Revelation: Strength for Today; Bright Hope for Tomorrow
The Final … Battle?

Our first passage is from the prophet Isaiah 11:2-5 where he describes how the Messiah, the Christ, our Savior will win the day over evil:

> ***2*** *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—*
> *the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,*
> *the Spirit of counsel and of might,*
> *the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—*
> ***3*** *and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.*
> *He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,*
> *or decide by what he hears with his ears;*
> ***4*** *but with righteousness he will judge the needy,*
> *with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.*
> *He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;*
> *with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*
> ***5*** *Righteousness will be his belt*
> *and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

Reflection *Revelation: Strength for Today; Bright Hope for Tomorrow*
The Last … Battle?

We are nearing the end of our worship series in Revelation, and like in a tv mini-series or a movie, the loose threads are being tied up. The villains are being brought down. Last week it was Babylon (aka - Rome, aka-any oppressive power structure). This week we have the rest.

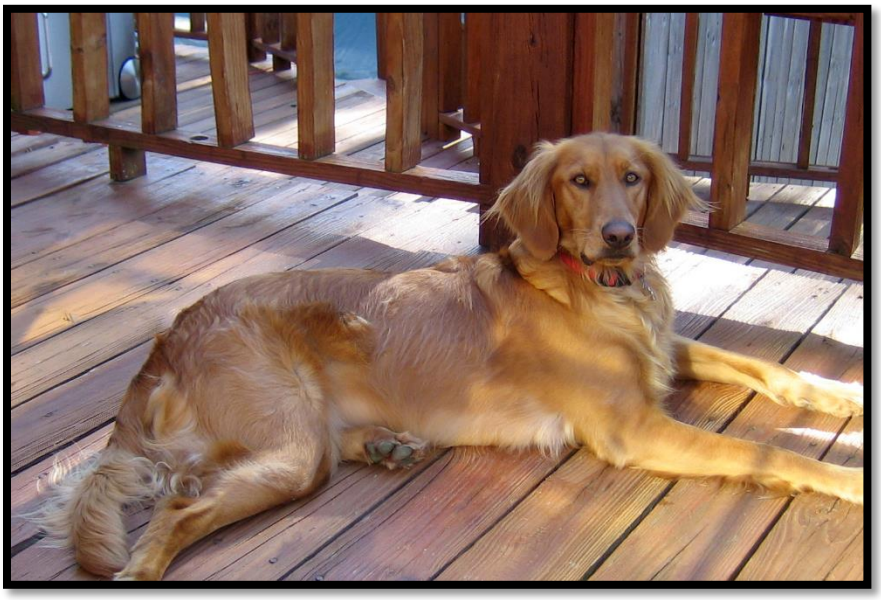
Some think of this as the Final Battle in Revelation, but it really hasn't been that. It has been one battle of a sort, but it has been described in a variety of ways. You can think of it like a kaleidoscope of sorts with each turn showing a different picture, and yes, we are getting to the final picture John presents of it this week.

But why? Why so many different pictures. Two things come to mind:

1. When you think of John having a vision, seeing what is going on in heaven or from a heavenly perspective, his is looking at something that is outside of, completely different from, any human's lived experience on earth. He is trying to describe it for us.

   Have you ever had a friend describe someone you've never met to you? *Well, she has amber brown eyes that almost glow in their intensity, and her hair is an incredible shade of strawberry blonde. It looks so smooth and silky. She is of medium height and thin but not too thin. She almost has a regal look about her. Absolutely beautiful.*

   Okay, do you have a picture in your mind? This is who I was describing.



   This is my mother's dog, Amber. Beautiful, right? Everything I said was true. Be honest, is she what you had pictured in your mind?

   So now, let's apply that to the heavenly realm. John's trying to describe the indescribable, from our perspective, our context, so he uses metaphors and symbols. He does it in a variety of ways. It is not unlike when Jesus talks about the "Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew chapter 13. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed … like a treasure in a field … and so on." Different ways of looking at it, describing different aspects, but still hard to picture accurately in our minds.

   But, John also wants to make sure that we get the message that we, the followers of God, who have to suffer through the pain and trauma of the world now, can be sure of one thing.

2. No matter what we are experiencing now, evil ultimately will be destroyed forever. No matter how you look at it, or how you conceive of it, let there be no doubts. Whether that evil comes in the form of a virus that attacks people all over the world, especially the most vulnerable, or it is systems that grind people up and spits them out, or the spiritual forces that orchestrate it, ALL will be removed. Justice will prevail.

And so it begins, this last picture, from Revelation 19:11-16.

Hear the Word of the Lord.

> ***11*** *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.* ***12*** *His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.* ***13*** *He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.* ***14*** *The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.* ***15*** *Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule [or shepherd] them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.* ***16*** *On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:* ***King of Kings and Lord of Lords****.*

The Word of Life!
Thanks be to God.

We finally have it, Jesus on the white horse ready to engage in the final battle. Except wait, he's already covered in blood. His own.

As the passage continues, the forces of evil led by the Beast are ready to fight, but there is no battle. He had already won. He won long ago through his crucifixion and resurrection.

Poet Robert Southwell wrote about it this way in the 16th century:

> *With tears he fights and wins the field,*
> *His naked breast stands for a shield.*
> *His battering shot are babish cries,*
> *His arrows made of weeping eyes.*
> *His martial ensigns cold and need,*
> *And feeble flesh his warrior's steed.*
> *("New Heaven, New War")*

This victory is real though it is hidden from many. It is already seen by people graced or gifted with faith, but it finally will be evident to everyone. (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. 2011 (orig 1989), pg 202)

That's what we have to wrap our heads around. The victory has already happened. Christ died, once for all, past-present-future. God's time is not like our time. We talk about it at Easter. Christ was resurrected. Through that act, he defeated death. He paid the penalty of death for our sins, our inability to be holy on our own and thereby have a close relationship with God. Then he defeated death by rising again. That is the truth, but we are living an a world where it looks like there is still a battle to be fought … because it is hidden. However, it will not always be hidden.

That is why we don't have to be disturbed or afraid of the violent language we see in Revelation. Christ wins the victory as if he needed a huge army to defeat his adversary. He needs none. The outcome was never in doubt. God speaks, and it happens from the beginning. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Jesus says, *Your done great dragon, ancient serpent*, and Satan is done. In this way, Jesus ultimately takes care of the two beasts, the dragon (or Satan) and his agents, and finally death and where it resides … throwing them into the violent chaos that they created. That is why no matter what our world looks like, we don't have to be afraid.

It doesn't mean that we don't have our part to play. Otherwise, Jesus would not have had anything to say to the churches at the beginning of Revelation. Jesus encouraged them all to remain faithful and demonstrate it with their actions.

We are also called to remain faithful. This is more than a thought exercise about belief. What does it being faithful look like?

We can be bold because we know even if no one else can see it, the battle is won. Love has won. We have won. That is what gives us strength for today. That is what gives us bright hope for tomorrow.

To paraphrase Samwise Gamgee from Lord of the Rings, *This darkness is only a passing thing … when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. (Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, film, New Line Cinema, 2002.)

We get tired. We all get tired. I have had my bouts of being tired, especially lately. Our call is to share in Christ's victory through our faith and patience. When we remember that, we can take strength to keep moving forward.

When we look at this last battle, which is no battle at all, we have the hope that the rule of death is at an end. The rule of life is about to begin. (NT Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, pg 186)

And that is where we will pick it up next week for our conclusion to *Revelation: Strength for Today; Bright Hope for Tomorrow*.

Amen.