

FOLLOWING CHRIST IN A FRIGHTENING WORLD:

*A HERO ON A WHITE HORSE*

*Revelation 19:11-16*

April 16,2000---Dr. Mark James Toone

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As most of you know I did youth ministry in Bakersfield, California for nine years. One Saturday a family in our youth program invited our group out to their little ranch. They had a few acres, a barn and one mare. Growing up as I did on a few acres myself with a nag of a horse named Monty, I thought I would show this city kids a thing or two about horses. So I went into the barn, found the tack and began to saddle the horse. I led her out, got on, trotted out of the corral and, once we were in the field, kicked her into a gallop. We hadn't gone more than thirty yards when, suddenly, the cinch strap, which I had improperly tied, slipped. The saddle whipped right around the horse's belly and I went flying into the pasture while the mare galloped off into the sunset, the saddle hanging from beneath her. I don't know what hurt more, my hip, which was sore for weeks, or my ego from having all my kids watch me make a fool out of myself. I wanted to be a hero for them on that horse. What they got was something else entirely.

Two thousand years ago, the Jews were also awaiting a conquering hero on a horse, a messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression. On that first Palm Sunday, instead, they got something else entirely. Ah...but when we turn to this morning's text...now this is more like it.

I have been to Israel five times. Each time, one of the obligatory stops is the Mount of Olives where we look out over Gethsemane, the Kidron Valley and up the other side to the Old City of Jerusalem. After we have enjoyed a glorious view of the Temple Mount, we walk down the route that tradition says Jesus took when he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is steep and windy. And it isn't so modernized that one cannot imagine crowds gathered around the Lord as he made this triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus had sent two disciples to find the donkey. They did so. The rest of the disciples made a saddle out of their cloaks. If you've ever seen the protruding spine on the back of a third world donkey, you can understand why such padding would be necessary. As Jesus

road down the side of the Mount of Olives, crowds gathered. They cut branches---we are never told what kind they are; we only assume them to be Palm branches---and spread them on the road in front of him. They greeted him with shouts of Hosanna, which means, "Save!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," they said.

There are two times prior to his resurrection that we catch a glimpse of the glorious Jesus---the Jesus who left his eternal relationship with his father in heaven to come to earth; the Jesus who would one day return to take all of his children unto himself. Can you think of the first "glory" moment? The transfiguration. When Jesus stood on a mountain with Peter, James, and John and they watched as his clothing became bright white and he was joined by Elijah, the prophet, and Moses, the lawgiver. For that instant, the three disciples saw Jesus as the angels once had seen him.

The other "glory" moment is this one right here. For in this Palm Sunday story, we find Jesus doing what he was so reluctant to do: receiving the accolades of the people. Ordinarily, when Jesus did some extraordinary miracle of healing, what did he tell the person to do? Tell no one! Even the demons tried to testify as to who he was but Jesus hushed them, too. But here, finally, as Jesus approaches the end of his life on earth, he allows the crowds to acknowledge him for who he was: their Messiah. Their long-anticipated King.

The only thing is, this wasn't quite what they had in mind. It's true, Zechariah had talked about the King of Zion coming to them riding on a donkey. But a much stronger, much more impressive tradition persisted. This tradition said that the Messiah would come as a conquering soldier, seated on a great white charger. And, frankly, if you had seen Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, you might have thought a lot of things. But you wouldn't have thought, "Look at the conquering soldier." The Jews were expecting Roy Rogers on Trigger; the Lone Ranger on Silver. What they got was a rabbi on a donkey named Pedro. (We aren't certain the donkey was named Pedro, but there is a strong tradition that it was.)

Now...when you turn to this morning's text...this is a more like it. This is what we expected. This glorious image of a conquering hero on a white horse. He sits at the front of an entire heavenly army. All of them are mounted on white horses. All of them are dressed in fine white linen. The battle has not yet even been fought, but we know we are looking at the victor. Listen to the ways in which this hero on a white horse is described:

**Eyes blazing like fire:** This isn't the first time we have seen this, is it? Way back in chapter one, there was a vision of one who was like a Son of Man. He, too, had piercing, laser-like eyes. What does this mean? It means that nothing is hidden from his eyes. There are no surprises. His vision pierces through the phoniness and subterfuge and sees right into the soul. The rider is described as one who judges with justice. He does so because he sees right through the lies. He knows the truth, the whole truth.

