

Revelation 19:11-16

Ascension, Supplement Series C, May 5, 2016

Theme: The Rider on the white horse fights for me

INJ Sometimes it wears on me that Christians are under attack all the time. What we confess is portrayed as foolish or old fashioned. We are mocked because we believe God made all things by his word. We state that killing babies is wrong, and somehow we are despised as hateful. Insisting that God instituted marriage for one man and one woman in a lifelong relationship of love makes us bigoted. Supporting abstinence and purity is laughable stupidity to many.

I don't think I am the only one who gets weary of the constant battles. Some church bodies have caved to the pressure and no longer stand on the truth. Many individual Christians have adopted positions that are in conflict with God's Word – and not only with political hot button issues. Our friends add to the confusion with their wavering opinions, making a faithful confession less common and more hated.

The opposition affects our habits. For many, regular worship is not a priority. Other things are just as important and more likely to attract our attention. Our time is stretched thin and we are not so eager use it to build our fellowship or to serve our neighbors. Church is more of a place we go to and less a family that we are eager to encourage and support. It is just easier to take the path of least resistance and avoid some of the skirmishes than it is to be bold and steadfastly stand on the Truth.

This evening we observe the Ascension of our Lord. Our weary eyes see our Savior return to his heavenly home, but this is not our loss. Jesus rules all things for the good of his Church. He will come back in glory to take us to be with him forever. Though we are tired and hard pressed, our Lord Christ encourages us. He promises to send his Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit he gave a vision to the Apostle John (and to us) so we would not lose heart. The Rider on the white horse fights for us. This Rider is not a scary figure, but one who shows that God is with us. We will emerge victorious from the battle. Stand firm and trust in the Lord's deliverance!

John sees this vision as the curtains of heaven are pulled back and he peers into the glory that has been prepared for us. What he sees is complex and full of meaning. Walk through this description of Jesus and take note of the things that give encouragement and joy. Can you picture it? The Rider is on a white horse. The color white is a symbol of purity. The good guys always ride the white horse, right? When we are beleaguered by the world and our sinful flesh, here comes our rescue and salvation!

The Rider is called Faithful and True. Faithfulness is a characteristic that seems difficult to find in our experience. People tend to take advantage of a situation. They may say one thing but do another. They hide their real intentions. Not so with the Rider on the white horse! He is faithful to his word. He has come to defend us from all the enemies that threaten us. He has come to save us from them and bring us to the glory of heaven. Do not be afraid, for the Rider on the white horse is Faithful.

And he is True. He speaks no half-truths. There is no manipulating emotions. The path he clears for us is the only one and the true one. Remember that Jesus once said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The Truth is exactly what we need to hear. Truth is that we are full of sin. We are corrupt to our core. We have no good thing within us and we cannot do anything that is pleasing to God on our own. The Truth is that we are dead, blind, enemies of God by nature. We truly need a Rescuer.

The Rider on the white horse is that Rescuer. God revealed the Truth. He took on our flesh to defeat sin and death and Satan. He came to crush the Devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. By truly obeying every detail of God's law, Jesus met the Father's demand for holiness. By truly dying on the cross, Jesus paid the debt sinners owed for sin. He gives us his holiness and he takes away all our guilt. The truth of his resurrection proclaims it. Jesus' ascension to heaven on this day affirms that he returns to the Father with his work truly completed and the victory truly won.

Truth is attacked viciously in our world. Some deny that anything is objectively true or false – even genders! Others reject specifically Christian truths like the miracle of the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. They laugh at us who trust in Jesus. The faithful and true things he proclaims they find ridiculous. Yet this Rider encourages us. He fights – no, he has won the battle and he will deliver us to glory.

Watch him jump into action. John writes that he judges and makes war with justice. He is not tricked by the sneaky way people twist and turn language so that wrong seems right and right seems wrong. He is not lulled into inaction because the choices are difficult. He judges rightly. He calls sin, sin. He exposes what is opposed to the gospel and those who oppress believers. He makes war against them to defeat them and destroy them. We who suffer under the oppression and groan beneath the constant pressure have to cheer as the Rider steps in for us. The Rider on the white horse fights for us!

His eyes are like blazing fire. He sees through the smokescreen and peers into the depths of the soul. Those who stand against him cannot hide.

