Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Glorious Return of Jesus Christ, Part 3
Scripture: Revelation 19:17-21
Code: 66-72

Tonight again we return to the nineteenth chapter of Revelation and the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Let me read you the text that we will address tonight as we look together to God's precious Word. It describes for us the end of man's day. It describes for us the holocaust of the battle of Armageddon. It describes the effect of the return of Jesus Christ to earth in judgment, it describes for us the final execution of all the ungodly, including the death of the Antichrist and the false prophet who are Satan's world leaders in the end time.

Revelation 19 and verse 17, "And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, `Come, assemble for the great supper of God, in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men both free men and slaves and small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, and those who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse and all the birds were filled with their flesh."

Now this, as you know, is the moment of the return of Jesus Christ and the tremendous impact of that return against the nations who have gathered to war against Him. It is the day, the precise day that was spoken of by the psalmist. Go back to Psalm 2, the second Psalm, and here you have what is a prophecy of this very event. Psalm 2, it says, "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a useless thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed." And there you have the battle scene, the nations of the world, the kings of the earth, the rulers coming together gathering to fight against the Lord and against His anointed who is, of course, the Messiah. And the response of heaven has let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us. In other words, if they try to defeat us, take us captive and bind us, we'll shatter such an effort.

And then this, "He who sits in the heavens," that's God, "laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury. But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain." God laughs and God installs His King, the Messiah, on the throne of

David in Zion.

Then verse 7 says, "I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord. He said to me, `Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee, ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.'" That is He will make Him the ruler of the world. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware. Now therefore, O kings, show discernment, take warning, O judges of the earth, worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling, do homage to the Son lest He become angry and you perish in the way for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him."

There is the psalmist's prophetic picture of the very event just described. And to borrow from that Psalm a thought, this final judgment, this return of the Lord Jesus Christ, as verse 16 identifies Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, this frightening, deadly judgment that takes place is the laughter of God. It is the laughter of God against the climax of man's blasphemous arrogance and unbelief. And you can't help but see this supper called in verse 17 the great supper of God, a supper offered to the birds to eat the dead flesh in contrast to that supper earlier in the chapter, back in verse 9 called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. What a contrast. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, a time of joy and rejoicing, a time of reward and blessing, and the great supper of God, a time of terrifying death.

Dr. Barnhouse wrote in commenting on this, "When our Lord was on earth the first time He told His disciples of a great feast to which all men were bidden to come freely. Love set the table and compassion was there to serve. Grace sat as host and joy poured the wine. For almost two thousand years the Lord has sent out His servants, crying the invitation to one and all, and for almost two thousand years, men for the most part have flouted the love that invited them and despised the grace that pleaded with them. Still, they bring forth the flimsy excuses of a newly married wife, of an unseen field, of an unproven yoke of oxen, still the carnal mind thus proves itself at enmity against God. The Lord is the God of patience but patience will not be mocked forever. The day of wrath must come. And those who have refused the call of grace to the banquet of love must be themselves the victims at another great supper, where their flesh will be picked clean by the fowls of the air."

Another great old commentator by the name of Suisse(?) wrote irresistible words that I must share with you. He said this, regarding this text, "This tells an awful story. It tells of the greatest of manmade food for vultures, of kings and leaders, strong and confident, devoured in the field with no one to bury them, of those who thought to conquer heaven's anointed King rendered helpless even against the timid birds. The great Conqueror comes down, He rides on the bright horse and flies upon the wings of the wind. Smoke goes up from His nostrils and devouring fire out of His mouth. He moves amidst storms and darkness from which the lightning howls its bolts and hailstones mingled with the fire. He roars out of Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem till the heavens and the earth shake. He dashes forth in the fury of His own incensed greatness amid clouds of fire and smoke. The sun frowns, the mountains melt and split at His presence. The hills bound from their place and skip like lambs. The

waters are dislodged from their channels. The sea rolls back with howling fear. The sky is rent and folds upon itself like a collapsed tent. It is the day for executing an armed world, a world in covenant with hell to overthrow the authority and the throne of God and everything in terrified nature joins to signal the deserved vengeance," end quote.

It is the culmination and the climax and the final moment of that which is called the day of the Lord. Now this graphic description that is seen here is not the first such description in Scripture. In fact, clearly the prophet Isaiah saw this when in chapter 66 verses 15 and 16 he wrote, "For behold the Lord will come in fire and His chariots like the whirlwind to render His anger with fury and His rebuke with flames of fire, for the Lord will execute judgment by fire and by His sword on all flesh."

Not only was this seen by Isaiah, but God allowed the prophet Joel to see it. In Joel chapter 3, some of the most graphic description of this event is given, starting in verse 12, Joel 3:12, "Let the nation be aroused, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come tread for the winepress is full. The vats overflow for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

By the way, I might add that it's not a decision to be made by men, it's a decision already made by God. It's the day when God renders His decision, when God brings in His verdict. God is the decider here, it's too late for men.

