-violence is to believe in a God who gets angry at injustice. It takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, this thesis will invariably die... Violence thrives today secretly nourished by the belief that God refuses to take the sword" "** (Keller, *Reason for God*, 74).

i.e. this thesis that non-violence that is equated to God's refusal to judge is born and thrives among those who live in nice, quiet, peaceful suburbs or towns.

(Volf paraphrase...)

For people living in a war zone, who have seen their homes plundered and burned, sisters raped, brothers murdered, the secular virtue of nonviolence is naïve. It is the belief in a God of Justice that enables people to refrain from retribution.

If God were not angry at injustice and did not make a final end of violence we could not refrain from retaliation and such a God would NOT be worthy of worship. When you are hurt and violated what keeps you from the cycle of violence is knowing that there is a God who Himself knows what people deserve. That way you don't have to judge; he'll do it. Romans 12:19

Deep down we want a righteous judge to set things right.

John's audience doesn't live in nice quiet suburbs. They are or will experience some of the worst persecution that the church has ever seen.

What keeps them from despair? What enables them to hold firm in the faith?

A vision of the Victorious Christ who is Faithful and True in righteousness and in judgement.

John doesn't see a hipster Jesus flashing peace symbols. He sees a Divine Warrior King of the universe who comes to conquer His and our enemies. His eyes are like flames of fire and there is a sword in His mouth. He rules the nations with a rod of iron, and he treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God.

THIS IS THE unveiled Christ who gives HOPE to His people.

The Psalms are full of the Hope that comes from faith in a God who will do make Himself known as a righteous judge.

As I was preparing this sermon on Monday, the 9th, I read Psalm 9 and it resonated with this idea of God being on the throne as one who will give judgment for the peoples in righteousness. V. 8.

It concludes with these words:

Arise, O LORD, do not let mortals prevail;

Let the nations be judged before You.

20 Put them in fear, O LORD;

Let the nations know that they are but mortals.

The problem of sin is that mortals esteem themselves to be like God _ Gen 3. This is the deep-seated heart problem of mankind. This sin issue reaches its peak as seen in the anti-God secular regimes promoted by the Dragon and the Beasts. AS MANY PSALMS AND REVELATION SHOW, THEIR DOOM IS SURE.

This image of Isa 63 and Revelation 19 depicts what is referred to in the OT as “The Day of The Lord” i.e. a time that indicates God’s dramatic and decisive intervention in the affairs of men and nations. This is the ultimate “Day of the Lord.”

In Revelation we’ve seen how the various cycles give different perspectives on the same time period, so to we see this pattern as the Day of the Lord, or the final battle is depicted.

Dennis Johnson also points out how the text of Revelation 19 and 20 also echoes the passage from Ezek 38-39.

Ezekiel’s portrayal of Gog and Magog’s destruction under the wrath of the Lord provides vivid and apt imagery for the vision in which John sees the utter defeat and condemnation of the beast, the false prophets, and all the earth-dwellers whom they’ve deceived and lured into suicidal rebellion against the Lord and his Christ.

The reference to the Beast in v. 19 takes us back to chapters 12-13 where we are introduced to the Dragon and the two beasts who represent the Secular state with its anti-God focus and the False prophet who deludes the masses into giving assent and allegiance to the global anti-God government. The evil partner of the Dragon, Babylon, the great prostitute is given to work with the beast, but he ends up turning on her, murders and mutilates her.

Now the Beast is threatened by the Rider on the white horse, i.e. Christ, who is no longer a vulnerable baby, but the Ultimate Warrior King of prophecy. He’s back and He’s ready to wage war against the Beast and his followers. Some might think that the outcome is in doubt. The Beast has the kings of the earth aligned with him.

They are no match for the one who wears many crowns and diadems and who wields in his hand a rod of iron.

The outcome is described in v. 17-18 as the ‘great supper of God’. The birds of midheaven are called to this feast where they will eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses, their riders, and the flesh of all men, free and slave, both small and great.

God is no respecter of persons. His justice is distributed fairly across the board.

What does this picture represent? Total destruction of the enemies of Christ. There are so many that they can’t be buried. Their bodies lie out in the open to be devoured by the birds. This is a sign of dishonor. Remember the words of Goliath to David (1 Sam 17)... *Come to me, I will feed your flesh to the birds of the sky.*

Or as the Outlaw Jose Wales put it, “Buzzards gotta eat too.”

I can’t imagine a greater contrast than the two Feasts depicted in Rev 19.

We all end up at one of them – either the invited guest as the Bride of Christ or the entrée for the birds of the sky.

These are the only two alternative destinies. Do you know which is yours?

The marriage supper of the Lamb or the great supper of God?

v. 19-21 give a RECAPITULATION of the Battle of Armageddon

This is not just “a” war, but “THE” WAR mentioned 3 times with the definite article – here in ch 19, 20, and back in 16. They all refer to the same war, this war between Christ and the Beast along with the kings of the earth.

v. 20-21 show the brevity of the battle. There is no description of the battle because it is over immediately. The enemies are defeated by the power of the presence of Christ and the sword from His mouth.

A picture is worth a thousand words and here we get a vivid picture of the victory of Christ. We can talk about it in propositional truth, but the image of the Rider on the white horse is given to convince God's people that He is in control.

This passage is designed to unveil hope to those who are seeking to stand firm in the face of opposition. We can also take hope and get a fuller picture of Jesus. He is the Lamb who was slain and the Victorious Lion of Judah – the champion of the Church.

Chapter 13 asks this question...

Who is like the beast and who is able to wage war against him? (13:4).

The answer is

Christ the cosmic conqueror on the White Horse.

Believer, take heart and stand firm for Christ is fighting for us.

Amen

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