

## FGBC: The Rider and the City: Here He comes

Revelation 19:11-21

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What happens when we die? What happens at the end?

If you plug this question into Youtube you can find a string of self-professed experts on the topic – it’s amazing how many people are authorities on a matter like this – and what’s even more amazing is how much their answers differ.

So Life Guide and Medium Phil Quinn says “When the soul leaves the body it passes to the other side, to a place we call heaven. Heaven’s like earth, but in its pure state. It is essentially bliss. You get to do everything you want to do and your loved ones are with you all the time... unless you are going to the bathroom.”<sup>1</sup> Great!

Indian guru Shekhar Kapur has a little different take. He says “Whatever state of being you are in in the moment you die escalates to infinite proportions. So if you are at peace then this will snowball into infinite peace – that’s heaven. But if you are afraid as you die then you will spend eternity terrified – we would call that hell.”<sup>2</sup>

Now that’s not so great. I mean if you happen to be having a bad day the day you die that could have some nasty eternal consequences!

Of course, if you don’t like either of those options then there are countless others you can tune into who have never died themselves – or perhaps died for very short periods of time depending on how you figure that out and they will all give you their 2 cents on what’s going to happen at the end.

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Well, today I’m happy to tell you there is another authority on the matter of what happens at the end. And this authority actually died and then overcame death. And not barely or weakly. He didn’t cheat death like someone pulling a fast one. Nor did He overcome death like someone gasping for air after drowning and receiving CPR. His victory over death isn’t even like someone who recovered from a near death experience but then later went on to die again. No He triumphantly, victoriously, overcame death such that death and sickness and pain hold no sway with Him anymore. And if you ask me, that’s the kind of authority you want in matters like this – somebody who actually knows.

Go ahead and grab your Bible. I want you to see that I’m not making any of this up. We are in Revelation 19 starting in verse 11 today. If you are new with us we’ve been in Revelation for a while now. But today we are starting a new section.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7pmecSkYr8> (Accessed March 25, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fjTr5-wtll&t=441s> (Accessed March 25, 2020)

So there are seven sections in Revelation – that number shouldn't surprise you by now. We get a prelude and a postlude, and then five windows that Jesus *opens* for John enabling him to see real reality.<sup>3</sup> They are five glimpses behind the scenes, as it were, that help us make sense of what is going on around us. And these windows open to show us how to follow Jesus in the middle of a world that is full of temptation, antagonistic towards faith, and very uncertain about what happens at the end – a world very much like our own.

So the first window starts in chapter 1:9, and begins with John saying “I heard behind me a loud voice.... And when I turned I saw...” And what John saw was seven golden lampstands representing the seven dominant churches of his day. And Jesus standing among them. Jesus isn't far away. He isn't high above looking down. He knows what's going on with His people. And from that vantage point Jesus writes seven letters addressing what it looks like for His church, then and now, to be faithful disciples.

Then window two, starting in 4:1, begins with John saying: “After this I *looked*, and there before me was a door standing *open* in heaven.” And John sees a throne. And it's not up for grabs. There's no contest for authority in heaven. Someone's sitting on the throne. And it's the Lion who is the Lamb who was slain. He's infinitely powerful, but He doesn't overcome by hurting those who oppose Him, but by taking the hurt of the world upon Himself. And so whatever you are facing, however out of your control it may seem, Jesus has got this. He's on the throne.

Then we get window three which begins in chapter 11 verse 19. And John says: “Then God's temple in heaven was *opened*.” And here John sees the Ark of the Covenant and the war behind all wars. There's a woman about to give birth, and a dragon. Both are signs. And then a Son is born – 12:5 – “who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And the dragon and his beasts can't touch the Son, so they go after the children of the woman – the people of God.

Satan knows he's defeated and so he thrashes out against God's people. And friends, this is where we find ourselves. Satan wants your destruction. And we are going to feel his attack. Do you feel his attack today? But if we press into Christ then we can be victorious. This section ends with God's people singing the Song of the Lamb.

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After this we get the fourth window. This one begins in chapter 15 verse 5. And John says “After this I looked, and I saw in heaven... the tabernacle of the covenant law – and it was *opened*.” And this section is all about God's judgment on the wicked. Everyone who rebelliously refuses to make God the God of their life will taste His judgment. Babylon, the mother of prostitutes, will fall. But blessed are those who get invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Blessed is the bride of Christ who purifies herself in preparation for when the Bridegroom arrives.

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<sup>3</sup> Outline and content adapted from Darrell Johnson's “Discipleship on the Edge”

And then we get to window 5 where we are today. This one begins in 19:11 and John says “I saw heaven standing *open*.” And we find out that heaven isn’t about getting to do all the things you love doing. It isn’t about all the people you love spending time with. Heaven is about a person – the Person. Heaven is about Jesus.