"The sun and the moon...writes Joel...grow dark and the stars lose their brightness and the Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble." That's the day that is to come. That's the day of...verse 21 says...God avenging blood. That's the judgment.

Even the prophet Ezekiel was given insight into such an event that was to come at the end time. Listen to how Ezekiel describes it in chapter 39 verse 1, "And you, son of man prophesy against Gog, and say, `Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against you, O god, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; and I shall turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest part of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel. And I shall strike your bow from your left hand and dash down your arrows from your right hand, you shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the people who are with you, I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and the beast of the field.'" Over in verse 17, "As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, `Speak to every kind of bird and every beast of the field, assemble and come and gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as though they were rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. So you will eat fat until you are glutted and drink blood until you are drunk from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. And you will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty

men and all the men of war,' declares the Lord God." This describes the judgment of God against the nations.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul spoke of it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Jude spoke of it in verses 14 and 15 of his epistle. Jesus spoke of it in Matthew chapters 24 and 25. And so there are a number of other passages that give us previews of this very descriptive event here in chapter 19 of Revelation. All of those passages are pictures of this kind of judgment, this coming end time judgment. There are various phases of it, various aspects of it, but all of those prophecies look forward to these judgments at the end time, at the time of the return of Jesus Christ. They give us perspective on the final destruction of Satan's empire, the end of Antichrist's reign over the earth and the deceptions of the false prophet.

Now let me see if I can't clarify in your minds exactly what is going on here. This is not the final judgment of the ungodly. This is simply their execution. This is not their final judgment. Their final judgment does not come until chapter 20 and verse 11, after the thousand-year Kingdom, at an event called the great white throne. They're very like a criminal in the sense that they are taken captive in hell. They're sent there by virtue of death and they are held incarcerated in hell for a thousand years until they can be resurrected and brought to the great white throne for their formal sentencing. That's the scene as it is here. They are simply executed here. They will be judged in a thousand years and we'll say more about that when we get into chapter 20.

This is not the final judgment. This is the execution of the ungodly sinners of the world who have sided with Satan during the time of the Tribulation, who have sided with the Antichrist, who have taken his mark, who have worshiped him, who have continuously rejected the gospel. And God comes down and kills them all. And these multitudes that Joel said are in the valley of decision are not there to make a decision, they are there to hear a decision that God has made. The judge has decided and this is execution day.

Now it is this very judgment that is described so clearly by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 25. So let's go back to Matthew 25, it's important that we understand the scriptural teaching about this event, no matter where it might occur, and it does occur at the end of chapter 25 in Jesus famous sermon on His own Second Coming called the Olivet Sermon because He preached it on the Mount of Olives.

First of all, we find the setting of the judgment described in verse 31, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory," and that ties us right into chapter 19, it's right at the same time when He comes. "And when He comes with all the angels with Him," and we saw that's exactly how He's going to come in the prior passage. "Then He will sit on His glorious throne, He comes out of heaven with all His holy ones, sets up His Kingdom. And at that point, all the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them from one another."

We move from the setting of the judgment to the separation. And that is what He does. He's going to separate. He's going to divide. And if we move from the separation to the next point, we would move to the subjects. His separation involves sheep and goats.

So Jesus Christ is going to come. He's going to come as judge. He's going to come to establish His throne. He's going to come with all His saints and angels with Him. He's going to come back and separate. He is separating in order that He might take into His Kingdom the godly and that He might kill, execute the ungodly.

Notice please in verse 32 that it says, "All the nations." All the peoples. Take the word "nations" and don't give it a collective meaning, just give it an individual meaning. What He's going to do is judge everybody in the world, all the peoples, all kinds of peoples from all kinds of places and cultures and languages and nations, He's going to judge all of them. And I don't want you to think of this judgment as a judgment on collective people groups. This is a judgment on individuals from every people group who have continually rejected the gospel. It is a judgment of separation..a judgment of separation.

Let's look at how that works. "He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, `Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" This is the valley of Jehoshaphat, multitudes are there, Christ has come, He's coming down the valley of Jehoshaphat has got to be, we don't know exactly where it is, it's not a historical term, it may be the valley that the Lord creates when He hits the Mount of Olives and creates that instantaneous valley there. In that moment in which He comes to destroy the wicked, He is doing the judgment that is here described. It takes a little while to describe it, it doesn't take a little while for it to happen. But He separates the sheep and the sheep He doesn't kill, they just stay right on the earth and go right into the Kingdom with Him. They are the ones, then, who populate the Kingdom. They will be Jews, of course, because many Jews will have been converted, the nation Israel will be converted, they will be saved and there will be many Gentiles and an innumerable number have already been converted in the time of the Tribulation, and many of them have martyred and executed but still some of them are alive. And so the sheep, or the saints, will remain alive, He doesn't execute them, obviously, why would He kill them? If they're still alive and they've been preserved, and we know from Revelation 12 that Israel will be preserved and there will be many nations preserved as well.