I once worked with a pastor named Rick Irish. He had eyes like this. He looked straight into your eyes and you felt like he was boring his way into your soul. Frankly, it was unnerving. Imagine bearing up under the scrutiny of the blazing eyes of Jesus himself.

**Many crowns:** On the rider's head sit many crowns. They aren't numbered for us. But crowns represent sovereignty and we are led to believe that this rider has unmatched authority. At first, it sounds like it must be a funny looking sight. Like one of those Chinese acrobats balancing plates on top of his head. Why the "many" crowns? Well, who else wears crowns in this book? Remember the dragon, the character that Revelation describes as Satan? How many crowns did he wear? Seven of them on his seven heads. Remember the Sea Beast? How many crowns did he wear? Ten of them on his ten horns. Well, here, sitting on the one head of this one rider are "many" crowns. Even in the face of a seven-headed dragon or ten-horned beast, his authority is unmatched.

What else do we see when we look at this rider? **A robe dipped in blood.** Most commentators believe this to be the blood of his enemies. The conquering Christ has utterly defeated his enemies. The blood of his foes stains his garment. But here's the thing: the battle hasn't taken place yet. The battle doesn't come until verse 19. Whose blood is it, then? If it isn't the blood of his enemies, whose

blood is it? His own! Think back to chapter 5. Why was the Lamb of God worthy to break open the seals on the scroll of human destiny? Because he was slain. Listen to the song of the elders again: “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

There is no question that this image of Jesus is one of warfare and victory. He is about to engage in the battle of the ages in which he will ultimately defeat all of his enemies. But the blood he bears on his garments as he rides into battle is not the blood of his enemies. It is his own shed blood. It is his not-so-secret weapon. In fact, even though the battle is yet to be fought, it has already been won. It was won on Jesus’ cross. As he rides in to do battle against his stubborn and evil enemies, his garments stained with his own blood are an obvious reminder that they are doomed. They are done for.

And what is his weapon? **A sharp sword proceeding from his mouth:** What is the weapon that Jesus will use to bring judgment upon the earth? Think about this carefully. What is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword? The Word of God. How did God create all things? By his word. When Jesus healed, how did he usually do it? By his word. When Jesus cast out demons, how did he do it? By his word. When Jesus raised Lazarus, how did he do it? By his word. When the soldiers approached Jesus in Gethsemane, how were they knocked to the ground? By his word.

Do you realize what is being said here? When Jesus returns, he is not going to have a literal sword sticking out of his mouth. He won’t need it. His words will be all the weapon he needs. This dragon hasn’t a chance. He was created by the word of Jesus. And with that same word, he will be destroyed. The Sea Beast...the Land Beast. They don’t stand a chance. Jesus will slay them with his word. All that is in rebellion against the Lord will one day fall...and they will do so because of the piercing power of his speech.

**His names:** Four times we are told something about the name of this rider.

**Faithful and True:** Here we return to the very first name by which the rider on the white horse is described: faithful and true. We might have our own ideas of what that means but in the biblical context, these words mean that he is one who will keep his covenant. He is the real thing. He is genuine. The real McCoy. Now why would this be the first description of the rider on the white horse? Well, this isn’t the first rider on a white horse we have met, is it? Do you remember the first time we encountered one in this book? Way back in chapter 6. Remember? The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The first four seals that were broken open by the Lamb of God.

What color was the first horse? White! At first glance, the two images seem similar. But there are many differences. The first Horseman of the Apocalypse has one crown. Jesus wears many crowns. The first horseman holds a bow. Jesus’ weapon is his very word which proceeds like a sword from his mouth. The first horseman is described as “bent on conquest.” Jesus isn’t bent on anything. He has already conquered. He is already victorious. He won the victory on the cross.

In other words, the first horseman is a counterfeit. It is Jesus who is faithful and true, Jesus who is the genuine article.

He is called the **“Word of God”** in verse 13. What does that remind you of? Remember the opening words of the gospel of John? “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.” The word for “Word” is logos. It is the same word that appears here. This is pre-existent one, the Logos who existed in the beginning with the Father. The Logos who was with the Father. And yet the Logos who was the Father. This Word...this Logos...was the creative agent of God. Remember how God created in Genesis? He spoke everything into existence. Here, seated on this great white horse, is the eternal Logos of God.

