

Revelation 19:11-21
Isaiah 63
Psalm 2

“Today, If You Hear His Voice”

January 5, 2020

Read 63:1-64:2

At the beginning of Isaiah 63, it is plainly the LORD himself who comes from Edom.
Only he would speak of his “day of vengeance”
(after all, vengeance is mine, says the LORD!) –
but also there are echoes of Isaiah 59,
where the LORD also looked, and saw that there was no one –
and so his own arm worked salvation.

And then in verses 7-14 we hear a reflection on the Exodus –
and the need for a *new* Exodus –
before closing with a prayer from the prophet –
pleading with God ...
‘Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down...’

We’ve sung Psalm 2 quite a bit of late –
and for good reason!

Psalm 2 is quoted many times – and alluded to many more times – in the NT.
There are four stanzas in Psalm 2 –
which are well divided in the four stanzas in our psalters.
Verses 1-3 sets up the problem:
the nations are plotting against the LORD and against His Christ.
Verses 4-6 then reveal God’s response:
He laughs – saying I have established my King on Zion!
In verses 7-9 we hear from the King –
as he reports that God has begotten him as his Son –
and therefore he will judge the nations with a rod of iron.
And then verses 10-12 conclude with a warning to the nations:
Listen up – and submit to the Son of God!!

So let’s listen up – and submit to the Son!

Sing Psalm 2B
Read Revelation 19:11-21

During Advent we looked at the Fall of Babylon.
How did Babylon fall?
The Beast turned against her.
The City of Man is destroyed by the rulers of man.

In the Fall of Babylon, we are still operating in the *middle* of history.

Cities rise and cities fall.
Nation rises up against nation –
kingdoms come, and kingdoms go...

and every time the City of Man comes crashing down,
we are reminded once again of the invitation to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!

But just when we thought we were *there* –
just when we thought we catch a glimpse of the Bride...

No, sorry.
In chapter 19, we don't yet see the bride!
We only see her in chapter 21!

Before we can see the Bride, we need to see the Bridegroom –
We need to see Jesus!
Because while it is true that the Fall of Babylon will be a sort of self-implosion,
the judgment against the Beast and the False Prophet –
and the judgment against the Dragon – the unholy Trinity –
comes only through the triumphant Lord Jesus Christ!

I want you to see Jesus!
I want you to hear what he is saying to you!

Because John tells us:
“Then I saw heaven opened.”

Heaven doesn't open for some minor reason.
Heaven opened for the Flood.
Heaven opened for the baptism of Jesus
And heaven opened a few other times.
But heaven doesn't open for just anything!

Here in Revelation something *in* heaven has opened three times.

In chapter 4, verse 1, John saw a door standing open in heaven – and he was called to *enter*.
In chapter 11, verse 19, he saw the temple in heaven open.
In chapter 15, verse 5, he saw the tent of witness in heaven open.

Now he sees heaven itself opened!!

In each of these moments, John is standing at the beginning of one of the sevens –
the seven seals (chapters 4-8)
the seven pictures (chapters 12-15)
the seven bowls (chapter 16)

Not surprisingly, we are at the beginning of another 7!

In chapters 13-15, we heard about the seven pictures –
the seven times that John says, “Then I saw...”

In chapters 19-21, there are seven more pictures –
seven more times that John says, “Then I saw...”

And with the fullest opening of the heavens – we have also come to the *final* seven!
Not surprisingly, it’s the *seventh* seven.

Seven Letters.

Seven Seals.

Seven Trumpets.

(Seven Thunders – that he’s told not to write down)

Seven Pictures.

Seven Bowls.

Seven Pictures

And once again, we see Jesus –
but this time in greater glory than ever before!

1. Heaven Opened – Christ Upon a White Horse (19:11-16)

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in^[b] blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

Verses 11-13 show us Jesus, sitting on a white horse.

White is not only the color of purity and holiness in the scripture –
it is also the color of “vindication of truth through judgment” (Beal, 950).

Jesus himself has been vindicated through judgment.

He passed through the fire of the wrath of God – and he has been vindicated!

And so also have his people – the “armies of heaven” in verse 14:

¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

The hosts of heaven follow Jesus on white horses – arrayed in fine linen, white and pure!

This is a glorious army – but not a particularly useful one for fighting!!

At least – not conventional fighting!

They are dressed more for a feast than for a battle!

Indeed “fine linen, white and pure,” sounds more *priestly* than warlike!

But isn't this appropriate?

If our warfare was standard warfare –

then they would be clothed in armor and armed with swords!

But our warfare is spiritual warfare –

and so they are clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

They are a kingdom of priests – not of warriors.

And like Jesus, they are riding on white horses.