You say, "How do you know that?" Because in the Kingdom there are many nations and they have to start somewhere so there have to be many people groups who are brought into the Kingdom in order that they might produce their own kind. So He takes those who believe and they are left with the Kingdom, only believers. All the ungodly are destroyed. And the believers are called sheep, and that's consistent, isn't it, with terminology used particularly by John. Puts the sheep on His right and the goats on the left.

Now any good shepherd had to do that. You know why? Because sheep tend to be docile and gentle and goats are unruly and rambunctious. And they...you'll often if you travel in the Middle East, you can often...you can spot them because they're salt and pepper. The goats over there are black, very, very black and the sheep are white, and you can see them mingled, but a good shepherd at some point has to do the separating. And that's exactly the picture the Lord uses. And He'll say to those on His right who are the sheep, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." It's Kingdom time and you will live and go right into the Kingdom and I'll be reigning on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem on a restored earth. You've got to have some living people living on this earth to enjoy the fulfillment of that prophecy in their natural condition. And so the believers will go right into the Kingdom. Jesus will initiate it right there.

The criteria by which He identifies His sheep, look at verse 35. How do you tell the sheep? "I was hungry, you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty, you gave Me drink, I was a stranger you invited Me in, I was naked, you clothed Me. I was sick, you visited Me. I was in prison, you came to Me. That's how it's going to be during the time of the Tribulation. There are going to be believing people who are not going to have any food. Why? Because they don't have the mark of the beast, right? So they can't buy and sell. And who's going to give them food? And they're going to be thirsty and they can't get anything to drink, who's going to give them drink? And they're going to be strangers and they're not going to have access to a place to stay because they're outcasts, they're going to be...they're going to be hunted. They're going to have to be refugees, they're going to have to hide to save their lives. And they're going to need clothes and they're going to be sick and somebody is going to need to tend to them, and they're going to be incarcerated in prisons by the system of the Antichrist.

And somebody is going to minister to them and you ask the simple question...who will it be? And I'll tell you who it will be, it will be other believers, right? Didn't Jesus say in John 13:34 and 35, "They will know us by our love," didn't He say that? "Obviously if you love one another, they'll know you're My...what?...disciples." And Jesus is simply saying, the sheep are the ones who have evidenced their regenerated life by the love of the brethren. John says in his epistle, "If you say you love God and don't love your brother, you're...what?...you're a liar."

And we say, "Well why does He say Me, Me, Me?" Why? Because Christ lives in every believer. Is that not true? In John 18 Jesus says, "Receive the least of these little ones, you receive Me." How you treat another believer is exactly how you're treating Jesus Christ. And so He personalizes it and says, "I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty, you gave Me drink. I was a stranger, you invited Me in. I was naked, you clothed Me. I was sick, you visited Me. I was in prison, you came to Me." And by the way they treated other believers, they evidenced their own salvation.

And then the righteous will say, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You drink, and when did we see You a stranger and invite You in, and naked and clothe You? And when did we see you sick, or in prison and came to You." And the King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you...what...you did it to Me." There's evidence that these are sheep because of how they treat their brothers and sisters in Christ. They're not saved by their good works, their good works evidenced their salvation. And the love of the brethren is a reality within the fellowship of faith. "How dwells the love of God in you," John asks in his first epistle, "if you don't meet the need of your brother?"

So the sheep then go into the Kingdom. And the good deeds are the evidence of their salvation. Then in verse 41 He will say to those on His left, this is the goats who represent the unregenerate, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." Why? "I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty, you gave Me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, you did not invite Me in. Naked, you did not clothe Me. Sick, in prison, you did not visit Me. Then they themselves also will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn't take care of You? Then He will answer to them, saying, Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me and these will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous to eternal life."

That's the same judgment you're seeing occurring in Revelation chapter 19. And their works showed that they never belonged to God at all. They never belonged to Christ. Very similarly, a cross reference would be Romans 2:5 through 10 where the Apostle Paul says that God's going to judge in the future on the basis of works. Not because we're saved by works, but the evidence of our salvation is in those works.

So this then is the destruction of the ungodly. He says the sheep are going into the Kingdom, the ungodly are going to be sent into the everlasting fire. This, as I said, is the destruction of the ungodly.

So what Jesus was saying is the same thing that John is seeing in the vision of chapter 19. It's important to say that because I think there are people who assume that Jesus is a much nicer person than some of the other New Testament writers. There used to be hermeneutic among liberal theologians called "The Spirit of Jesus." And anything that was supposedly attributed to Jesus that didn't fit the docile sort of indifferent tolerant spirit of Jesus that they had concocted as being true of Him, they just eliminated it all together. But there obviously is a reality in the mind and the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ that will deal as firmly with vengeance as it dealt compassionately with mercy.