We are also told that he has another name written on him that no one knows but himself. You would be amazed at the speculation of commentators on what that name might be. Don’t they get it? **No one knows but he himself.** What is the point of speculating? In ancient times, it was thought that if you knew

the name of a creature, it gave you power over it. Here is Jesus, the incarnate God who revealed himself to his own creation. Yet in this verse we are reminded of something very important. There is still more to know about Jesus. We will never know it all. No matter how long we know Jesus, no matter how much we study him, there is more to be found. More to be known. And some things that we mere mortals will never discover. As Dale Bruner puts it, “There are no graduates from the school of Jesus.”

**King of King and Lord of Lords:** Written on the part of his robe that lays across his thigh...the most visible place on a horseman...is another name. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is the name made famous in Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus. In this most visible way, the rider makes a claim that no one or nothing else can ever make. There may be other kings. But he is the King of kings. There may be other lords. But he is the Lord of lords.

Jesse Ventura once said he likes being king because there is no one over him. Sorry Jesse! You are wrong. There is someone over you. Powerful rulers around the world may not believe in Jesus. May not believe there is a god. May not believe that there will come a time of reckoning. But it makes no difference whether they believe it or not. For there is a King of kings and a Lord of lords. Presidents, prime ministers, kings, queens, potentates, dictators, tyrants, tribal chiefs...they may have power. They may have status. They may have authority for a time. But whether or not they acknowledge him, there is another...one who wears many crowns...who is above all of them. And the scriptures say that one day EVERY knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and EVERY tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father.

I had to juggle our texts in order to have this reading this morning. We’ll come back to the texts we left behind. But I wanted to use this reading for Palm Sunday. Because the two glimpses we have of Jesus this morning pose an important question to each listener. We have the image of Jesus on the donkey. Or the image of Jesus on a white warhorse. And my question to you, my friends, is this: which rider do you wish to meet? The Jesus of Palm Sunday and the Jesus of Revelation 19 stand in stark contrast to each other. Which one do you wish to meet?

For if there is any clear truth that comes out of our study of Revelation, it is this: One day, God's patience will be spent. One day, God will return in Jesus Christ to finally and forever destroy all that is evil upon this world. Those who wish to be counted among the faithful followers of the lamb will see him in one way. Those who wish to live in rebellion against God will see him in another way altogether.

So I ask again. Which Jesus do you want to meet? Which rider do you want to meet?

The Jesus who rides on a donkey or the Jesus who rides on a warhorse?

The Jesus whose eyes brim with tears as he weeps over the city of Jerusalem? Or the Jesus whose eyes are ablaze with fire.

The Jesus whose head is crowned with thorns? Or the Jesus whose head is crowned with many crowns?

The Jesus who refrains from calling upon the angels to save him from the cross? Or the Jesus who is followed by an army of heavenly hosts?

The Jesus who had a spear driven into his side? Or the Jesus who has a sharp sword proceeding from his mouth with which to strike down the nations?

The Jesus who walked the Via del la Rosa...the way of Sorrows? Or the Jesus who has trod the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God?

The Jesus whose name was written on a sign and spiked above his head on a cross? Or the Jesus whose name is written on his robe and thigh: Here is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that donkey, he was a king coming in peace. He was a king coming to lay down his life for his subjects. When Jesus comes again, he will not be mounted on a donkey. He will be seated on a horse of war. And he will bring the righteous judgment that has been so long delayed. My friends, you will meet one rider or the other. Which rider would you care to meet?

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR  
A HERO ON A WHITE HORSE  
*Revelation 19:11-16*

*Pastor Mark Toone*  
*16 April, 2000*

- *Read Matthew 21:1-11 and the above text. Compare them. Which image would the people of first century Jerusalem preferred?*
- *Four references are made to the name of the Rider of the horse. What are they? What do they signify? Which is most meaningful to you and why?*
- *The rider is described as wearing a garment that is dipped in blood. Do you agree or disagree with Pastor Mark that this blood is his own? Support your position. What are the implications in each case?*
- *We live in a time that does not like the idea of judgment. Our social mantra is tolerance and inclusivity. Is judgment a necessary part of the Christian gospel? In what way is judgment "good news?"*
- *Pray for the unsaved who will attend Easter services, that God's love and grace might break through to them.*