Would you stand with me as we read Revelation 19 starting in verse 11? Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read Revelation 19:11-21]

Now let me take you back for a second to the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. One of the first days Jesus was “on the job,” so to speak, He began collecting disciples. First He found Andrew and Peter and next He found Philip who went and found Nathaniel.

And when Jesus saw Nathaniel coming He said to him “Now here’s a genuine son of Israel – a man of complete integrity.” And Nathanael was impressed and asked “How do you know me?” And Jesus says “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” And then Nathanael is really impressed; he falls at Jesus’ feet and says “You are the Son of God.”

And then Jesus replies with a prophecy. He says:

Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.... I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth. (John 1:50-51)

Jesus says “You are going to see heaven opened and when you do you are going to see Me. And now Jesus is fulfilling this prophecy. John looks and sees heaven open and Someone’s there! In the end we find out it’s all about Jesus.

And so as we begin to look through the last window in Revelation we finally see Jesus breaking through and coming into focus. And He’s riding a white horse. And this isn’t a way we’ve seen Jesus before – this is new.

So we have glimpsed the Lion before. We saw Him way back in chapter 4. But mostly it’s been the Lamb. And the Lamb is a picture of the way Jesus came the first time. Jesus won by taking the hurt of the world upon Himself; by allowing Himself to be sacrificed for our sin so that He could clothe us in His righteousness. That’s what happened on the cross.

And we are approaching Easter which is all about remembering that event. And so on Palm Sunday, the week before Easter, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – a king on a donkey. Actually kings did this all the time when they entered a city in peace.

And so when Jesus did that He fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy that had been made some 500 years before Jesus was born:

Rejoice, O people of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!

Look, your king is coming to you.

He is righteous and victorious,  
yet He is humble, riding on a donkey—  
riding on a donkey's colt....

your king will bring peace to the nations.

His realm will stretch from sea to sea (Zechariah 9:9-10)

But in Revelation 19 Jesus has parked that donkey and taken up His war horse. And that's because the context of our text today is what has been called "The Final Battle" or "The Battle of Armageddon." And Jesus is not coming in peace now, He comes for war.

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If you remember the demonic frogs from chapter 16 you will remember that they went out to collect all the rebellious kings of the earth who refuse to bow to the Lamb. And they were all gathering them for the final battle on the great day of God Almighty.<sup>4</sup>

This is that Day. But here we find out that calling it "The last battle" is a bit of a misnomer because there isn't any battle. At least there isn't any battle at the end of the age. And that's because the battle already happened. The final battle was the cross. That's where Jesus overcame the enemy. That's why the dragon can't touch the Son in chapter 12 – he's getting wooped. And that's why here at the last battle there is no battle.

Did you notice how all the armies of evil are here with the beasts, and then there is this almost comical comment "But the beast and the false prophet were captured and thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulphur." There's so little contest it's almost like they volunteered to be caught.

Well they didn't volunteer. Jesus just shows up and it's over. The war they've planned doesn't happen. There is no battle. There isn't even any push back against the children of the woman. It's just judgment now against the beasts and all those who refuse to make God God in their lives – the dragon gets his in chapter 20. This is what happens at the end.

And in this transitional moment we come across a particularly gory image. So last week we talked about the marriage supper of the Lamb. And we said this is a wedding feast between the church and Jesus. Jesus is getting married and blessed is everyone who gets invited to that banquet. Blessed is everyone who is part of the bride.

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 16:14-16

But here we get another supper and you don't want to be invited to this one. This one is called – verse 17 – the great supper of God. And it's the birds who feast and, surprise, it's the kings, generals, and everyone who don't worship Jesus who are the feast.

So everyone gets invited to a supper. Nobody gets left out. Nobody gets missed. It's one or the other. This is what happens at the end before the big beginning.

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But how does this all come about? Why does Jesus win this non-battle? And How does He win? John wants to answer these two questions with this passage.

So first, why? And the answer is "Because of who Jesus is." Jesus wins because of who He is. No one can beat Him. No one can stand against Him. And this is shown in the way He does battle.

So 2000 years ago Jesus didn't come in swinging and fighting. He came in humbly receiving everything Satan and death could throw at Him. He came in in a manger. He came in "like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him."<sup>5</sup> He came in riding on a donkey.

And He took everything the enemy could throw at Him. He took all the hardships of life. He put Himself in our shoes and walked the road. And on top of this He took all the temptation Satan could muster. None of us could have stood. And He took the hurt of the world upon Himself. He bore it all on the cross. He drank the full cup of wrath to the very last drop. And He laid His life down.

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And then, when it was all consumed and there was nothing left, He was still there. And three days later the door of the tomb burst open and Jesus took the keys from Death and Hades and left the grave behind.<sup>6</sup> This is who Jesus is. And it's because of who Jesus is that He wins.

And there are several pictures in this text that point to this, verse 12 has three of them. So verse 12 starts saying: Jesus' "eyes are like blazing fire."

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When I was little I never understood why my parents made me look them in the eyes when they asked: "Did you take the cookie?" But now that I've been to daddy school I realize the brilliance of this – our eyes give us away. They are windows into our souls.

