

## The Final Battle

Jonathan K. Dodson | Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-15 | November 27, 2022

Today, the final battle. Three central images: the Battle, the Supper, and the Throne.

### The Battle

The film *Fury* opens panning a motionless battleground covered in thick fog, as the fog thins a rider on a white horse makes his way across the blackened earth, surveying the spoils of war, but as the rider comes into focus you realize it's a Nazi officer come to gloat over the Allied dead. Cognitive dissonance sets in. Why is a *Nazi* on a *white* horse? A similar tension emerges as we read Revelation 19. The heavens open, **and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.** His robe is dipped in blood; he treads the winepress of God's fury, and strikes down the nations, hurling his foes into a lake of fire. What are we to make of this rider? He is called **Faithful and True**, a moniker given to Jesus in chapter one and three, but there he is described as the faithful and true *witness*: bearing witness to the blood of the Lamb for sinners slain. Here, he is a faithful and true *warrior*, exacting death from his foes. But is the warrior just? Does he belong on a white horse? In the latest Cormac McCarthy novel a central character loses his parents, his sister to suicide, the love of his life, and his closest friends. No one is left. He wonders aloud: "*People want the world to be just. But the world is silent on this subject.*" It's true isn't it? The world can't speak, and even when its inhabitants do their judgments are, at best, uneven. How often do we hear about DNA evidence overturning a verdict or some miscarriage of racial justice? The world cannot produce pure justice. For *that*, for plumblime righteousness, we need a judge who is *always* faithful and true. And that's what we have here. Jesus judges the great and small, the slave and the free, with the **sword** of his mouth. The *Word of God*, sharper than any two-edge sword, is *Jesus* (13). He is the hair-splitting Word, and for a time, if you receive his cut he saves you (Js 4), until he comes riding on a white horse. *Here* is the other edge of the sword, an *accusatory* word, smiting not saving, reckoning not redeeming. When Jesus rides forth from the heavens *it is too late*; the time of mercy and salvation has ended. Justice has begun. His verdict is plain and pure: **no one is righteous, not even one** (Rm 6:23). What gives him the right? Consider how he is **adorned**: a crown with *many diadems*. Why? *He is endlessly royal*. Eternally deserving of his reign. Never to be unseated. His eyes are like a flame of fire. *His perception is pure, 20/20 every, single time.* **On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.** Why on his thigh? The thigh was the typical location of the warrior's sword, and where the hand was placed to swear an oath. This is no tattoo; *it's sworn victory, triumph in the flesh*. And with every king, lord, and power subdued, Jesus' title comes into full bloom. Let the King of kings and Lord of lords eternal and just reign begin. Now if this is who Jesus is, then what should his followers look like? They should be the most evangelistic, compassionate, and justice-pursuing people on the planet. So share the gospel this week. Have mercy on those who struggle. Stand up for what is right, but do it all with the character of Christ. Speaking of Jesus' character, we're told **he has a name that no one knows but himself**. If we don't know it, why bother to tell us? Because it's a symbolic way of saying, there's *much more* to Jesus. My wife explained our daughters name, Ellie, to some friends recently. Ella from her grandmother, Luella, and Nellie. She has her great grandmas spunk. Now we know more about Ellie! Jesus has a name we don't know because we will learn about his character for all eternity, never exhausting the inexhaustible riches of Christ. You see: *there is no boredom with the eternal Jesus, only with those far too easily entertained.* Behold the rider of boundless glory.

