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December 27th: Revelation 19 & John 21:9-25

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The Rider on the White Horse.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Revelation, chapter 19. After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for His judgments are true and just, for He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of His servants. Once more they cried out, Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah. And from the throne came a voice, saying, Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, small and great. Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of many peals of thunder, crying out, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And he said to me, These are the true words of God. Then I fell down at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, You must not do that.

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, the one sitting on it, is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword, with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

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, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great. And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet, who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, and those who worshipped its image.

These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, and the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. Babylon the Great fell in chapter 17, and the kings of the earth, the merchants and the sailors, shipmasters and seafarers lamented over it in chapter 18. Chapter 18 contains lamentations over the great fallen city.

Chapter 19 opens with rejoicing over it. If alas, alas was the dominating expression of chapter 18, hallelujah is that of chapter 19. Chapter 19 opens with a rejoicing multitude in heaven, contrasting with the silenced multitude of the devastated city of Babylon the Great.

The rejoicing is taken up by a number of heavenly voices. It starts out with the loud voice

of the multitude in verses 1 and 2, followed by them crying out for a second time in verse 3. The 24 elders and the 4 living creatures add their voices in verse 4. In verse 5 there is a voice from the throne. Then in verse 6 the voice of the multitude returns for a third time.

The multitude are presumably those mentioned in chapter 15 verse 2. They now seem to be taking a lead in the worship of heaven. They praise the Lord for the truth and justice of his judgments, and his faithful vindication of his servants by judging their adversaries. Behind the worship here we might hear the words of the song of Moses prior to his death in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 43.

Rejoice with him, O heavens! Bow down to him, all gods! For he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land. Also of Psalm 79 verse 10, Why should the nations say, Where is their God? Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes.

At a number of points in the book of Revelation we have seen the importance of the Lord's avenging of his people. The saints cry out for their blood to be avenged upon those who took their lives, and here God is praised for his avenging of his servants. The judgment of Babylon has a finality to it.

Using language taken from Isaiah chapter 34 and the destruction of Edom, the worshipping multitudes speak of the smoke of the overthrown city going up forever, like a permanent testimony to its destruction. Isaiah chapter 34 verses 9-10 read, And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur. Her land shall become burning pitch.

Night and day it shall not be quenched. Its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste.

None shall pass through it, forever and ever. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures respond to the multitude, ratifying their praise with an Amen, Hallelujah. The voice from the throne that comes in verse 5 summons the entire company to join together in praise.

In verses 1 and 2 the reason for the praise was the overthrow of the harlot. In verses 6 and following the reason given is that the Lord has begun to reign, and that the wedding of the Lamb has come. The claim that the Lord has begun to reign takes up language that we earlier heard at the blowing of the seventh trumpet in chapter 11 verses 15-18.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before

God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was. For you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants. The prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth. With the wedding coming, all must get ready.

The motif of the eschatological wedding is a prominent one in the Johannine literature especially. Revelation has used imagery from the Song of Songs at several points. Jesus in chapter 1 was presented as the heavenly bridegroom.

In the Gospel of John, themes of the eschatological wedding abound. Christ is depicted as the bridegroom, and John the Baptist is the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding feast.

Like the patriarchs' first encounters with their wives, he meets a woman at a well. Allusions to the Song of Songs are found in the washing of his feet at Bethany, and in his burial, and his meeting with Mary Magdalene in the garden. To get herself ready, the bride, of whom we are first hearing, is given fine linen garments with which to clothe herself.

There have been several instances of garment-related themes in the book to this point. Garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, in chapter 7 verse 14 for instance. Here the garments are described as the righteous deeds of the saints, but also described as clothes that have been given.

As Peter Lighthouse notes, in considering the way that the garments can be the saints' own righteous deeds, while also being given to them and washed in the blood of the Lamb, we might begin to develop a richer understanding of the way that our good works can be integral to an account of salvation, without undermining either the priority or the sufficiency of grace. The angel speaking to John expresses the blessedness of those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to which John surprisingly responds by falling down at his feet to worship him, at which he is rebuked and charged to worship God alone. Angels, although they can be powerful and dazzling in their splendour, are not worthy of worship, they are not divine, rather they are fellow servants, and in the book of Revelation, servants that will increasingly take a lower status as the bride is elevated to reign with Christ.

Angels have in common with faithful saints their holding to the testimony of Jesus, the witness that Jesus bore through his life and death. By holding to this testimony, their lives are governed by the same principles and lived in continuity with his. This testimony is established by the spirit of prophecy, who establishes the continuing witness of Christ within his servants.

