

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church
Revelation #33

Our Blessed Hope!
Revelation 19:11-21

I hope . . . I hope that all of you here today will feel warmly welcomed and be encouraged by the people at Bridgeway.

I hope . . . I hope Oklahoma City will be spared an outbreak of tornadoes this summer.

I hope . . . I hope my children and grand-children will flourish spiritually and passionately pursue God all the days of their lives.

I hope . . . I hope the Kansas City Royals will emerge from the cellar of the American League Central Division and compete for another World Series title!

I hope . . .

What do all of these “hopes” have in common? ***Not one of them is guaranteed of coming to fruition.*** Hope can be incredibly painful and frustrating. When what we hope for doesn’t come to pass, we hurt, we’re confused and disillusioned.

But the human soul cannot survive without hope. So it seems best and wisest if we invest our hope in something that is absolutely certain to occur. And the Bible tells us what that is. It is the hope we have that Jesus Christ will return to this earth a second time to consummate his kingdom, to deliver his people, to banish evil from our world, to destroy every enemy that defies him and his lordship, and to create a new heaven and a new earth where we will live with him in indescribable joy forever. This hope is described in the NT in several different places. For example:

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Romans 8:22-25).

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left

until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

“[We are] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:13-14).

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

If your hope is not in the concrete, tangible, physical, personal return of Jesus Christ, you have no hope. No other hope makes sense or has any possibility of being of any benefit to anyone, if Jesus Christ is not going to return a second time. As Paul said, this is our “blessed hope”! If you think there is yet another option, another hope worthy of your focus and faith, you’ve been lied to. I’m not here to lie to you. I’m here to tell you the truth: Jesus Christ is coming back, and that and that alone is the only hope worthy of your confidence. It is the only hope that will never put you to shame or disappoint you. Today we are going to see what John says about this hope, especially as it pertains to what Jesus will do to the unbelieving, immoral, and idolatrous world that has denied him.

The Rider on the White Horse (vv. 11-18)

There have been previously in Revelation allusions and somewhat vague references to the return of Jesus Christ and the consummation of his kingdom. We saw this in Revelation 11:15 and again in 14:14-16. But now the veil is lifted and there can be no doubt whatsoever at what is happening.

We see here in vv. 11-21 what is undoubtedly a vivid and highly symbolic portrait of Jesus at his second coming. Each of these 12 descriptive phrases is designed to tell us something about who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he will do for his people.

(1) Jesus is first portrayed as one sitting upon “a white horse” (v. 11). You may recall from Revelation 6:2 that another white horse has already appeared, but we determined that the rider in chapter 6 was a Satanic parody or idolatrous rip-off of the Lord Jesus.

Someone may push back by saying that in other texts concerning the second coming Jesus is described as coming on the clouds of heaven. So which is it: on a horse or in the clouds or perhaps on a horse that is in the clouds? Probably none of the above. We must never lose sight of the fact that this is apocalyptic language. It is highly symbolic. His appearance here on a white horse is designed to alert us to the fact that he comes to conquer and to rule. I don't think we are supposed to press for a literal or physiological interpretation of this text.

(2) He is called "Faithful and True" (v. 11). He does not usurp to himself a judgment that he does not rightfully own. His faithfulness to the Father in obeying every command and his faithfulness in fulfilling every promise he has ever made are the foundation of his right to bring judgment. Jesus always spoke the truth and never compromised. ***You can't trust anyone but Jesus.*** He is the only one who always speaks the truth and never lies. He is the only one who is always faithful to his promises, never breaking his word. He is the only one who will never betray you or break a confidence. He is the only one who will tell it like it is, regardless of how it may make you feel.

If Jesus said that your sins are forever forgiven when you repent and trust in his death in your place on the cross, you can believe it. You can bank on it. Why? Because he doesn't lie. He speaks the truth. He is perfectly and altogether faithful.

(3) "In righteousness he judges and wages war" (v. 11). Both verbs are present tense, perhaps pointing to timeless or customary actions of the rider. This judgment and waging of war is not merely *against* unbelievers but also *on behalf of* his people. It is in "righteousness" that he judges. Unlike tyrants and rulers throughout history who took bribes and extorted from others, Jesus wields the sword of judgment in perfect harmony with what is right. Unlike generals and armies that waged unrighteous wars for financial or territorial gain, Jesus wages war *against* all such unrighteousness.

(4) His "eyes are a flame of fire" (v. 12). This reminds us of the portrait of the risen Christ in Revelation 1:14 (see also 2:18-23), all of which points to his role as divine judge who sees perfectly and exhaustively into the lives and hearts of people. You can't hide from him. Nothing in your heart, not even the most closely guarded secrets, are unknown to him. His eyes not only see what you do, but why you do what you do.