They will not escape. The Rider is determined to root out all evil and eliminate it completely. Look at his blazing eyes!

Just above those eyes, on his head, are many crowns. He is King, ruler of all the earth. He does not have just one crown there, as the ruler of one area or as a king among many other kings. He is the only King. All others have thrown their crowns upon him. He alone has all authority in heaven and on earth. Every knee must bow before him and submit to his rule. None can stand against him.

The name that the Rider is given underscores his fearsome power and determined purpose. "He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself." That is a strange sentence to us, but consider that Biblical names often express truths about the identity of the bearer. The name Jesus means Savior. Immanuel means God with us. The Holy Spirit is called the Counselor. That no one knows this name is an ominous reminder of his mission. What will he do? How will he do it? Like Special Ops in the military, no one knows the details, but you can be sure it will happen. All who hate God and his word will experience judgment when the Rider on the white horse makes war against them in truth and faithfulness.

This Rider, if you haven't made the connection yet, is Jesus our Savior. He is pictured for us in his role after his Ascension. He works all things for the good of his Church. He rules the world in justice. He will come again to put an end to all sinful rebellion and rescue his believers so they will live with him in heaven. When you feel overwhelmed by the way things in this sinful world are going; when you are pessimistic about what is happening, picture this Rider on the white horse. He is at your side and nothing will turn him away. You are safe because your Jesus fights for you.

John next describes him as being dressed in a robe that is dipped in blood. His garments are stained red, not because of the blood he shed to pay for sins, but because of the blood of those enemies he has slain. They are many. They are steadfastly opposed to Jesus. They will fall before him. None will survive. Compare the battle with the Egyptians who perished as the waters of the Red Sea crashed down on them. Moses wrote about it in our first lesson. They didn't stand a chance, going against the Lord God.

The next name given to this victorious warrior is the "Word of God." St. Paul says the Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit. The writer to the Hebrews says it "penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Jesus uses his word to engage those who stand against him. It is the same word we speak and know. By it the Lord uncovers sin and exposes guilt. There he condemns all who will not trust Jesus the only Savior. The

Word of God cuts down all evil even as it strengthens and comforts all who trust in it. Jesus is the Word of God, and he works powerfully as we proclaim his law and his gospel. He fights for us and has won the victory.

The bloody warrior on the white horse is accompanied in John's vision by the host of the armies of heaven. Notice that they are not sprinkled in blood. They are dressed in clean white linen. They are pure because the Savior has washed them and made them clean. They do not fight this battle, for it already has been won by Jesus. They proclaim the victory. They shout the glory of the Rider on the white horse. They and we worship and serve him who has brought us to glory. We have rest and will enjoy the peace of God forever.

Peace was won through the saving work of Jesus. He is the Rider who now has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth, with which to strike down the nations. None will be able to withstand him. No alliance of nuclear powers will deter him. No cyber strike will disable him. No mob will divert him. Jesus will destroy every enemy and rescue his people.

The picture gives a few more details to express the thoroughness of the dominance of the Rider on the white horse. He is crowned with many crowns, and he will rule with an iron scepter. The rod that symbolizes his power is not wishy washy or bendable. It is strong and firm and it will crush those who resist it. The final phrase fills the picture full: "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." The winepress is the vat where grapes are squished to extract the juice from the pulp. Those enemies of the Lord will be squashed under the unquenchable fury of God Almighty who is angry at their insolence. They will not survive this battle. All who laugh at God will be condemned in his judgment.

The final name given to this Rider on the white horse is written on his robe and on his thigh: King of kings and Lord of lords. He is not a ruler among many. He is not just one of several powerful forces. He is the only one. The most powerful and excellent King and Lord. None are his equal. This is the One who fights for us. Jesus has returned to his Father in heaven and he rules with power and might. Under his care we are safe and secure. Do not be afraid, for the Rider on the white horse fights for you.

The picture John relates to us is impressive. We need not fear any opposing force. Though the church may seem small and lowly, it has a victorious Savior. Though it seems the faithful are dwindling and there will be none left who confess the truth, the Lord defends his own. Though we are weak and hard pressed, we are not alone. Do not lose heart, but lift up your head. Jesus, the living and ascended Savior will take you, and all his believers to heaven. The Rider on the white horse fights for us! SDG Amen.