

Revelation 19:11-21 Faithful and True

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I read out "All the king's horses and all the king's men"  
at the start of the service.

The song was one of many by Petra that I listened to as a teenager.  
It was not my favourite.

Perhaps "This Means War" or "On Fire" were my favourites.

But the songs all shared a common theme.

They presented a more muscular vision of Christianity  
than the one I was used to hearing  
in the songs we sang in church in the 1980s.

And you can imagine that this was appealing to a teenage boy.

I had a bit of an allergy to singing songs that I called  
"Jesus be my boyfriend" songs.

OK let's be honest, I still do.

Jesus be my boyfriend songs,

are songs where if you swapped the name 'Jesus' with another name,  
then the song would work just as well as a love song  
from some sloppy easy listening radio station.

"O Lord, you're beautiful,  
your face is all I seek."

"The power of your love-

hold me close, let your love surround me."

Wouldn't you love to sing that one, Lech?

You can almost feel the girl germs attacking you, can't you?

But Petra's songs were nothing like that.

They presented a deep vision of care for the community.

"We've got to get his message, back to the street."

But there was nothing sentimental about it.

And what particularly attracted me was how biblical the lyrics were.

It was like there was a whole side of Christianity,  
straight from the Bible,  
that was being ignored.

Like the song I read out at the start of the service.

All the King's horses.

It's evident that it's a reworking of the passage we read today.

"On a great white horse, the King will come ridin'

He's the One they call Faithful and True

With His eyes of fire and blood-dripped clothing

He had a name nobody else knew."

Every feature of those words comes straight from Rev 19.

No question about it.

There's something very appealing about that

when you strongly identify as Christian

and also strongly identify as male.

So what do we have in the second half of Revelation 19?

Babylon has fallen in the previous couple of chapters.

That is, the human empires that set themselves up against God.

But there also needs to be an accounting for the spiritual figures:

the beast, the false prophet and the dragon.

Well in the second half of chapter 19,

the beast and the false prophet get their comeuppance.

We have to wait for the next chapter in a new vision

for Satan to finally be vanquished.

"I saw heaven standing open

and there before me was a white horse,

whose rider is called Faithful and True."

And there are no prizes for guessing who the horseman is.

Looks like a champion or a hero.

Comes down out of heaven to defeat the forces of evil.

It must be Jesus.

But it's not gentle Jesus meek and mild.

It's warrior Jesus fierce and strong.

I bet your grandmother didn't teach you to address your prayers

to warrior Jesus fierce and strong.

But here he is.

And he has a very interesting name: faithful and true.

This is not the first time in Revelation these words have been paired up. In the letter to the church in Laodicea in chapter 3, Jesus is called "the faithful and true witness".

Neither is it the last time.

In chapter 21:5, the angel commands the apostle John, "Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true."

Again in chapter 22:6, the angel said to John, "These words are trustworthy and true.

The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

Jesus is faithful and true,

the words of the prophecy are trustworthy and true.

And the Greek word that lies behind 'faithful' and 'trustworthy' is exactly the same word.

Jesus is described with exactly the same words as the prophecy itself.

It's like the start of John's gospel.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God."

Who is the word that John is speaking of?

It's Jesus, the word of God become a human being.

God's word is faithful and true

whether it comes in human flesh or in a book.

But the connection between Jesus and the Word of God doesn't stop there.

We're told 19:13 that his name is the Word of God.

And what is the weapon that this fearsome warrior wields?

Why, he has a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.

Does he hold it in his left hand or his right hand?

Well neither actually.

The sharp sword is coming out of his mouth.

I tried to find a picture of Jesus riding his white horse to show you.

The internet has no shortage of pictures of Jesus riding a white horse.

But they all have him holding his sword in his hand.

The image of a sword coming out of your mouth

is too much for the artists.

But what's the point?

The point is that his weapon is the words that come from his mouth.

When God does something,

he speaks and it is so.

"And God said, 'Let there be light.'

And there was light."

So when Jesus comes to judge,

he judges with the word of God that comes from his mouth.

If you want to know the basis on which Jesus will judge the world,

it's simple and clear.

He judges according to the Word of God.

He judges according to the trustworthy and true words in this book.

There's no question about what his judgement will be.

But he speaks in order to put into effect

what has already been written down.

That's why it can say,

19:11 "With justice he judges and wages war."