So, in chapter 19 we are hearing really John's description of the very same event that Jesus described in Matthew chapter 25. Now if I may, I want to take you back to chapter 16 of Revelation,

and I'm trying to fill in all of this so that you have a complete understanding. Revelation 16 verse 13, "And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs." This, by the way, is the sixth bowl judgment. Remember, seven seal judgments, culminating in seven trumpet judgments, culminating in seven rapid-fire end-time bowl judgments. So we're right at the very end. Out come these filthy scummy demon spirits performing, verse 14 says, signs. And what do they do? They go out to the kings of the whole world and they deceive them to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty.

The question often comes up, why do the nations of the world when they've been so devastated through the whole Tribulation think they can come and fight against God? And the answer is because there are hellish demons who go over the world and deceive them and God allows that to happen. So it its these demons who have gone over the world and they have collected the remaining forces of humanity and they've driven them all to the land of Israel, stretching to the north from Armageddon, all the way down to the south. Collecting themselves together under the illusion that they can fight against the Lord Jesus Christ who is about to come.

Verse 15 he says, "Behold, I am coming like a thief." That means suddenly, terrifyingly, and with devastating results. And verse 16 says, "They were gathered together to the place which in Hebrew is called *Har Magedon*, Armageddon, the valley of Megiddo." And so again I'm just pointing you to the fact that chapter 16 also speaks of the very same event. You read it in Joel chapter 3 as we did earlier. You read about it in Zephaniah chapter 3, you read about it in Zechariah chapter 12, Zechariah chapter 14.

So demons gather the remaining forces of the ungodly. Remember, their capital city Babylon is already destroyed. But what is left of their worldwide power is collected and gathered into the land of Israel. They gather to fight or perish. Right now, folks, it's...it's fight or die. The executioner is on the brink, Christ rising from the throne gathering all of the holy angels of heaven together is about to descend in devastating judgment on the world. You say, "Do they know that?" Sure they know that, the preachers have been telling them that. And it's now fight or die. And so they come armed to the teeth. And you can believe that whatever nuclear capability they have, what ever warheads, whatever exotic, sophisticated kinds of powers they may be able to amass on the level of weaponry, whatever "Star Wars" kind of operations they can pull off from satellites and whatever else is up in the sky, they're going to have it all. They're going to get all of the cooperation of all of those who possess nuclear armament and they're going to be ready to destroy the Son of God when He comes.

And so, down in verse 17 we come to the conquest. In spite of all of their efforts, in spite of all of the attempts to victory, they're going to be terribly defeated. I just want to speak of two things and maybe we'll just look at the first one tonight and we'll have to do this one more time. Conquest announced and then conquest accomplished. Conquest announced and then conquest accomplished.

Verse 17, "And I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried out with a loud voice saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, `Come, assemble for the great supper of God.'"

Now here again an angel plays a key role, an important role in the action of the final days in the action of the book of Revelation. This angel is standing in the sun. What does that mean? Does it literally mean he's standing right in the sun and not being burned up? Well it would seem to me that if he was actually standing in the sun, we don't have any reason to believe that angels who are spirit beings could project any visible of themselves from a position inside the sun that would be able to be seen by anybody. I mean, a little angel standing in the middle of the sun, firing off its flames thousands of miles into space wouldn't be seen. I think the meaning here is that in the proximity of the sun, perhaps...perhaps in an eclipse fashion, blocking out the sun, stands this angel. And he is doing to the sun what the moon does to it in an eclipse. The sun glows nothing but an outline around the silhouette of the angel.

He stands in a conspicuous place and he stands in a commanding place. Now remember that Joel 2 verses 30 to 32 and Acts 2:19 to 20 says that the sun will not give its light. Remember that? And the moon will go dark when the sun goes dark because the moon is a reflector. But the indication here is that the angel is standing in the sun and the sun is still shining so we assume this is before God turns out the sun.

The angel makes the announcement. And when the announcement is complete and he has called the birds together to eat the flesh, then the sun goes black. The sun, Matthew 24:29 says, will be dark and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then appears the Son of Man.

So first the announcement then everything goes out. And everything goes black. And then comes the blazing glory of the Son of Man in heaven.

Now let's go back to this angel. He cried with a loud voice. Something angels have been often doing in the book of Revelation. Chapter 7, chapter 10, chapter 14, chapter 18, angels were yelling a lot in the visions John was having and always to introduce very important words to announce judgment on very wide scale. They're talking to the world. I mean, this is going to be some kind of a heavenly megaphone and the whole world is going to hear this. But who is the angel addressing? The angel is talking to the birds. Amazing. Which birds? The ones that fly in midheaven. What's midheaven? It's where birds fly. How is that for reasoning.

So if you wonder when you read chapter 8 verse 13, and chapter 14 verse 6 where you have the Greek term midheaven what he means, here he defines it. Midheaven is where birds are. It's up there above us.