(5) On his head are "many diadems" (v. 12). This is to be contrasted with the dragon who has but seven diadems and the beast who has ten. "The undefined multiplicity of diadems shows Christ is the only true cosmic king, on a grander scale than the dragon and the beast, whose small number of crowns implies a kingship limited in time. Christ should wear more crowns than any earthly king or kings, since he is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (19:16)" (Beale, 952). The crowns point to his authority.

It was the great Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper, who rightly declared of Jesus: "There is not a square inch in all the universe over which he does not say: Mine!"

(6) He has a name written “which no one knows but himself” (v. 12). It initially seems strange since there are three other names of Jesus that are explicitly mentioned in this paragraph: he is called by the name “Faithful and True” (v. 11), “The Word of God” (v. 13b), and “King of kings and Lord of lords” (v. 16). But there is apparently one more name that is too sacred or too profound for any to know.

This clearly echoes Revelation 2:17 as well as 3:12. This statement would contradict vv. 11,13,16 only if it is meant to be taken in a strictly literal sense of a literal label. But “the confidential nature of the name here has nothing to do with concealing a name on the cognitive level but alludes to Christ being absolutely sovereign over humanity’s experiential access to his character. To some he reveals his name (i.e., his character) by initiating a salvific relationship (as in 2:17; 3:12; 22:3-4; Luke 10:22; Matt. 16:16-17), but to others he reveals his name through an experience of judgment” (Beale, 955-56; cf. Exod. 6:3). Thus, most likely his “name” refers to his character as saving Lord and/or judging king.

It may also point to the fact that there are depths to Christ’s character and resources in his infinite being that we simply are incapable of grasping or understanding. Also, in the ancient world to know someone’s name “was a basis of power over him. Jesus remains beyond the grasp of his foes, but he has their name and number, allowing him to place them wholly under his spell” (Philipps, 546-7). He is truly inexhaustible!

(7) He is clothed in a “robe dipped in blood” (v. 13; see Isa. 63:1-3). Whose blood is this? Is it the blood of Christ himself, shed at Calvary? Is it the blood of the martyred saints? Is it the blood of Christ’s defeated enemies (a common OT image: see Exod. 15; Deut. 33; Judges 5; Hab. 3; Isa. 26:16-27:6; 59:15-20; 63:1-6; Zech. 14:1-21)? I’m inclined to believe it is his own blood, the blood he shed on the cross as the basis of his victory over sin.

(8) His name is called “the Word of God” (v. 13). He is the Word of God in that through his words and deeds he manifests and reveals the character of God himself. He not only makes known God’s will but is also the one who enforces it on his people. He speaks for God. He perfectly embodies all that God is. He is the expression of God’s character.

(9) He is followed by heavenly “armies . . . arrayed in fine linen, white and pure,” who were “following him on white horses” (v. 14). Is this an army of *angels* accompanying Jesus from heaven to execute final judgment (cf. Matt. 13:40-42; 16:27; 25:31-32; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 14-15)? Or are these *believers*, martyrs and others in the intermediate state, who accompany him? Revelation 17:14 speaks of the second coming of Christ and identifies those who come “with” him as the “called and chosen and faithful”, a clear reference to Christians. Also, in Revelation, with one exception (15:6), only believers wear white garments (see 3:4-5,18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13-14). See also 1 Thess. 4:14-17 for the idea that the saints accompany Jesus at his second coming.

In addition, we read in Revelation 19:8 that the saints, the people of God who have trusted Jesus are clothed in fine linen, white and pure. This now appears again on those who accompany Jesus at his return.

(10) A sharp “sword” from his mouth is used to “strike down the nations”, which he rules “with a rod of iron” (v. 15). The OT background for this is found in Isaiah 49:2; 11:4; and Psalm 2:9. One word from his mouth, one declaration of judgment, and his enemies are defeated. They are defeated by the proclamation of truth!

I find it fascinating, disturbing, and a bit silly to listen to Russia and North Korea and the United States threaten one another with destruction, each claiming to have more nuclear firepower, more manpower, more machines and military might than the other. When Jesus returns he will only have to speak one word with the sword that comes from his mouth and all nations will crumble in defeat.

(11) He treads “the wine press” of the fury of God’s wrath (v. 15). This image is drawn from Isaiah 63:2-6. See also Rev. 14:19-20. Note the piling up of language here. God is the Almighty one. The Almighty one will give vent to his wrath against wickedness and rebellion. This wrath of the Almighty one is characterized by intense and unimaginable “fury.” So don’t think for a moment that God is indifferent to the immorality and idolatry and arrogance of people today or of people in times past. Fierce, yet righteous, judgment is coming.

(12) The name “King of kings and Lord of lords” is on his robe and thigh (v. 16).

An elderly Scottish Christian lady was near death, yet full of peace and comfort and confidence. When asked how she could do this, she replied: “I’m resting in the truth and power of Christ’s good name. If I should awaken in eternity to find myself among the lost, the Lord would lose more than I would, for all that I would lose would be my immortal soul, but he would have lost his good name” (as told by Joel Beeke in Revelation, 498).