Heaven is opened and a rider on a white horse comes. The rider on the white horse picks up a number of the descriptors of Jesus from earlier in the book. For instance, he is the faithful and true, as Jesus was described as the faithful and true witness in chapter 3 verse 14.

His flaming eyes recall chapter 1 verse 14, and the sword coming from his mouth recalls that of chapter 1 verse 16. Many diadems are on his head. To this point the diadems that we saw belonged to the dragon and to the beast.

The diadems are crowns of authority which he has won from his foes. He is now the mighty and victorious emperor of the world, as it were, the king of kings and lord of lords. This we should bear in mind is the child who was destined to rule in chapter 12, and now he will rule with his rod of iron.

He is followed by the armies of heaven, arrayed in the fine linen garments described earlier in this chapter. They are, as Peter Lighthouse notes, a bridal army, much as we saw with the 144 virgins earlier in the book. While the garments of the saints have been washed clean with the blood of Jesus, Jesus' garments are stained with blood.

G.B. Caird argues that the blood on Jesus' robes is not the blood of his enemies, nor even his own blood, but the blood of the faithful saints and martyrs. The victory of Jesus and his bride occur through the shedding of their blood in martyrdom. What seems like their complete destruction, as they are trodden like grapes outside of the city, is actually their preparation through harvest.

The rider on the white horse has a name written that no one knows but himself. This might remind us of chapter 2 verse 17, where the one who overcame in Pergamum was promised a white stone with a new name written on it that no one would know save the one receiving it. The name received by Jesus is the name above every other name, as Philippians 2 declares, a name expressive of his proven divinity.

He is also here referred to as the Word of God, the name by which he is spoken of in the first chapter of John's Gospel. The Word of God fights and strikes down the nations with the sharp sword of his mouth. The rider on the white horse also takes up the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1-4.

The spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear.

But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The rod then, by which Jesus rules, is probably like the sword to be considered as a rod of his mouth.

The Word rules through his word. The description here might be drawn in part from Isaiah chapter 63 verse 1-6 where we see the imagery of treading down the winepress again. Speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.

So my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger, I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth. The rider on the white horse here treads down, most likely the martyrs, preparing the wine of God's furious wrath, with which he will make the nations drunk.

The chapter ends with the defeat of the beast and the kings of the earth who gather together against the Lord and his armies. Here we should think back to the pouring out of the sixth bowl, the drying up of the Euphrates and the gathering together of the two armies at the mountain of Megiddo in Armageddon. An angel summons the birds of the air to join together to feast upon the dead bodies of the defeated foes of the rider on the white horse.

Revelation has picked up the language of Ezekiel on many occasions and this is the case here. This is from Ezekiel chapter 39 verses 17 and following. As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field.

Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan. And you shall eat fat till you are filled and drink blood till you are drunk at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you.

And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors, declares the Lord God. It should not be hard to see in this grisly feast a contrast with the other feast to which people are invited, the wedding supper of the lamb. All of these foes are defeated by the sword that comes from the rider on the white horse's mouth.

Behind many of the events described here we should hear the words of Christ from the Olivet Discourse, places like Matthew chapter 24 verses 30 to 31. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other.

Then later on in chapter 25 verse 31 to 32, when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Once apostate Jerusalem, which persecuted the

church and killed the prophets, has been brought down, Christ's reign will be established over all of the nations.

His kingdom will go out to every part of the world. In Revelation, as in Matthew, the downfall of Jerusalem heralds the establishment of the kingdom of God, which then spreads over all of the world. The significance of this definitive victory is most seen in the heavens, but the pattern and reality of that victory in the heavens gradually spreads over all of the world.

Christ's rule will be seen in the bringing down of kingdoms and nations that oppose him, and the raising up and the vindication of his people. His kingdom will stretch from one end of heaven to another. No longer will it be restricted to, or narrowly focused upon one strip of land in the Middle East.

It will be found in every part of the world. Likewise, no longer will Satan be able to claim that all the authority of the kingdoms of the earth belongs to him, rather all authority and power has been given to Christ, and now having established the foundation of his kingdom through tearing down the old covenant order, his people, his body, his bride, his church can go out into all parts of the world, establishing his rule in places that were formerly under the sway of Satan. A question to consider.

Looking at the New Testament in contrast to the Old, what are some of the most striking changes that we can see in the way that the reign of God is expressed on the earth? How can this chapter help us to understand these? John chapter 21 verses 9 to 25 When they got out on land they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them.

And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you? They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Tend my sheep.

He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. Truly,

truly, I say to you, when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted.

But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, Follow me.

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you? When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me. So the saying spread among the brothers that this disciple was not to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.