Why is this...why is this angel standing in the sun yelling so the whole world can hear him and talking to the birds? He's inviting them to feed on the carnage. He's declaring the victory before the battle is ever fought. He's inviting them to eat the carrion, the dead corpses of all slaughtered in the return of Jesus Christ.

And even this isn't new. No, even Jesus spoke this in Matthew chapter 24. Amazing what Jesus said. He's talking about verse 27, the coming of the Son of Man and then in verse 28 He says, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather," Matthew 24:28. Also Luke records Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 17 that at the time of the coming of the Son of Man, the same kind of thing is going to happen. In fact, Luke tells us when He comes two will be in a bed, one will be taken, that means taken into the Kingdom, rather taken into judgment, the other will be left to go into the Kingdom. Two grinding at the same place, one will be taken away into judgment and be sent to hell, the other will be left to go into the Kingdom. And they answering said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body is there also will the vultures be gathered."

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

So Jesus on at least those two occasions and perhaps more often talked about birds, birds of prey, not only predatory birds but scavenger kinds of birds eating the flesh of the corpses. Now it could be that this is a metaphor for just the fact that the wicked, rotten, world is seen as a decaying, filthy corpse that's good for nothing but to be destroyed. But I think there's no reason not to see this literally, as well.

The angel commands the birds. And he says, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God." And by the way, it won't be the first supper that birds have had on human flesh, birds have eaten human flesh through the history of the world. You can see a similar kind of judgment. For example, go back just to the Old Testament and you see it. Isaiah 18 talks about judgment on Ethiopia and Egypt and in verse 6, "There will be left together for mountain birds of prey and for the beasts of the field and the birds of prey will spend the summer feeding on them. And all the beasts of the field will spend harvest time on them." You have the same thing in Jeremiah 7:33. Through all the wars of antiquity, all the wars of human history up until the modern era, birds like the birds who will eat the flesh of these in the end time have eaten the flesh of others. Certainly through human history birds of prey and scavenger birds have filled themselves with flesh.

So it's a call to the supper of God. And the birds are called to gather. The battle will be very brief, covering a span of two hundred miles where the blood splatters so high it hits the horses' bridles.

Millions of dead bodies strewn everywhere. The prophet tells us that after the birds have done their work and eaten themselves and glutted themselves, it will take seven months to bury the dead bodies, seven months right on into the Kingdom.

Now if you're curious like I am, you're saying to yourself, "Where are all these birds going to come from?" And I want to help you with that. You might be interested to know, if you've ever been to the land of Israel you're very aware of the Israeli Air Force, you're very aware of the fact that they're flying over you all the time. In fact, it takes an Israeli jet fighter pilot a minute a half to fly from the western border to the eastern border of Israel. So they just keep doing this....a little longer from north to south. But it's a matter of security to them and that's a matter of life.

And they have fought, as you well know, in all kinds of wars in the Middle East and those pilots put their life on the line. But I want you to know this. Far more Israeli pilots have been killed by birds than by enemies throughout the history of the Israeli Air Force. And one of the most frightening realities in the Israeli Air Force is the occasion when a bird goes right through the plexiglass in a cockpit of a jet and takes the head off the pilot. And it happens frequently, or did up until most modern times.

You say, "How do you know that?" Because I have a training film video produced by the Israeli Air Force and by the government which was sent to every airport in the world. And a copy given to every chief pilot in every installation. I happen to come across the chief pilot for American Airlines in Chicago. And he said, "John, I have a video I want to give you, you will find it absolutely fascinating. It's all about the birds in Israel." They had such a major problem even in the fear of losing airliners going into Tel Aviv because so many birds were around the Tel Aviv the Bengourian(?) Airport there, they were sea birds, sea gulls and other birds around the sea. And because there was water at one end of the runway, they would literally swarm there and get caught in the props. And pilots were losing their lives in that way. They showed film of the bird literally would decapitate the head of a pilot, cockpit film. It's incredible to see.

And they realized that they were going to have to do something about this problem. And so...they are ingenious, you know, and so they decided that they would come across a plan and they got some people together to study the whole problem. And what they did was they developed gliders and they started to fly with the birds. And they came across some amazing discoveries.

First of all, all the birds from western Europe in the far west, way into Siberia, all the migratory birds which are the larger birds, all of them migrate south every year. And all of them migrate through Israel. Millions and millions of them. You say why? Because in their migration they need food, for one. And there's no food east of there because it is utterly barren desert. And there's no food west of there because it is...what?...sea. And so they fly down the narrow strip of Israel. They come in the spring, the early spring and they know what kind of birds come and they can predict within a day or two when they will arrive. And different bird groups come and millions and millions of them come, all flying

through Israel. Isn't that amazing?

You say, "Are you saying that the Second Coming of Jesus will be in the spring?" Might be in the spring, or He might just call them early...or hold them till late. But that's how they come.