His judgement is only to speak what has already been decided.

19:12 "His eyes are like blazing fire."

This is a feature pulled straight from the vision of Jesus in chapter 1.

One of the great Hastings fashion statements

as I go on my daily exercise

is the decorated chin protector.

Some have a bright blue chin protector.

Some have multicoloured hand sewn chin protectors.

You thought you were being commanded

to wear a mask for public safety.

Like the church that put up a sign outside.

"Thou shalt wear a mask. Hygenesis 20:20"

But no.

In Hastings, we wear chin protectors.

What's the point of a chin protector?

It won't stop your chin catching coronavirus.

The point is  
that if you catch sight of a meddlesome member of the constabulary,  
you can quickly put your chin protector over your mouth.

Well it might work with the constabulary.

But it won't work on the day of judgement with Jesus.

His eyes are like blazing fire.

They see everything.

They don't just see what is on the outside,

like whether your mask is covering your mouth or your chin.

They see what is on the inside.

They perceive the state of the human heart.

Even within the church,

Jesus can see who are faithful and true disciples  
and who are not.

In the letter to the church in Thyatira, Jesus says,

3:18 "These are the words of the Son of God,  
whose eyes are like blazing fire."

And Jesus' accusation against the church in Thyatira  
is that some of its members had not been faithful to him.

The blazing eyes are able to perceive  
which hearts in the church are faithful.

19:12 "Jesus also has a name written on him  
that no one knows but he himself."

This is a slightly perplexing description.

We've already been told that he is called 'faithful and true'.

In verse 13, his name is 'the Word of God'.

In verse 16, his name is 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'

There doesn't seem to be anything particularly secret about his names.

Here are some thoughts about the secret name.

Firstly, the name Yahweh

which our English translations render "The Lord" in capital letters,  
is the covenant name for God in the Old Testament.

This is the name that faithful Jews wouldn't pronounce  
in case they would be taking the Lord's name in vain.

Because they wouldn't pronounce it,  
it is in a sense a secret name.  
No one knows exactly how you should say it.  
Is it Yahweh, like we say today?  
Or is it Jehovah, like they said 100 years ago?  
Or is it something different?  
No one really knows.  
Maybe Jesus has the name of God the Father written on him  
to show that he is one with the Father.  
Another possibility is that we aren't supposed to worry  
about what the name is,  
instead, it's the fact of the name being secret that is important.  
In the ancient world,  
knowing someone's name gave you some control over that person.  
It still works in the school playground.  
If there are kids misbehaving and the teacher on duty shouts out,  
"Hey you lot, stop that!"  
Often the kids will keep going.  
"What you mean us?"  
We never realised you meant us."  
But if the teacher shouts out "Johnny and Fred, stop that straight away!"  
It's far more likely to have the desired result.  
You can see it with Jesus casting out demons in the gospels.  
Sometimes they want to parade their knowledge.  
"I know who you are, the Holy One of God."  
So Jesus' secret name might be a way of underlining  
that he is under no one's control.  
He is calling the shots.

And he's calling the shots with his own unique fashion statement.  
No it's not a chin protector.  
It's a robe dipped in blood.  
When I read that,  
the first place my mind went is to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.  
But it seems that your first instinct is not always right.

These bloodstains come from dispensing judgement.  
 Already back in chapter 14,  
 we had the grapes going in to the winepress of God's wrath,  
 and the blood flowing out 5 foot high for 300km.  
 That would likely stain your clothes.  
 And if we flick back to Isaiah 63:1-3,  
 we read about God's judgement on the nations.  
 "Who is this coming from Edom,  
 from Bozrah with his garments stained crimson?  
 Who is this robed in splendour,  
 striding forward in the greatness of his strength?  
 It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.  
 Why are your garments red,  
 like those of one treading the winepress?  
 I have trodden the winepress alone;  
 from the nations, no one was with me.  
 I trampled them in my anger  
 and trod them down in my wrath;  
 their blood spattered my garments,  
 and I stained all my clothing."

Jesus is the one calling the shots.  
 He is dispensing the judgement of God.  
 But he's not alone.  
 We are there with him.  
 19:14 "The armies of heaven were following him,  
 riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean."  
 The armies of heaven are the redeemed people of God.  
 And our role in the judgement  
 is to give a visual justification of his justice.  
 Jesus' armies don't carry any weapon.  
 The sword coming from Jesus' mouth does all the fighting.  
 But by our clothes we demonstrate that his judgement is just.  
 The fine linen represents the righteousness of God's people.  
 His judgement on the world is just

because his own people are made pure by the blood of Jesus.