And so here Jesus' eyes give Him away as totally pure. But He is also able to look right through us with these eyes. Nothing is hidden from His gaze. No one can pull the wool over His eyes. This is who Jesus is.

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 53:2

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 1:18

Verse 12 continues “On His head are many crowns.” Throughout Revelation crowns show up all the time: The dragon has seven crowns on seven heads. The beast from the sea has ten crowns on seven heads. Crowns are symbols of authority, and it wasn’t totally uncommon for kings to wear more than one crown. Often conquering kings would take the crown off their defeated enemy and add it to their own.

But here Jesus is unique. He has many crowns, countless crowns, but unlike the beast, all on one head – He alone is Lord. And as He rides into battle He does so as one who has won many battles. What battles has He won? He won the battle for my heart and yours if you’ve bowed your knee to Him. And in doing this He plucked us out of the devil’s hand. You are a crown on Jesus’ head. So He’s got millions or billions.

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The third picture John gives us in verse 12 comes as he says “Jesus has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself.”

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As I was studying I had to laugh here because of how many commentaries, written by people who take Jesus at His word – who believe in Him, work so hard to try to figure out what this name is. For crying out loud it says: “Nobody knows.” It’s a mystery!

But this doesn’t mean there isn’t a point here. I’ll give you two: First, when you know someone’s name you have a level of control over them. This is classroom management 101 – if you don’t know the kid’s name you aren’t going to be able to get him to sit down. Or maybe when you were little and did something bad you learned how bad it was by how many names your mom used to address you. “Daniel Ernest Hoffman, get over here.” I don’t think I’ve ever used the full name trick with my kids, but that’s because I’ve got so many I spend most of my time trying to get their first name right.

The point is that knowing someone’s name gives you authority over them. And in ancient days this extended to gods. If you knew a god’s name you could get them to work for you. But here Jesus has a name that no one knows. No one has authority over Him.

Second, names reveal something about a person’s character. We’ve seen this throughout Revelation. God’s people get His name written on them which means they bear His image. And the followers of the beast get his name written of them – they bear his image. So names, in biblical culture, are attached to our identity and our nature.

Now here’s a cool thing about Jesus: throughout scripture Jesus is given dozens of names – I found over 50. He’s the Almighty One, the Alpha and Omega, the Advocate. He’s the Bread of Life, the Bridegroom. In our passage today He’s called Faithful and True, and the Word of God, and King of kings and Lord of lords.

And each of these names are like pin pricks through a curtain that give us a glimpse of who Jesus is. And the picture gets fuller and fuller the more we know Jesus. But here’s the beautiful thing about Jesus: you can never exhaust what there is to know about Him. There is always more to be revealed.

And all eternity isn't going to be enough time to exhaust every new and awesome thing about Jesus. He will always have a name that is unknown. It will always be "further up and further in." This is who Jesus is. And this is why He wins.

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There is so much more we could unpack here, but I want to end by looking at how Jesus wins because this is crucial to grasp.

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As Jesus rides into the supposed last battle He's carrying only one weapon. Verse 15 says "Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." And then in verse 21, after the beasts have been thrown into the burning sulphur, it says "The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse." Jesus wins simply by speaking. His sword is His word.

And this has been the way it has been from the very beginning. The Bible begins with God speaking the heavens and earth into being. Everything from stars to sea monsters came into existence because God told it to. And then John tells us that the Word of God became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

And throughout Jesus' ministry He was constantly overcoming storms and sickness and death simply by speaking a word: "Be still." "Get up." "Lazarus, come out." Jesus is the Word of God and only a word from Him is required to bring the last battle to an end.

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In 100 AD Jesus gave the message of Revelation to John and to the church because they were in a crisis of faith. It was bleak outside. It looked like Caesar was in control. His army was huge and his word carried weight. And the church looked so fragile and vulnerable. And so the question everyone wanted answered was "Does Jesus really have this? Is He going to win? How is this going to end?"

And this is the exact context we find ourselves in today. The world is in crisis because of COVID-19, but to be honest it's been in crisis forever – a crisis of faith. And the question all people are asking is "Who is going to win? Who is the biggest most real force? Caesar with all his political power? The economy with all its financial power? The educated elite with all their intellectual power? The scientific world with its theoretical power? Whose in control? Whose going to win?"

Of course we want to know what happens in the end, but not just so we'll know. This affects how we live now. We need to know so we can throw our chips into the game. You see all of us are placing bets. We all live towards what we believe is in control. Or as we saw last week, we all orient ourselves towards a city. We are either living towards the city of God – the bride, or we are living towards Babylon the prostitute. This is the crisis of faith humanity has always found itself surrounded by.

And into this crisis Jesus shows up and shows us how it's going to end. He is going to ride in and speak. That's it. So whatever uncertainty you find yourself living in today, whatever temptation you are surrounded by, orient yourself towards Jesus. He's the one who wins.