There's another reason they always fly through Israel, because Israel has thermals and they come in high and they can literally glide right down the thermals and then they dissipate across the north of Africa. They ride the thermals. They come for the food.

And so the Israelis began to study these birds and this is an incredible thing, it shows you the mind of God in His creative power, but each type of bird group always fly the same pattern at the same altitude at the same time of year. And so now they have trained all the pilots to fly at different altitudes at given periods of time from the migrating birds, and they have solved the problem. It's incredible. This training film was then used by American Airlines to train all of their pilots who fly in there to understand the patterns, the patterns the inexorable on varying patterns of these birds. But when the time comes for the feast, the birds will know the path well. And they will come to the great supper of God.

Now, let's look at verse 18. He says, "Come, birds, assemble for the great supper of God," and here is the extent of this judgment, "in order that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of commanders, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves and small and great." And, of course, you understand he's just collecting absolutely everybody. Eat the flesh of kings, start at the top. It's a terrible indignity for a king to lie unburied and for birds to tear his flesh. That's precisely what's going to happen. There's not going to be anybody to take care of them. There won't be anybody left alive to take care of them. This is the end of the kings, a desecrated kind of end. The birds are going to eat their flesh.

And the rulers won't be able to lead their people, the kings won't be able to give direction because the fear will be so totally overpowering. The flesh of commanders, we just kind of move down the ranks, the flesh of mighty men, great soldiers, the flesh of horses and the riders, that would be just the soldiers themselves. Now obviously there's not going to be armies on horses in the same way there are today. Although there certainly may be some. They were the ancient battle instrument, and are emblematic of whatever battle instruments are used in the future. Perhaps there will be horses there.

Then the flesh of all men is added, look at that in verse 18. "The flesh of all men both free men and slaves and small and great." And the terminology is very much like Revelation chapter 6, everybody...everybody in the whole world is going to become food for vultures...the whole world. This is the end.

Zephaniah the prophet described it, "Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly. Listen, the day of the Lord, in it the warrior cries out bitterly, a day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind because they've sinned against the Lord, their blood will be poured out like dust, their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath. And all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one...here it comes...of all the inhabitants of the earth." There is no way around this, this is the execution of everybody who is not redeemed, everybody. Nobody escapes, free men, slaves, small, great, nobody escapes. They all become food for the feast.

Well, the conquest is announced, let's look quickly then at the second point, the conquest is accomplished. Verse 19, "I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army." And John is looking at this incredible vision and he says, "I saw the beast." Who's that? That's the Antichrist, isn't it? The world ruler, one introduced in chapter 11 verse 7 and then described in chapter 13 verses 1 through 8. The beast and the kings of the earth, who are they? Well back in chapter 17 you remember that there are ten kings, and the Antichrist has somehow divided the world into ten sectors and he has put somebody over those sectors who answers to him. So the Antichrist who rules the world and those who are immediately under him, these who are ruling over the ten sectors of the world, and then he says their armies. That's...that's everybody who's collected there. Remember now, the sixth bowl, chapter 16, the deception of the demons who come out of the pit gather all these armies. So he says I saw the Antichrist, I saw the ten kings, I saw the armies from all over the world assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army. They have armies, He has an army, singular.

They're assembled for the purpose of making war against Jesus Christ. And as I said, they'll be armed to the gills, armed to the teeth. And the battle is set. Zechariah 14:5 describes Christ's army as, quote: "All the holy ones with Him...all the holy ones with Him."

So His enemies succeeded in killing Him when He came in humility and grace, because it was the plan of God for salvation that He die. They hated Him when He healed and showed mercy. Imagine how they're going to hate Him when He has been judging them and is now ready to return to execute them. And so they're armed and they're ready.

Then immediately it happens, verse 20, "The beast was piazo, captured and with him the false prophet." The first thing you do is take the leaders, and now you've destroyed the head. And so the beast is captured or seized and with him the false prophet. You remember him, he performed the signs in the presence of the beast by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the

beast and those who worshiped his image. You remember the description of the false prophet back in chapter 13 verses 11 to 13, how he performed signs and wonders to convince people that the beast was a god. And then you remember in chapter 13 verses 16 and 17 how everybody who worshiped the beast was given a mark, the mark of the beast on their head or in the back of their hand. And by that they could buy and sell and function in the society. Then in chapter 13 verses 14 and 15 it describes how they worshiped the beast.

So the beast was seized and the false prophet who did the signs and wonders who deceived those who received the mark and who caused people to worship his image. In other words, the army loses its leadership. These are two men, by the way, I don't want to lose sight of that, they're two human beings. They're demonically empowered and indwelt, but they're human beings. One is the political leader of the world, the other is the religious leader who has turned the religion of the world toward the Antichrist so he is both king and god. They are captured first, the armies lose their leaders immediately. And these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire.