## The Supper

Next the beast, the kings of the earth and their armies gather to make war on the Rider and his army. Who will win this contest? There's no suspense for Jesus, whose angelic warrior preemptively calls for the birds of prey to feast on their corpses: *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God.* They are swiftly defeated, overturning their false worship and deceit. The birds of heaven descend in stomach-turning imagery. What could it possibly mean? It's what's known as **post-mortem desecration of the remains**. It was a common feature in the ancient world to recognize a divine curse had fallen upon an individual or nation if the body was exposed, mutilated. In Scripture, divine curse is associated with a tree. *Saul* attempted genocide and was beheaded and hung on a tree. King David's seditious son *Absalom* was protected by his men until they saw him get caught in a tree when riding under it, and immediately they struck him down. *Goliath*, the Philistine giant warrior was decapitated by David and birds of prey devoured the Philistines, *post-mortem desecration of the remains*. Why? *Cursed is he who hangs on a tree*, says Deuteronomy. A curse that falls upon God's enemies, but there is one more tree—the cross—where Christ bore our curse to give us his blessing! His death for our life. The great exchange, unmerited and free, costly and curse-free. For those who respond in faith to Jesus, there is no *post-mortem desecration*; only *post-mortem vivification*, bodily resurrection to join Christ in his new creation!

## The Throne

Next the great white throne judgment: *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it*. The vision of "a great white throne" harkens back to earlier chapters, where God is pictured "sitting on a throne." Why a throne? This is a *judicial proceeding*. Everything is stripped bare to face the judgment of God. Even earth and sky flee away. God is taking everything down to the studs before rebuilding. The **books** are opened. Small and great are resurrected to be "judged according to their deeds" before the divine court. Who is judged? All. Christians and non-Christians. The New Testament consistently teaches that although we are saved by Christ's work, we are judged by our works: *each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire"* (1 Cor 3:13-15). How we work, how we build on our faith, the decisions we make, matter. Those who "take care" how they build will receive *reward*. Those who don't take care suffer *loss*, the word means to be deprived. Perhaps it means as Jonathan Edwards suggests, deprived of a greater capacity to enjoy God. Whereas those who have taken care enjoy God more in heaven, as they did on earth. *Diligence leads to delight*. Where do you need to be more diligent? How are you building on your foundation? Gamers are diligent to reach the reward of the next level; mothers diligent to reach the reward of kids who walk, talk, and study; professionals to hit new benchmarks. *Diligence leads to delight*. And so it is with God; he is a rewarder of those who seek him! Does this mean we have to merit a place in heaven? No, for that there is another **book**: *Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. It's a separate book. A distinction made, not by human works but by divine grace, not based on individual performance but on Jesus' performance*. We get into the book of life through death. The Christ hung on a tree that we might go free; Christ cursed that we might be blessed; Jesus crucified that we might be vivified,

to live forever with him. Then how might the books affect everyday life, when we're battered by shooting headlines, broken families, and a closing church? As the *Fury* tank crew continues to battle their losses, the tank enters a peaceful Austrian village, and the crew goes out carousing to cope with their loss and the trauma of war. But Boyd pulls up a stool in the center of town, puts on his glasses, and diligently reads Scripture. With chaos and coping all around him, he turns to the Book of Life. He copes differently, peacefully. The director comments, "*it was important to me to show how someone can lean on Scripture and their relationship with Christ in an environment where they're seeing this much inhumanity and destruction.*" Friends, if it feels like the world is unjust, it's because it is. But Christ is just. Our Captain, faithful and true. So don't expect peacetime when you're at war, but be like Boyd and cling to your Captain not to coping. Only the Faithful and True can bring pure justice and deep peace. Don't cope by burying your pain; bring it to Jesus, and name it out loud. Don't lean on fleeting distraction but on the eternal Word. Since announcing my retirement and the closing of our church, I wake up each day with a sadness at the bottom of my heart. I make a cup of coffee, tell him how I feel and open up the Word to ask for joy and peace, and Jesus gives it every single day. Daniel 10 has been close to my heart: *O man greatly loved, do not be afraid. Peace be with you. Be strong and of good courage. And as he spoke to me I was strengthened.* What God commands, he supplies. He's asked for strength and he has given strength. He will do the same for you. When there is chaos all around, pull up a stool, open your Bible and turn to Jesus. There is no greater reward.