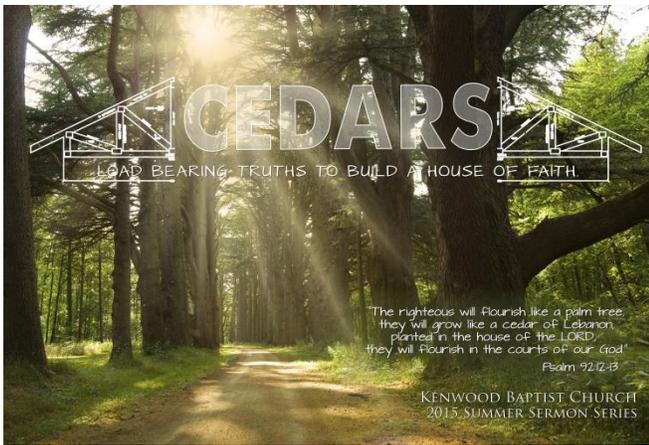


***Cedars: Load-Bearing Truths to Build a House of Faith  
“What Will Happen When Christ Returns?”***

Revelation 19:11-21  
Cedars Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
August 23, 2015

**TEXT:** Revelation 19:11-21

We continue this morning with our summer series on the Cedars of Lebanon: Loadbearing Truths of God's Word. We have been answering a set of implied questions all summer: Where



do I find truth? Who is God? Who are we: what is wrong with us; can anyone help us? What repairs worlds wrongs? Who is running this world? Am I safe, secure? What is the goal of life? Where do I belong? How do I get involved? This morning we ask the implied question of Christian theology: Where is this world going, and who will be waiting when we get there? This is the topic of what will happen when Christ returns. The return of Christ is a

distinctive doctrine of Christian faith. It is an important doctrine. It tells us where this world is journeying and who will be there when we arrive.

I want to begin with a broad consideration from Scripture about the certainty of Jesus Christ's personal, visible, and glorious return, and then focus our attention on the text we just read that says that when He comes, He will come in triumph, as a conquering warrior to judge and to save. Sometimes Christians disagree with each other about the timing or sequence of Christ's return, but that should not obscure this unique, shared belief that Christians have about the fact of Christ's return. Sometimes we divide ourselves up over this issue, when, in fact, it actually unites us in a very significant way. Let's look for a minute together at the reality of Jesus' own promise. Jesus' return, Christ's return, is certain. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 24:30:

*“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”*

The clouds of heaven are the visible radiance and splendor of the presence of God, and Jesus

says all people will see Him coming with great power and glory. Jesus says in Matthew 25:31-32:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him.”*

In Acts 1:11, when Jesus prepared to ascend to the Father in the sight of His disciples, they saw Him arise, taken up into heaven. They were awestruck at His glory, and the angel said to them:

*“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.”*

Christ’s return is certain, and Peter says in Acts 1:21:

*“Heaven must receive Him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.”*

Dozens of passages in the Scripture promise Christ’s certain return. There is, however, an element of Christ’s return that is uncertain, and sometimes we wrongly devote our attention to this. The timing of Christ’s return is uncertain. Jesus tells us explicitly in Mark 13:32:

*“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

The timing of Jesus’ return is unknown. He tells His disciples in Acts 1:7:

*“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.”*

But, Jesus tells us to be watchful and ready, emphatically telling us we do not know on what day our Lord will come. We should really banish any and all attempts to locate Christ’s return in time. This is something Jesus Himself says the Father has set. Jesus does, however, give us one clue about the timing of His return. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus says:

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

In other words, the Gospel must be proclaimed to all peoples. There will not be any people group, on that great and final day, that can say: “We never knew, we never heard.” There has been a radical increase of global Christian missions in the last 200 years, and the number of unreached people groups is shrinking, praise God! But, Jesus says this is the only limiter. Jesus’ return will be personal; it will be He Himself; it will not be an invisible force. The angel says this same Jesus will return to you. Jesus says in John 14:3:

*“I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”*

Jesus’ return is certain, though the precise timing is uncertain. His return will be personal; it will

be visible to all peoples on the Earth. Revelation 1:7 says:

*“Look, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him.”*

There will be no secret, invisible return of Christ. This is one of the great errors of our neighbors just up the street, the Jehovah's Witnesses. They teach that Jesus invisibly returned to the earth in October 1914. This is not the biblical teaching. The biblical teaching is that Christ's return is visible. Some Christians teach that Christ will return to the earth secretly, at a later point. The Bible's teaching is that Jesus' glorious return will be visible to everyone. It will be a public event. All nations will gather before Him, and He will come in glory and great power and authority. Again, to hear Jesus' words in Matthew 24:30:

*“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”*

Jesus' return is a certain reality. What happens when He returns? The Scriptures teach that when Jesus returns, He comes as Savior and Judge, to bestow salvation for His people and judgment on His enemies. There will be a general resurrection of the dead, that all who lived will arise and stand before Him. He will execute judgment, banish evil, and usher in the new heavens and new earth. Next Sunday, we will look in more detail at the final result of His return, this new creation, new heavens and new earth.

This morning, we want to focus our attention on a unique and important doctrine of Christian theology: that Jesus Christ will return to earth as a glorious, conquering King; that He will execute God's judgment upon His enemies. It is a fearful and important topic that many dodge, and yet the Scripture is filled with this important teaching that is distinctive to Christian faith. In Acts 10:42, Peter says:

*“And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.”*

In Acts 17:31, as Paul moved out across cultural lines to speak to the people of Athens and explained an introduction to Christian faith, he says:

*“God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.”*

When Paul was imprisoned later in Caesarea and had the opportunity to speak and preach to the Roman governor Felix, he spoke about faith in Jesus Christ. Luke tells us that Paul's preaching over two years focused on three topics: on righteousness that we have in Christ; on self-control, the discipline required of believers; and on the coming judgment. As Paul spoke about the judgment, Felix often broke off his preaching and said, “That's enough for today.”

The judgment of Christ is a critically important topic for us. The Apostles' Creed, a summary of early Christian doctrine, describes the coming of Christ in judgment in this way in the central section about Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord:

"He is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and He will come to judge the living and the dead."

Christ's coming judgment is awesome; it is accurate; it has no mistakes; and it is a tremendous manifestation of power and glory. For the redeemed, it will result in deep rejoicing. For those apart from Christ, it will be a day of horror and calamity. The depiction of Christ's coming as Judge is not primarily presented as just a legal decision, as though it's an exercise in a courtroom. The picture of Christ's coming in our text is a picture of Jesus Christ as a conquering warrior, satisfying the longings of our hearts. Young boys, young girls, long for a knight in shining armor, with no flaws. Adults long for a hero who carries out the duties of his office with righteousness. Jesus Christ satisfies this desire within us. He is a hero who can be trusted, who can be followed, who will never let us down, and who carries out His sacred duty with holiness, righteousness, awe, and splendor. The text before us in Revelation 19 is stunning, and when we think of Jesus, we must integrate within that vision the full counsel of Scripture. Jesus is depicted in this text as a conquering warrior. Look at Revelation 19:11. John says:

*"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True."*

This rider has no flaws; He is holy and righteous, He can be trusted in all things; and this rider rides forth in splendor. John says when he saw Him ride forth, He comes forth as a conquering warrior. He judges with righteousness and makes war, as it is said of God Himself in Exodus 15:3:

*"The LORD [Yahweh] is a warrior; the LORD is His name."*

Jesus did not withhold this image of a conquering warrior in His own teaching. In Luke 11:21-22, when he describes those who are bound by the enemy of our souls, Jesus says:

*"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder."*

Jesus is the saving, conquering Warrior, mighty to save. John sees the figure of Christ in glory. He says that Christ's eyes were like blazing fire, a penetrating, sovereign, awesome gaze. John said that on His head were many crowns, displaying the universal sovereignty and dominion of Jesus Christ. Within the imagery of the Book of Revelation, the beast and the false prophet mimic Christ's sovereignty, but they muster only seven or ten crowns. When he sees the glory of Christ, he says He is crowned with many crowns. The hymn, *Crown Him with Many Crowns*, is

a statement, an open declaration, of the universal sovereignty of Jesus Christ. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He himself, probably alluding to the ineffable name of God Himself. Christ, in His glory, blazing eyes, universal sovereignty, with the name of God written upon Him, is dressed in a unique garment that is dipped in blood, probably His own blood dipped in to save those whom He has redeemed. John tells us in Revelation 19:13:

*"...and His name is the Word of God."*

This echoes chapter 1 of John's Gospel. Christ, in His glory, as this conquering warrior, is followed by the armies of heaven, also riding on horses. As Christ moves forward as this conquering warrior depicted in splendor, we see a set of images to describe His majesty and power. There are three awesome images of Christ. The first image is a sharp sword, as John beholds our coming King, he says in Revelation 19:15:

*"Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations."*

Christ possesses the sword of His mouth to conquer all peoples, in the imagery of Isaiah 11:1-4 that:

*"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, ... 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 second image of Christ's ruling power is His conquering scepter, that He will rule them with an iron scepter, is from Psalm 2:7-9:

*"I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to Me, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You. Ask of me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'"*

Too often, we imagine Jesus as just a gentle Shepherd. But this gentle Shepherd also has a ruling staff; He has a sword; He has blazing eyes, and all peoples, you and I, will see Him in this splendor one day, and the Scripture says we will give an account to Him of our deeds. We will give an account to Him of every word that comes out of our mouth. We need this picture of Christ incorporated into our vision lest we tame Him by our own vain imagination.

The third image of Christ in this text for me personally is the most staggering of all, that this conquering Warrior treads the winepress of God's wrath. John sees Christ and says in Revelation 19:15:

*"He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."*

This is a staggering image, that Jesus Christ comes and He treads the winepress. The imagery here is of a winepress filled with grapes. As the wine is produced, as the grapes are crushed and

the juice of the grapes flows out of the winepress, this is the image of the wrath of Almighty God being poured out. John describes this in Revelation 14:19:

*“The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath.”*

This is the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, and John says that when Christ returns in glory, He carries this out. He carries out the display of God's omniscient power, His wrath against sin and evil. Jonathan Edwards describes the wrath of God in the sermon I mentioned last Sunday, the sermon that launched the Great Awakening in our country. It contains at its heart a reflection on this very verse of the power of Christ, the glory of Christ. Edwards writes that we should consider:

**“Whose wrath** it is: it is the wrath of the infinite God. If it were only the wrath of man, though it were of the most potent prince, it would be comparatively little to be regarded. The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, ... But the greatest earthly potentates in their greatest majesty and strength, and when clothed in their greatest terrors, are but feeble, ... in comparison of the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth.”

Edward says further to consider:

“It is **the fierceness of his wrath** that you are exposed to. We often read of the fury of God; as in Isa. 59:18. *‘According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay fury to his adversaries.’* The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, *‘the wrath of God,’* the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is *‘the fierceness and wrath of God.’* The fury of God! the fierceness of Jehovah! Oh, how dreadful that must be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! But it is also *‘the fierceness and wrath of **almighty** God.’*”

The only place that the wrath of God can be avoided is that place of being in Christ. Jesus Christ lifted up the cup of God's wrath in the garden of Gethsemane, and He staggered. He staggered when He considered the wrath of God against the weight of sin. He said: “Father, if there is any other way to save humanity than for Me to absorb Your wrath, let this cup pass from Me. And the Father said: “There is no other way,” and Christ drank the cup of the wrath of God for you and for me. If we do not place our faith in Him, then we await the treading of the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God against the sin of humanity and the evil of the cosmos. We will meet the King of kings and Lord of lords in the end. We will see Him in splendor. Christ's return brings victory and the defeat of evil. John sees this before him, and it is depicted as Christ's final victory, where evil is banished, sin is judged. He says in Revelation 19:17-19:

*“I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings,*

*generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.”*

This image is drawn from Ezekiel 39:17-22, where the birds of prey are gathered at a scene of great slaughter. Christ conquers. He defeats His enemies, the beast, the kings of the earth, his armies, and all who are standing against Him. The battle of Christ is never in doubt. This final, holy war is described in two verses, a single sentence in Greek. The battle is never in doubt because Jesus rides forth to conquer and save. Jesus judges His enemies and purifies the earth.