Apparently they don't even die, they're has to be some kind of transformation but Christ just takes them and pitches into the lake of fire. This is the first mention of that place which is the final eternal flaming hell. There is a hell, there always has been a hell, being separated from God, it is always a place of torment, but this is its final form. It's called the lake of fire. Any place separated from the presence of God is a hell of some kind, but this is the final form of that hell. And the first two to populate it are the Antichrist and the false prophet.

Daniel 7:11, he saw the same thing. "I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and given to the burning fire." So Daniel sees some kind of destruction. John says they were cast alive into the lake of fire. Their bodies may literally have been killed, but, of course, their spirits go alive into hell. It's hard to resolve those two texts. But the Lord knows the significance of them.

But nonetheless certainly they'd have to be altered or changed as they go into that hell in order not to be instantly consumed. So maybe there is remaining flesh in the world as they are executed and their spiritual being is somehow transported to hell.

This is not Hades. Hades is a temporary place. This is the final lake of fire. Later on, by the way, we'll find in chapter 20 that the devil and all his demons will be sent there because it was prepared for them. And sad...sad, so will all unbelievers at the end of the Great White Throne Judgment, be taken and sent into the final lake of fire.

This lake of fire tells us several things that are important. It's good evidence that there's no such thing as annihilation of the ungodly. Some people say when the ungodly die, they're annihilated. It doesn't make sense because these two people, the beast and the false prophet, are thrown into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. They're thrown in, then the Kingdom begins. Down in chapter 20

verse 10, "The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone at the end of the thousand-year kingdom where the beast and the false prophet are also." So they didn't get annihilated when they arrived there, did they? They're still there a thousand years later.

And then verse 15, "Anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the same lake of fire." Isaiah looked at this lake of fire, chapter 66, and says it's a place where their worms shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched. Jesus Christ looked at this place and called it everlasting fire where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched, called it Gehenna. That was a smoldering constant fire in the city dump of Jerusalem that never went out. Jesus said, "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it shall be in the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity and cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable."

In Matthew 25:41 it's called "everlasting fire." Revelation 14:11 says the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. And John says this lake of fire burns with brimstone. Chapter 20 verse 10 says the same thing, "It burns with brimstone." Chapter 21 verse 8 says, "The lake that burns with fire and brimstone." It's just to make a more graphic description, brimstone, a sulfuric kind of chemical thing that makes it explosively hot.

And that's what's going to happen to the rest of the people of the world, not just these two, they have the privilege of being the first two to populate the final...the final place, the final place of destruction, the eternal hell. How sad, how tragic. But then, after all, they're the two most blasphemous human beings who ever lived, they're the two who had the greatest exposure to preaching and miracle power and judgment and they are the first to be given the distinction of being eternally separated from the presence of God. And the rest of the world will follow.

And that takes us to the last verse, and we did make it, how about that? Verse 21, "And the rest, all the rest of these armies were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse and all the birds were filled with their flesh." Remember now, chapter 19 verse 15 says, "Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword and with it He'll smite the nations." This is His Word, isn't it? The whole world of sinners is killed, not just the armies but whatever sinners are left all over the globe. And not all of them will be gathered there. The armies will be there, but there will be some people remaining and they'll be killed as well. He'll smite the peoples, chapter 19 verse 15 says, swift, devastating death comes as He speaks.

John Phillips has written, "Then suddenly it will be all over. In fact, there will be no war at all in the sense that we think of war, there will be just a word spoken from Him who sits astride the great white horse. Once He spoke a word to a fig tree and it withered away, once He spoke a word to howling winds and heaving waves and the storm cloud vanished and the waves fell still. Once He spoke to a

legion of demons bursting at the seams of a poor man's soul and instantly they fled. And now He speaks a word and the war is over, the blasphemous loud-mouthed beast is stricken where he stands. The false prophet, the miracle working windbag from the pit is punctured and still. The pair of them are bundled up and hurled headlong into the everlasting flames. Another word and the panic-stricken armies reel and stagger and fall down dead, field marshals and generals, admirals and air commanders, soldiers and sailors, rank and file, one and all they fall and the vultures descend and cover the scene."

Just an incredible, incredible picture of how it's all going to end. Zechariah 14 describes it with these words, verse 3, "The Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which is in front of Jerusalem on the east and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley," I mentioned that may well be the valley of Jehoshaphat. "So that half of the mountain may move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains." In other words, God's people will be able to flee from Antichrist and from the devastation right through that valley. "To Azel, yes you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. The Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with Him. And it will come about in that day there will be no light, the luminaries will dwindle. It will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening there will be light." It's all going to dark and then boom, the light of Christ's coming. "It will come about the living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea. It will be in summer as well as in winter."

Somehow the whole topography of Israel is going to change. He hits the Mount of Olives, splits the things wide open, the people all flee, then the water flows through that new valley and creates a blossoming desert.