This should make us want to look more closely at the picture of Jesus here!

There are seven statements made about the rider in verses 11-13:

First, He is called Faithful and True.

In chapter 3, in the letter to Laodicea,

Jesus said, “The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness...” (3:14)

Second, In righteousness he judges and makes war.

In the letter to Pergamum, Jesus said that if they did not repent,

he would come and war against them with the sword of his mouth.

Third, His eyes are a flame of fire.

In the letter to Thyatira, Jesus described himself as the one whose

“eyes are like a flame of fire.”

The idea is that his eyes see through (burn through) all barriers.

You cannot escape the gaze of the one whose eyes are a flame of fire.

Fourth, On his head are many diadems.

Notice – being the fourth in a series of seven,

this is the central feature.

Never before in the book of Revelation has Jesus been shown with *diadems*.

The only characters with diadems

have been the Beast (13:1) and the Dragon (12:3).

The Beast and the Dragon had usurped their authority.

When Adam fell, he handed over his rule to the Dragon.

That is why the Devil is called “the Prince of this world.”

It was rightly the title of Adam.

God gave to Adam dominion over the earth and the seas.

But Christ – the second Adam – has defeated the Devil

and he has the diadems to prove it!!

Isaiah 62 had suggested this picture.

“The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

Fifth, He has a name written that no one knows but himself.
In the letter to Pergamum, Jesus said that he would give a new name
to the one who conquers –
a name that no one knows except the one who receives it.
Therefore, we see that Jesus has conquered!

Think about this for a moment:
he has a name *written* that no one knows but himself.
If the name is written, then how come no one else knows it?

Think back to what God said to Moses in Exodus 6:3.
“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty,
but my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.”
Now, if you go back and read the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
they frequently use the name “Yahweh.”
So they knew the “word” Yahweh.

It’s not a matter of knowing the particular word.

It’s a matter of whether God has revealed the *content*
of what the name *means*.

The name “Yahweh” (I am who I am – or I will be who I will be)
refers to God’s covenant faithfulness – his *hesed* –
that he *does what he promises*.

And even though Abraham knew the word “Yahweh” –
he did not experience the fulfillment of the promise –
therefore God did not *make himself known* as Yahweh.

Even so, when our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed on that Day,
he will make himself known by a name that only he knows.

I like the way Greg Beale says it:
“To some he reveals his name (i.e., his character)
by initiating a salvific relationship,
but to others he reveals his name through an experience of judgment,
and to them the *redemptive significance* of his name remains a mystery.
Just as ‘no one other than’ true believers

can learn the ‘new song’ of salvation (14:3),
so only they can know and experience Christ’s name,
because of his revealing initiative...” (956)

Do you *know* the saving power of Jesus?
If your answer is “no” –
 don't be ashamed to admit it!
Rather, call out upon Jesus, “Lord, have mercy on me!”
You might say, “but I’ve been a professing Christian for years,
 it would be embarrassing to admit it!”
No, it won’t!
Really!
It will be liberating – to come to Jesus freely and truly!
 Saying to Jesus, “I need *you*.”

Because if you harden your heart in order to *pretend* that everything is okay,
you don’t *know* how much longer you have until the sixth statement:

Sixth, He is clothed in a robe dipped (or sprinkled) with blood.
This is drawn from Isaiah 63 –
 the champion who comes from Edom [we’ll hear more about this shortly].

And seventh, the name by which he is called is The Word of God.
This goes back to the prologue to John’s gospel –
 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
 and the Word was God.”

And then in verse 14, we see the hosts of heaven are clothed in white –
 because Jesus had said to the church in Sardis,
 “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments...”
And then in verses 15-16 we see an explanation of the picture of Jesus in 11-13.

¹⁵ *From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule^[c] them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.* ¹⁶ *On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

In the letter to Pergamum,
Jesus identified himself as the one “who has the sharp two-edged sword” (2:12)

This is why he is called the “Word of God” –
 because his warfare is not fought with physical weapons –
 but by the word that comes forth from his mouth!
This is rooted in Isaiah 49:2, where the Servant of the LORD’s mouth
is said to be a sharp sword.

Likewise, in the letter to Thyatira, Jesus said that he will give to the one who conquers
“authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron...
even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”

This reminds us of Psalm 2, which we sang earlier –
the Son of God – the LORD’s anointed –
who will bring judgment on all the nations with a rod of iron.

And he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.
This is *why* his garments are spattered – even soaked – with blood
(again – remember Isaiah 63!!).

Thus, on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written: “King of kings and Lord of lords.”
This was the name that the kings of Babylon had used of themselves.
In chapter 17, the Lamb was proclaimed Lord of lords and King of kings.