And as Jesus dispenses justice with mighty power  
another name becomes visible,

19:16 "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Of all the rulers,

Jesus reigns supreme.

What does it mean for us to be a child of the King of kings?

It means that we are not vulnerable to the powers of evil.

Yes we might suffer for any number of reasons.

But that the end of the day,

it cannot leave a mark.

The only person who has a mark in heaven is the Lord Jesus.

He has the scars where the nails were driven into his hands.

But you will be there unmarked.

As you look at brother and sister Christians,

you can see the marks.

This person is scarred because their marriage failed.

This person is scarred because they've been bullied.

This person is scarred because of a serious illness.

This person is scarred because they've been ripped off financially.

This person is scarred because

they were brought up in a dysfunctional house:

maybe there was no Dad, maybe addictions.

Life leaves its scars.

But in heaven there will be no scars.

I can't imagine what I would look like without scars.

I can't imagine what you would look like without scars.

But when we ride our white horses behind the King of kings,  
we won't have any.

And that's a reason to press on fearlessly now.

But for those who are not riding behind the King of kings  
on their white horse,  
prospects are not so bright.

The angel cried out to the birds,  
"Come, gather together for the great supper of God."

It sounds like it might be  
an invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

It's meant to sound like that.

It's a macabre parody.

While we gather with all God's holy people around his table,  
something that we will actively dragging down from heaven  
into this world later in the service,

the birds are gathering to feast on the corpses of the slain.

Death is the great leveller.

The birds feast the same on kings and generals,  
slaves and peasants.

All those who oppose the King of kings and Lord of lords  
have equal treatment.

Well nearly all have equal treatment.

The Lord Jesus has something special prepared  
for the beast and the false prophet.

Unlike the rank and file members of Satan's army  
who merely perish at the sword coming from Jesus' mouth,  
the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive  
into the lake of burning sulphur.

What does that represent?

It's hard to imagine.

None of us have ever seen a lake of burning sulphur.

It's like an image of judgement that has become a metaphor  
without anyone really processing what the reality is like.

Burning sulphur makes sulphur dioxide.

That's better known as rotten egg gas.

If you've smelled a rotten egg,  
you know that's pretty unpleasant.

And it has a tiny amount of sulphur.

A decent amount of rotten egg gas leaves you gasping for breath.

The sulphur dioxide reacts with water in your lungs

to make sulphuric acid,  
and eats your lungs out.  
While the smell makes you gag.  
And the beast and the false prophet are thrown in alive  
so that they experience the torment consciously.  
It's not at all a pretty picture.  
But it's God's just judgement on them.  
You see they have led others astray.  
They have intentionally deluded people,  
so that instead of worshipping the King of kings,  
they have worshipped the image of the beast.  
They have intentionally led others to their eternal downfall.  
And there must be a reckoning.

How should we respond to the just severity of God's judgement?  
We must be reminded  
of the overwhelming importance of eternal salvation.  
If God in his justice reserves such punishment  
for those who lead people away from Christ,  
how important it is to lead people towards Christ.  
How important it is to resist the delusion of the false prophet,  
and proclaim clearly the gospel of Jesus  
while people still have an opportunity to respond.

If I were to look at the church today  
and not ask people but gauge by observing their reactions,  
what do you think the greatest tragedy  
that could befall a person would be?  
If I asked people no doubt they would tell me,  
"O going to hell is the worst thing that could happen."  
But when you watch,  
what is the thing that gets them most upset?  
Is it when their loved ones are on a path to spiritual destruction?  
Sadly, I don't think it is.  
It's when their loved ones face physical illness.

Now physical illness can be pretty distressing.  
But it's not the be all and end all.  
If you're a Christian,  
the worst that can happen  
is that you die and go to be with Christ for eternity.  
That's not so bad actually.  
So let us look to the rider on the white horse,  
the one called faithful and true.  
His name is the Word of God  
and he judges people according to the Word of God.  
Let's praise him that he's our King of kings.  
And make every effort  
on behalf of those deluded by the beast and the false prophet,  
while there is yet time.