

## Understanding Revelation Part 29

### Following Jesus

Revelation 19:1-21

The 1980's TV series, "The A-Team" was made into a full length motion picture.

In both the TV series and the movie, a group of ex-United States Army Special Forces are led by Colonel "Hannibal" Smith

His often repeated phrase, "I love it when a plan comes together" is still ranked in the top 100 Greatest TV Quotes and Catchphrases of all time.

**Revelation 19, is the final coming together of God's plan** – one that His people have been waiting for throughout redemptive history.

It is the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15 that one day the Messiah would bruise Satan's head.

It is when God's promise to Abraham to bless all the peoples of the world through his offspring will come to fruition.

It is when God's promise to David that one of his descendants would rule permanently will come to pass.

It is when all the Old Testament prophecies, many of which we have looked at, will be finally and completely realized.

It is when the words of Jesus, spoken to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, will be fulfilled.

As I read this passage, **I am struck with the great contrast between the first advent of Jesus and His return.**

In the gospels we are introduced to a Messiah who is subject to humiliation, suffering, and death.

But His return will be characterized by triumph, glory, power, and dominion.

He came over 2,000 years ago as Savior, but when he returns he will come as Judge.

At his first coming Jesus wore a crown of thorns as He willingly yielded His power.

At his second coming, He will be adorned with many crowns as a picture of His complete dominion.

At His first coming, the people mocked Him by placing a sign over his head that charged Him with the crime of claiming to be the "King of the Jews".

When He returns, He will claim His rightful place as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the name written on his robe and thigh.

At His first coming, Jesus suffered the humiliation of dying on a cross.

At His Second coming, He will come in glory, riding on a white horse.

At His first coming, He willingly gave up His life to save others.

At His second coming, He will slay those who have refused to trust in Him with the breath of His mouth.

**But there is another contrast** in this passage that I want to focus on – a contrast **between the fates of those who have placed their faith in Jesus and those who have not.** That contrast is illustrated by three pictures

### THREE CONTRASTS

#### 1. Two suppers

##### **\*The marriage supper of the Lamb**

This is going to be a glorious celebration in which Christ followers will enjoy the finest food and wine, and even more importantly, get to fellowship with Jesus face-to-face.

Imagine what that will be like as we observed the Lord's Supper together.

Those who are invited to that supper will be greatly blessed.

##### **\*The great supper of God**

In verse 17, a different supper is described.

It is referred to as "the great supper of God".

But in this case, those who take part in that banquet will actually be the meal, so to speak.

Here in chapter 19, we see in more detail the events that we were introduced to back in chapter 14 where the harvest of the earth was described.

A massive army, after being deceived by the Antichrist and the false prophet, will gather to fight against Jesus.

This is often referred to as the Battle of Armageddon, but it really won't be much of a battle at all. First the Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire.

We'll look at the lake of fire in more detail over the next two weeks when we examine chapter 20.

We'll see there that the lake of fire becomes the final everlasting place of torment for Satan and for all who have not placed their faith in Jesus.

Then Jesus, using only His words, which are represented by the sword coming out of His mouth, will slay every single member of the army that has gathered to fight against Him.

This is exactly what the prophet Isaiah predicted would happen: (Isaiah 11:1-4)

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, 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 picture we get here is that this is all going to happen very quickly.

As I said, this really won't be much of a battle at all.

And once that occurs, God will send his angel to command the birds of the air to feast upon the flesh of the slain bodies, thus fulfilling the words of Jesus: (Matthew 24:28) - *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

Unlike the marriage supper of the Lamb, those who take part in this supper will certainly not be blessed.

## 2. Two armies

### \* The armies of heaven

When Jesus returns, he will be accompanied by the armies of heaven.

As you might expect, there is some disagreement among commentators as to who comprises this army.

But the text itself provides us with a clear answer to that question.

You will note in verse 14, that the armies of heaven are "arrayed in fine linen, white and pure".

We saw that same description earlier in the chapter: (vs. 7-8)

It is clear that those who are arrayed in fine linen, are those who are part of the Bride, the church, and who are further identified as the "saints", another reference to Christ-followers.

Since there are other references to angel armies, both in the Old and New Testaments, it is certainly possible that there are also angel armies that accompany Jesus at His return.

But what is primarily in view here is those who have been faithful to Jesus and who will have the privilege of accompanying Him at His return.

It is instructive for us that this army is also mounted on white horses, just like Jesus, and that they are following Him.

We'll discuss that some more in just a moment.

You will also notice that this army has no weapons.

That is because Jesus does all the fighting here. His army merely follows Him.

This is completely consistent with Isaiah's description of this same event: (Isaiah 63:1-6)

*1 Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." 2 Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. 4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. 5 I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. 6 I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."*

Jesus carries out the judgment against His enemies with no help from anyone else.

When He says that "no one was with me" in verse 2, He is referring to the fact that no one else is involved in carrying out the judgment that is described here.

It does not preclude His followers from accompanying Him as He carries out His wrath.

### \*The armies of earth

As we see in verse 19, the kings of the earth also had their armies.

And these are massive armies.

As we saw earlier in chapter 14, their blood is going to be spattered as high as the horse's bridle over an area that measures nearly 200 miles long.

But these armies will be no match for Jesus.

Every single member of these armies will be slain by His word.  
Five times in this passage, there is reference to flesh that will be eaten by the birds of the air and that description emphasizes that all who are part of that army, regardless of rank, power or social position are going to be slain by Jesus and their flesh eaten by the birds.  
These two contrasting armies represent the two possible fates for every person who has ever lived on the face of the earth.