But think for a moment about the picture.

Jesus died for sinners.
He endured the wrath of God –
the cursed death of the cross –
to deliver us from death and hell.

He shed his blood to cleanse us from our sins – to save sinners!

So why is he now trampling out the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God?
Why is now taking vengeance on sinners?!

Because they will not repent!
Because they hardened their hearts – as in the rebellion in the wilderness.
If you refuse to repent – then will come the second picture.

2. Angel Standing in the Sun – Calling for the Great Supper (19:17-18)

¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ 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, ^[d] both small and great.”

In verses 17-18 we see the second of John’s seven final pictures.

The language of a bright angel calling to the birds
reminds us of the angel who proclaimed the fall of Babylon in chapter 18.
There it was Babylon who fell.
Now it will be the kings of the earth who had lamented over her –
now it is their turn to fall!

And the angel summons the birds of the air to “the great supper of God.”

This imagery is taken from Ezekiel 39:17-20 –

“Speak to the bird of every wing.... Gather yourselves together and come...
so that you may eat flesh...
you will eat the flesh of mighty ones and the blood of princes....
And you will be satisfied at my table with horses and chariots,
mighty ones, and all the men of war.”

Why does John choose this particularly graphic image?

We have seen in the book of Revelation that there is an unholy trinity –
the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet,
that is a counterfeit of the true Triune God.

Likewise, Babylon is the counterfeit city that is a mockery of the heavenly Jerusalem.
There are two mothers – our heavenly Mother, and the Mother of Prostitutes.

And even so there are two feasts.

The Wedding Supper of the Lamb –
and the Great Supper of God.

All of history participates in two liturgies.

The liturgy of the Lamb – the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ.
And the liturgy of the Beast –
following our own pleasure, power, and prosperity.

You have a choice:

you can either worship Jesus,
follow his path and obey his voice,
and be the Bride at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb,
or you can worship the Beast,
pursue your own path (thereby obeying the Beast)
and be the main course at the Great Supper of God.

I would very much like to apologize for such a graphic image...
but I can't.

Or better – my apology is that if I do not preach boldly and clearly what Jesus says –
then I am doing far more harm to you
than any slight offense you may take to such an awful image!!

If I do not tell you that this day is coming –
then you would rightly curse my name when the day comes,
and no one warned you!

But that day is coming!

And when it comes,

3. The Beast and False Prophet Captured and Thrown into Lake of Fire (19:19-21)

¹⁹ *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.* ²⁰ *And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence^[e] had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.* ²¹ *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.*

Verses 19-21 then show us the third picture of John's final "seven".

The Beast and the kings of the earth gathered with their armies
to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army...

Remember that John is showing us *pictures*.

He is not describing the future literally.

I rather doubt that there will be a literal battle with literal horsemen.

And once you go the route of saying that the horsemen *could be* tanks,
you have already surrendered the literal reading of the text!

(Besides, the birds of the air don't eat tanks!)

What John is saying – or better, what John is *seeing* –

is the final conflict between Christ and Antichrist.

The final conflict between the Lamb of God and the Beast.

And Jesus will win that battle *by the sword that came from his mouth*.

At the end of verse 20 we hear:

These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

Which two?

The Beast and the False Prophet.

Do you remember the Beast – from chapter 13?

The Beast had seven heads – *one of which* had a mortal wound.

We were told in chapter 17 that the Beast's seven heads

represent seven mountains – they are also seven kings.

So which one of the seven kings gets thrown into the lake of fire?

I think many have gotten really confused at this point in their reading of Revelation,
and they have so identified the "Beast" with the "Antichrist"

that they assume that the Beast is just one person.

But the Beast – according to Revelation 13 and 17 (based on the larger picture in Daniel) – is a kingdom unlike all the other kingdoms.

The Beast is not an individual.

The Beast is a personification of the way that political power is used in the city of man.
Just like the False Prophet – the second Beast – is the economic power.

So when “these two” get thrown alive into the lake of fire –
that means that the whole world system of opposition to Christ will be destroyed.

Throughout the ages, the church has seen this Anti-Christ revealed in part.
Nero – the Pope – the Turk – Napoleon – the Soviet Union –
many Christians have seen a resemblance between these figures
and the descriptions here in Revelation.

But that’s what we should expect.

We should expect to see the “spirit of antichrist” at work (as 1 John says).
And we should expect to see the spirit of antichrist overthrown –
not by the weapons of this world,
but by the sword that goes forth from the mouth of the Lamb!
by the *Word of God*.

The Reformers were by no means the first to call the papacy the Antichrist.
That started in the tenth century.
And some of the medieval theologians who referred to the papacy as Antichrist
were later declared to be *saints*.