According to Proverbs 18:10, “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” We are to take refuge and seek our safety and the reassurance of all God’s promises by trusting in the truth of what God’s name embodies. This means that we must put our confidence and hope for the future in what his many names mean.

A Brief Summation of the Order of Events at the Second Coming of Christ

It might be helpful for me to pause here and try to provide you with a step by step scenario of what I believe will happen when Jesus returns to this earth.

First, contrary to what many, if not most, of you have been taught for the majority of your life in church, Christians will not be raptured or removed from this earth so that they don’t have to endure the persecution and trials that will be imposed by the Beast and by unbelievers. The end-

time scenario portrayed by Hal Lindsey in *The Late, Great Planet Earth* or in the many *Left Behind* novels of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, is simply not biblical. The rapture or translation of the saints is never described in Scripture as a means of escape from tribulation or suffering.

Second, at the close of history Christ will return in the company of his angels and all those who have died in faith. At the sound of the trumpet, those who are with Christ will immediately receive their resurrected and glorified bodies (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Third, those believers who are alive on the earth when Christ returns will be caught up or raptured and immediately transformed by receiving their glorified bodies. See Phil. 3:20-21 and 1 Cor. 15:50-55.

Fourth, we will not ascend into some spiritual heaven far beyond this world but will accompany Christ as he continues his descent to the earth and participate in his defeat of all his enemies. See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, esp. v. 17 and the verb “to meet” . . .

The Judgment of Christ's Enemies (vv. 17-21)

One thing that this final battle signals is the end of any opportunity to be saved. There is no hint in Scripture that those who persist in unbelief and idolatry to the end of their lives or until the time that Jesus returns will have another opportunity to recognize the error of their ways and repent.

Here the angel announces the coming destruction of the beast, false prophet, and their followers through the same imagery found in Ezekiel 39:4,17-20 where the defeat of Gog and Magog is described. The picture of vultures or other birds of prey feasting on the flesh of unburied corpses killed in battle (see also Rev. 19:21b) was a familiar one to people in the OT (cf. Deut. 28:26; 1 Sam. 17:44-46; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; 2 Kings 9:10; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Ezek. 29:5).

This is obviously highly graphic and evocative symbolism. In the OT to give someone's flesh to be eaten by the birds was an expression of total defeat and their being put to shame. We see this in David's words to Goliath:

“This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand” (1 Sam. 17:46-47).

So, we need not think that all the bodies of all unbelievers will literally be eaten by the birds, but rather that God's enemies will suffer complete defeat and devastation and be exposed to the humiliation of judgment.

This portrayal also reminds us that judgment is the great leveler of persons. Neither wealth nor influence nor political power nor gender nor ethnicity nor education will exempt anyone from judgment. All are held accountable to God.

Note in vv. 19-21 the instantaneous brevity of the battle. There will be no successful resistance. Christ's omnipotent authority brings an immediate and irreversible end to all opposition.

The judgment appears to come in two stages (although note that nowhere is the actual "battle" described; only its outcome). First, the beast and false prophet are "seized" and "thrown alive" into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:10 indicates that their torment is eternal. I have argued earlier that the beast and false prophet are primarily corporate or collective images and not two particular historical individuals (although individuals may at various times in history function as a manifestation of either beast or false prophet).

Also, if it seems strange to you to speak of throwing non-human, corporate, images into the lake of fire, see Revelation 20:14 where "death and Hades" are also thrown into the lake of fire! Second, all "the rest" of their followers are killed. That they, too, will ultimately be thrown into the lake of fire is evident from Revelation 20:15.

Conclusion

There are two ways to escape the eternal judgment and condemnation that comes when Christ does. On the one hand, you can live a perfect life: holy, righteous, not only in your deeds but in your thoughts and motivation. Or you can flee to Christ and put your confidence and hope and trust in what he endured on the cross for those who know they could never live a perfect life.

Everyone hopes, even those who deny Jesus Christ. Even atheists. If nothing else, they hope that Christianity is wrong, because if it is right, they will find themselves among those described here in Revelation 19:17-21. Or perhaps their hope is that with death there is oblivion. Eternal unconsciousness. But at minimum they hope with all their hearts that what we read in Revelation is false, a religious fantasy.

Or it may be that some hope that the end result will be some form of universal salvation. They may not believe in Jesus. They may not believe that salvation comes from faith in Christ. But they may live in quiet hope that if they are wrong about whether or not God exists at least there may be the possibility that all mankind will transition into some form of spiritual afterlife where all is well.

But there is only one hope that is sure and solid and certain and that is the hope that Christians have of an eternity of glory and joy and happiness and peace that comes from living as forgiven sinners in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. And that hope can be yours today, if you will but cry out to Jesus and invest your belief and confidence and trust in his death on the cross for sinners and his bodily resurrection from the grave.