

Here Comes Jesus
Revelation 19
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The evening of July 4, 2011 found us in the beautiful city of Louisville, Kentucky. As the curtain of darkness began to descend upon the city, we opened the curtains of our 23rd story room only to discover the beginnings of an annual fireworks show. For the first time in my life, I was privileged to view the bursting shells of an Independence Day celebration on eye level. Several times during the show, a crest in the tempo would rise with multiple shells exploding all within a few seconds of each others. As I read the final chapters of Revelation I think about the many shells exploding during the grand finale. They were all parts of the show occurring simultaneously. From our vantage point we would have likely described the event much differently than the masses of people positioned at ground level. One could describe any of the individual shells or try to describe an overview of the entire event. In these final chapters of Revelation, we see many events unfolding simultaneously. They are all part of the consummation of the current age yet are described individually. They are all connected yet viewed independently.

Revelation 18 has described the overthrow of evil in a manner understandable to the recipients of the original writing. They viewed Rome as an evil empire. Rome was persecuting the early church and early Christians along with traditional Jews believed their culture of life was seducing the entire world to live in her evil. The reference to Babylon is clearly code language for Rome. The early church would have reveled in her collapse as predicted in chapter 18. We can view that chapter as a description of God's complete victory over evil. God overthrows the system and then deals with the powers driving the system, namely, the beast, the false prophet, and the antichrist.

A Glorious Time of Worship

Chapter 18 has been called a funeral dirge leading to the praises of victory in the first part of chapter 19. The first five verses record the praise service which follows the overthrow of evil. Verse 1 gives insight into the celebration. A great multitude shout, "Hallelujah," which literally means, Yahweh be praised. This phrase is particularly fitting in light of the cause for celebration. For centuries man has praised the works of his hands, the thoughts of his mind, and the riches of this world. He has relished in her sensuality and lived as if he were his own God. This lure of the world has drawn many astray yet when God overthrows that evil's seduction, rightful praise is given to God. No longer will man praise idols and false Gods. God is recognized then as the one who brings salvation, who has glory, and who has the power.

The sweet taste of victory always gives rise to celebration and fan fare. The celebration occurring after the fall of evil will be like nothing ever known. Verse 3 points out that the saints will recognize that God has avenged the blood of the martyrs. For thousands of years enemies of Christ and His people have thought they were winning. They have gloated and killed saints. All around the world today martyrdom of Christians continue. Ladies and gentlemen, when all the martyrs of all the ages see the glorious Lord victorious over the evil influence that has encouraged and motivated anti godly words and actions, it will be a celebration to behold. A second time they shout, praise be to Yahweh. Verse 5 is like a summons from heaven that all danger has passed, give praise because the hour has come.

Verse 6 announces the reign of God the Almighty. We should not think that Christ has not been reigning; for the Kingdom is His. However, the kingdom of darkness is being dispelled at this time. The allowance God has made for Satan to play on this earth among God's creation is coming to an end. This is the time when everything on earth will be in submission to the reigning Christ.

Symbols are an extremely valuable ingredient of apocalyptic literature. The revelator uses the image of a wedding to give an incredible description of the final victory over evil. The bride has been made ready. Most New Testament believers equate the bride of Christ with the church. The picture here is of the Lord courting His bride. He has given himself for her; having forgiven her of her many transgressions against him. He has loved her and he has gone to battle for her. An opposing force has been in competition with him and has seduced her in various ways at various times. Finally he has won her total allegiance and the opposition has been defeated. In a gracious act he declares forgiveness by giving her the privilege of dressing in a white gown. He sees the righteous acts and has forgiven sin. All who have received His forgiveness are invited and all who are invited attend this marriage feast.