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus and remain faithful to Him will be part of His army when he returns to this earth to carry out his righteous judgment.  
Everyone else is essentially a member of the armies of the earth.  
Though not all of them will physically be present at the final battle described in this chapter, ultimately all of them will suffer the same fate of being separated from God for eternity in the lake of fire, joining the Antichrist and the false prophet who will be the first inhabitants of that horrible place.  
Ultimately our enlistment in one of these two armies is dependent on the last of the three contrasts we'll look at:

### 3. Two positions \*Following Jesus

Note the position of the army that comes with Jesus – they are following Him.  
Not ahead of Him, not even beside Him, but following Him.  
But because they are following Jesus, they are spared from the judgment that is being carried out before them.  
From the very first of His public ministry, Jesus has called His disciples to follow Him.  
He called His first disciples with these words: (Mark 1:17) - *And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."*  
There is a very important principle contained in these words of Jesus.  
When we choose to follow Him, then He can make us to become what He wants us to be – in this case, fishers of men.

### \*Before Jesus

The remaining people are those who were before Jesus.  
They were the ones who decided to do things their way rather than repent and commit their lives to Jesus.  
And as a result, they were the ones who became the object of His wrath.  
Whenever we choose to go before Jesus, we take ourselves out from under His protection and become subject to experiencing His judgment and wrath.  
Since that is the case then I need to understand...

## HOW TO MAKE SURE I'M FOLLOWING JESUS

### 1. Trust in what He has done, not what I can do.

In this entire account, the armies of heaven do nothing but follow Jesus.  
Jesus is the only one even equipped with a weapon, His word, that He uses to pour out His wrath on those who have chosen not to follow Him.  
In fact, their garments don't even get stained with blood.  
Only Jesus has His robe spattered with blood as He carries out His wrath.  
This principle even applies to how we enter into a relationship with Jesus in the first place.  
Although we usually illustrate that truth with passages from the New Testament, here I'm going to prove this idea using only Old Testament passages in order to confirm the seamless nature of Scripture.

The first thing we must realize is that no matter how many good things we do, when we place those righteous deeds before a holy God, He sees them for what they really are: (Isaiah 64:6) *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*  
Notice the word all – it is used three times in this passage to make it absolutely clear that every single person is a sinner and that what we consider to be righteous deeds don't impress God at all.  
So if that's the case, how do we get right with God so that we can enter into a relationship with Him?

These words from the book of Proverbs give us a clue: (Proverbs 3:5-8)

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*

We must acknowledge to God that our ways and our understanding are incapable of ever earning

favor with a holy God.

So we place all of our trust – our faith – in God alone.

We trust in what He has already done for us and not on what we can do ourselves.

We must also have a reverent fear of God, which leads to repentance.

But there is an even more specific way in which we need to trust in what God has done.

It is described for us by the prophet Isaiah: (Isaiah 53:5-6) -

*But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

This is obviously a prophecy about Jesus the Messiah.

In fact if you read this whole chapter, it is an amazing account of how Jesus came to this earth and took all of our sins upon Himself and suffered and died to pay the penalty for our sins.

The only way that I can make sure I'm following Jesus and therefore not subject to His wrath when He returns to this earth, is by trusting in what Jesus has already done for me on the cross rather than trusting in what I can do in my own strength and power.

But even after we've made that commitment, we need to continue to live our lives day to day depending on what God has done and not what I can do.

You'll notice that the army following Jesus is clothed in fine linen bright in pure.

Earlier in the chapter those garment were identified as the righteous deeds of the saints. But the form of the verb "arrayed" in verse 14 indicates that someone else has clothed them.

That is completely consistent with what we saw in verse 8 where God had granted the Bride the ability to carry out those righteous deeds.

## 2. Have a loose grip on the things of this world

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke these familiar words to those who would choose to follow Him: (Luke 9:23) *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

We normally use the picture of taking up the cross here to illustrate the idea that we must die to self, which is consistent with the idea of denying oneself.

That is certainly at least part of what Jesus is saying here.

But it is likely that there is a further meaning to Jesus' words.

The word translated "cross" is the same word also used for a tent stake or peg.

And if Jesus is using it in that sense, He is telling those who would follow Him not to get too entrenched where they are because they might need to pull up their tent stakes in order to follow Him.

That concept seems to be further supported by the words of Jesus at the end of that same chapter in Luke:

(Luke 9:57-62) - *As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

The consistent principle we find in each of the events here is that we can't hang on too tightly to the things of this world if we want to follow Jesus.

John confirmed that principle with these words from His first epistle:

(1 John 2:15-17) - *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

If we love the things of this world more than we love Jesus, then we'll have a real hard time following Him.

## 3. Imitate Jesus

I mentioned earlier that the armies of heaven imitated Jesus.

Just like Jesus, they were riding white horses.

If we are truly following Jesus, then we will attempt to imitate Him as we live our lives

on a day-to-day basis.

Many of you here remember the old Gatorade commercials that featured Michael Jordan and encouraged us to “Be like Mike.”

If we’re going to be followers of Jesus, then we need to “be like Jesus.”

Here is what the apostle Paul wrote about this idea in his letter to the church in Rome:

(Romans 8:29) - *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Several years ago a psychologist at the University of Michigan did a study in which he found that couples who bore no particular resemblance to each other when first married, had, after 25 years of marriage, come to resemble each other.

And the higher degree of marital happiness that the couple reported, the greater the increase in facial resemblance.

The same thing occurs in our relationship with Jesus.

The more time that we spend with Him and the better we get to know Him, the greater the likelihood that we will become conformed to His image and begin to resemble Him.

#### Are you following Jesus?

If so, then you are in for a great blessing.

But if you’re not, if you’re getting ahead of Jesus and doing things your own way, then there are some serious consequences to that decision. The choice is yours.