"And the Lord will be King over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one."

"Now this will be the plague...verse 12 says...which the Lord will strike all the people who have gone to war against Jerusalem." Here's how they're going to die, listen to this. "Their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet." Just like that. "Their eyes will rot in their sockets and their tongue will rot in their mouth. And it will come about in that day that a great panic from the Lord will fall on them, they will seize one another's hand and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another." As they're rotting away, they'll kill each other, strike each other.

It's a frightening scene. Certainly not something to be relished, something to be dreaded and feared. This is going to come at the end. But Daniel chapter 12 verse 12 extends it out, actually seventy-five days, if you add it all up, past the end of the Tribulation. Some kind of time period. It may well be that

that forty-five days, ultimately seventy-five days is the days when the birds eat the feast of flesh, followed by the burial.

And then this passage closes the chapter, "All the birds were filled with their flesh." Can you imagine John seeing all this vividly before his eyes? And, you know, you read all that and you're reminded of what Peter said. He said, and it's just hard to imagine, he said, "Know this...2 Peter 3...that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, saying, `Where is the promise of His coming?'" There will always be deniers, there are always going to be those who are going to deny that Jesus is coming. "Where is the promise of His coming." They are mockers. You know what their argument is? It's the argument of ridicule, it's not an intellectual argument, it's just the argument of ridicule. They play on the disappointment of people who have been waiting and waiting and waiting and hoping and hoping. Their mockery comes out of their ridiculing hearts.

And then their mockery comes out of the love of sin. It says, "They follow after their own lusts." And anybody who follows after his own lusts doesn't want a day of reckoning, right? They want to pursue their sexual pleasure and they do not like evangelical eschatology. They want an eschatology that suits their behavior. They don't want to hear about judgment on sin. So they argue from ridicule, they argue from morality, or immorality, and then they argue from uniformity. They say, "Forever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue just as they were from the beginning of creation."

You know what their argument is? Well it will never happen because it never has. It's like saying, I'll never die, I never have. It's the argument from uniformity. There can't be a divine judgment like that, there never has been one. Why you, anybody understands evolution, we've been around for billions and billions of years and this deal just keeps going along. It's just always been the same, no judge, no God, no judgments, no eschatology, no accountability.

You see, that's what evolution is. And that's what natural...natural approach to the world is. It's just a way to escape accountability. And Peter says, "I think they forgot the Flood. I think they forgot. This had escaped their notice that God created an immense catastrophe when He turned loose the heavens in the Flood. Their foolish arguments, notwithstanding, Jesus will come. And what are the argument of believers? The argument from Scripture. He says, "The Word spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles." In spite of what the mockers say in their ridicule and their love of sin, and their belief in uniformity, your argument is Scripture. Secondly, your argument is history, the Flood. Thirdly, your argument is eternity. What does that mean? God's not bound by a clock, folks, don't let this one fact escape your notice that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. God's not operating by your watch. And if you look at your watch and your little calendar and say, "Well it never has happened, it certainly never will," God's not confined to your timetable.

And then you can argue from grace. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, He's just patient because He wishes not any to...what?...to perish." So we argue from Scripture and history, we argue from eternity, we argue from grace that Jesus is coming. And then Peter says, 2 Peter 3:10, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements be destroyed with intense heat, the earth, the works be burned up and since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be?" That's the question, isn't it? I think you want to be the kind of person who escapes this judgment. That's only sensible. By God's grace I pray you will be.

Father, thank You for this time tonight, as frightening as it is, as fearful, as tragic, as horrifying to think about people in eternal punishment, eternal hell. Yet, Lord, we know that this gives You glory and brings You honor. And we know that this comes at the end of the greatest expression of the preaching of the gospel in the history of the world. This comes at a time when You have demonstrated Your power over and over, Your miracle power, Your judgment power. You have shown Your mercy, You have shown Your grace, You have shown Your justice, Your wrath. You put it on display day after day after day, the gospel has been preached to every person from preachers and evangelists to angels flying through the heavens. And Your grace has extended itself patiently all the way to absolute obstinacy and hardness of man. And then when all they do is shake their fist and curse You, the judgment falls.

O Father, we know You're not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. You have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And we know that's why You sent Your Son Jesus Christ because You so loved the world that You wanted to provide a Savior, a way of escape, one who could bring the forgiveness of sin so that sinners would never have to experience Your judgment. I would pray that even tonight, even in the hearing of this message, You would be gracious to sinners and save them from the wrath to come. We thank You, Father, that we don't look for this event, we look for the Rapture when You collect us out of this world and take us to the place You've prepared for us in heaven, a place of bliss and joy, not a place of eternal punishment. May this message grip our hearts. And those of us who are Christians, may we be filled with joy and a sense of responsibility like Paul who said knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men. May it give us a desire to speak the truth to those who are perishing. We bless You for this day and all that it has brought to us and give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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