John becomes so enamored with the message that he falls down at the feet of the messenger as to worship. He is quickly corrected and reminded that the vision is coming from a messenger who does not deserve worship. Perhaps for an instant John mistook the messenger to be Christ. The message is strong, only the living God deserves our worship. As with differing times of Christian history, angels were gaining a strong favor in the first century. Men have through the ages and were in this age worshipping angels instead of God. The clear warning is to worship God and be thankful for the messenger He uses to bring His message.

The Return of Christ

For over 2000 years, Christ has worked through the Holy Spirit on this earth. At this consummation of the age, Christ will return. He is pictured here on a white horse symbolizing absolute power and authority. His faithfulness is in full view along with his identity as the truth. All falsehoods are coming to complete disclosure and deception is no match for truth. From the position of truth, Christ has the deserved position of judge and can do so with complete righteousness (Verse 11). From the position of righteousness he wages a war driven by justice against injustice. Verse 12 continues the description by speaking of eyes full of the flame of fire which symbolizes his ability to look through all deception to see the underlying reality. He has many diadems or crowns which is a direct contrast to the 7 diadems of the dragon and 10 of the sea beast. He has won victories too numerous to count.

Jesus appears with a name written which remains a mystery. Surely this is a symbol to humans that although we understand many facets of the Lord and His majesty, in many ways He remains a mystery to man. He is beyond our comprehension. His robe is dipped in blood which has been a subject of many interpretations. Some have suggested the blood of the martyrs; others have suggested the blood of those He is warring against, while others see it as His own bloodshed on Calvary. In symbolic apocalyptic fashion, it seems most plausible to be the blood of those who are being defeated. The blood of the enemies on his own garment signifies his victory and the cost of the battle.

John links the first few verses of both his Gospel and his first epistle with the truth about Christ, his name is the Word of God. This is the name and the power which will now go forth in conquering fashion. An army follows Christ and they too are mounted on white horses. There is no blood on their clothes as they are dressed in clean white linen; the battle belongs to the Lord. The army is not identified. It is most likely the host of heaven since the resurrection is yet to come. Verse 15 describes the sword in his mouth which is the word of God. This sword is figurative for the only weapon needed by the Lord is the words that come from his mouth. His words establish the truth and falsehood buckles

under the presence of truth. Words are nothing more than ideas that back up some reality. The words on His robe and thigh are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is one thing for a human to claim to be a king or lord; it is something quite different for someone to come with those titles that possess the reality of fulfilling the assigned name. When God comes with the declaration of kingship and the powers of evil are under full subjection to His presence, every king will bow to him.

Verses 17 and 18 paint a picture of vultures coming to eat the flesh of all that would rot due to the huge presence of death. Vultures are on the earth to clean it from the decay of dead flesh. Dead, rotting flesh is a reminder to humans of the great tragedy and consequences of sin. Christ will bring a cleansing when he comes in judgment. The stage is set for the final showdown. Evil has been overcome and like the exploding shells of the fireworks show, another is coming in full view as one fades into the background.

With the coming of Christ and His power overcoming all the powers of the earth, the beast is fully exposed along with the false prophet. This presence of evil which has so effectively deceived man for thousands of years is now naked before the world. The only power he has is one of deception and truth has laid deception bare. Jesus lays hold of this beast and the false prophet and cast them into the lake of fire. All other evil was killed by the word of his mouth and the presence of God cleans up the mess.

The applications for modern believers from this chapter are many. We live in the age of deception even though we live in the age of the church. Evil will eventually be completely exposed by the Word of Truth which is the person of Jesus Christ. He will totally expose the darkness. We have been given the written Word of God which also exposes the evil of this world. On a personal level it exposes the darkness in each of our lives. Victory today is walking in the truth which exposes the darkness. The battle rages on two fronts. One is the battle of the mind the other is the battle of the heart. The heart is sinful and turned within. This heart fuels the pleasures of sin for a season. With the mind we justify the desires of the heart and are deceived. In order to be victorious both the mind and the heart must be humble resulting in total submission to the living God. Pride is then cast aside and repentance takes full control.