William Mounce describes this great final victory when he writes:

*“John is not describing the gradual conquest of evil in the spiritual struggles of the faithful, but a great historic event which brings to an end the Antichrist and his forces and ushers in the long-awaited era of righteousness. History may offer examples of the triumph of right over wrong, but far from exhausting the truth of Revelation, they merely prefigure the actual consummation with its end to wickedness and beginning of universal peace.”*

We need to know the ending of the story. The ending of the story is Christ's return, and when He returns in glory, He comes as the conquering Warrior, and your deep longing for a knight who can be trusted, with no flaws, who will defeat evil, is satisfied in Jesus Christ. That day, though it is awesome, though it causes us to tremble, though it strains our understanding, though presses us close to Him, in Scripture, Christ's return as this conquering Warrior to judge launches worship. Psalm 96:10-13 says:

*“The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity. ‘Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness.”*

The cosmos will burst into song when the Lord sets every wrong to right and condemns evil. Our soul will be satisfied in Christ's righteous judgment. We need this truth in powerful ways that have very practical outcomes in our life today, and I want to close with three of these.

Application number one: Christ's righteous judgment makes Him worthy of worship, nothing less. Miroslav Volf, a Croatian man who lived through horrific violence in the Balkans, sees the judgment of God as necessary for Him to be worthy of worship. Volf teaches at Yale, and he wrote this:

*“If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence—that God would not be worthy of worship. . . .The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God. . . .*

My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires belief in God's divine vengeance will be unpopular with many . . . but it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence results from the belief in God's refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of innocent people, this theory will invariably die . . . with other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."

Application number two: The belief of Christ's return in glory has a restraining force on our lives and hearts. That Christ returns to judge is the only thing that makes it correct for us not to, because He will come in glory, and He will set wrongs to right. It is the only truth that restrains our impulse to take vengeance in our own hands. God will return, and He says: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay."

Application number three: Christ's return as a conquering Warrior means that we live our lives in conscious accountability to Him. We live our lives in anticipation that we will appear before Him, this conquering, saving, righteous Judge. Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish Noble prize-winning writer, wrote an essay called *The Discreet Charms of Nihilism*. He lived through a Nazi period. He lived through a communist period in his native land, and he lived through a period in his country as the young generation began to believe that we just live our lives, are buried, die in the end, and there's nothing afterward. He recognized that the true opiate of people is not religion, as Marx taught. Milosz says:

"The true opiate of the people is the belief in nothingness after death. That's what really deceives us—the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, our greed, our cowardice or murderers are not going to be judged."

That brings us a false comfort, but when we live our lives in the reality of Christ's coming judgment, we live with attentiveness and watchfulness. We live in a sense of care. We live with an urgency that all might receive the Gospel and believe the Word.

We are going to have three baptisms in the second service, a father and two sons confessing their faith in Christ, who absorbed the wrath of God for them. The truth of Christ's final judgment makes Him worthy of our worship and satisfies our souls. It has a restraining power on our impulse to take revenge. The return of Christ in glory also opens up for the redeemed a celebration: Christ's return in glory. Revelation 19:1-9 is set in context of a Great Banquet, with Christ, the conquering Knight, banishing evil, being introduced with thunderous praise:

*"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God"* (v. 1).

*"Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, small and great"* (v. 5).

*"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns"* (v. 6).

*"Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and*

*His Bride has made herself ready" (v. 7).*

The positive side of Christ's return to banish and judge evil leads into a glorious celebration. Christ's final judgment is not the end of history, it's the penultimate end. It is the end when the King's enemies are judged and banished and all is celebration in righteousness. It is an invitation in the end to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, the Great Supper of God. It is a celebration where the King's enemies are banished, and we live in safety and security within an innumerable multitude of redeemed, forever. Events like our annual hog roast aren't just a social events. They point forward to when Christians gather together from different backgrounds. They are pictures of where the end is going: to a celebration, a celebration with no fear, no ending, no evil in the world. The heavens and the earth are renewed in glory, and the triumph of Christ is final. This is the ending of the biblical story, and it is true. We need the doctrine of Christ's final return because Christ describes this in dozens of passages. We need this truth. It restrains us, it makes is urgent to share the Gospel, and it helps us understand the meaning of the privilege of gathering together as God's redeemed people in festal celebration. The King's enemies are banished forever. It's a foretaste of that, and I invite us all to celebrate today.

Amen.