Let me quote from a 20th-century Roman Catholic source:

“Not only dissidents and heretics but even saints
had called the bishop of Rome the "Antichrist"
when they wished to castigate his abuse of power.”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antichrist>

The medieval papacy was indeed *Beastly*.

And Rome indeed acted like Babylon.

When Paul speaks of the “Man of Lawlessness”
(who sounds very much like John’s Beast) –

he says that he will take his seat in the “temple of God.”

Which means that the antichrist will probably be a professed Christian.

No one is better able to usurp the power of Christ –
than one who professes to lead the people of God!

That is one reason why the reunion of Christendom can only be a *good thing*
if the Pope renounces his claim of supremacy over all other churches.

So long as the Pope claims *supremacy* over all other churches,
so long as he claims to be the *head* of the Christian church on earth,
he remains *in principle* open to becoming Antichrist once again.

People sometimes think that the doctrine of justification by faith alone
is the chief stumbling block to reunion with Rome.
But even if Rome corrected her errors on justification –
the claim of papal supremacy would remain as a fundamental barrier to union.

But enough of Rome!

Why is John writing this?

He is writing to encourage the church.
Remember the condition of the church at the end of the first century.
We often think of the days of the apostles as the “glory days” of the church.
But if you read their epistles, you see a whole lot of pain, misery, and struggle.

And it’s not just ‘persecution’ from outside!
Paul’s epistles are full of warnings about false teachers *inside* the church.
And John himself in his letters warns frequently of false teachers.

At that time there might have been 100,000 Christians in the whole world –
(the PCA has over 300,000 members – and we are but a tiny fragment
of the roughly 2 billion professing Christians in the world today!)

But the apostles themselves seem to have been very concerned by false teachers.
The seven letters of Jesus to the churches in Revelation 2-3 show why!

The church was becoming infected by Babylon.
Babylon’s pursuit of power, pleasure, and prosperity
was luring whole churches away from their first love.
What matters to you more?
Knowing God?
Or knowing the Star Wars universe?
Or the Avengers universe?

Well, which one do you spend more time on?

When we are devoted to knowing and loving God –
that devotion overflows into our love for one another.
When we are devoted to our own personal pleasure, power, or prosperity,
then that devotion overflows in our neglect or abuse of one another!

(I’m not saying that you shouldn’t watch movies!

It can be useful to watch movies to understand how they shape the people around us – and, for that matter, how they *shape us*.
If you think, “Oh, but Pastor, I just want to turn my mind off and enjoy a movie!” – well, then the movies will shape you anyway – and you won’t even realize it!

This is part of the battle of *words* that Revelation is showing us.

Back in chapter 13, verses 5-6, we heard that the Beast
“was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words...
It opened its mouth utter blasphemies against God,
blaspheming his name and his dwelling,
that is, those who dwell in heaven.”
In the book of Revelation, “earth-dwellers” are those who oppose God.
“Heaven-dwellers” are those who believe in God and the Lamb.

The Beast is speaking evil against God – and against his faithful people –
against the church of Jesus Christ – the heavenly Jerusalem – our Mother.
In that sense, the Beast is the Anti-Christ.

And then we saw the Anti-Mother – the Mother of Prostitutes – Babylon.
Babylon – the earthly city – the city that offers you everything your heart desires.
Power – Prosperity – Pleasure.
Devote yourself to her – and she will give you whatever you want!!

But little do they know that the dead are there –
that her house is but the doorway to the grave.

Babylon promises the world – and delivers the world – for a time...
but the way of the selfish pursuit of pleasure and power and prosperity
always ends where Babylon does:
in death and destruction;
in misery and despair –
with the laments of the kings, the merchants, and the shipmasters –
all who sought their fortune and their happiness with her!

But remember, who destroyed Babylon?
The Beast and the peoples and multitudes and nations and languages
will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.

And throughout history, we see this over and over again.
The city of man is overthrown by man – over and over again.

Whenever a city rises up – like Babylon – seeking to control the whole world –
seeking to displace the Heavenly Jerusalem
as the source of our pleasure, prosperity and power –

the result is always the same.

Eventually, the nations of the earth will destroy the city that they once obeyed.

It's rarely 'cataclysmic' destruction.

Rome was never actually *destroyed* –

the "Fall of Rome" in 409 was more symbolic than substantive –

but Rome did slowly dwindle thereafter.

In the same way, other cities that have gained preeminence:

Constantinople, Paris, London, Moscow –

and the day will come as well for New York, Beijing, and others.

And every time we see a city fall –

we see a foreshadowing of the final fall of Babylon.

Therefore, today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts!

Do not wait a single day!

Repent!

Turn from the path of destruction – and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!