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The Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Ascension of Our Lord

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The Lord Has Ascended Amid Shouts of Joy

The Bible tells us that Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after his resurrection on Easter Sunday. Our congregation no longer worships on Ascension Thursday, so we remember the ascension on this last Sunday of the Easter season. Ascension is one of the five great festivals of the Christian Church and brings us the assurance that Jesus preserves the Church as he rules and reigns at the right hand of God.

Sermon

Revelation 19:11-16

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. 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. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Introduction – When Jesus ascended into heaven, it was scary for his followers. Some of them had been with Jesus for almost three years and now he was leaving. It was a scary time, but the promises helped. They walked from Bethany to Jerusalem **with great joy**.

Our situation is completely different. We didn't see Jesus go; for us Jesus has always been just gone. But the promises help. Jesus promised that he was going to prepare a place for us. **I will come back**, he said, **and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am**. The Bible says that Jesus **is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us**. He's constantly representing us and insisting that he paid the full penalty for our sins and that no one can condemn us. Best of all we know that Jesus is in complete control. **He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church**. That's us—the church, the believers. Jesus has taken back the full use of his godly powers and he uses all those powers for us. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God and now life is all about Jesus and us.

So, what about Jesus and them? I don't mean the people who need to hear the good news from us. I'm talking about the people who have heard the good news but don't want anything to do with it. I'm talking about preachers and prophets who deny the good news and destroy it in their pulpits. I'm talking about pundits and professors who laugh at the good news on their podcasts and in their classrooms. I'm talking about the

proponents and promoters of abortion and sinful sexuality and the perverts who sell drugs to kids and turn kids into prostitutes. They are all the soldiers of Satan. What about Jesus and them?

St. John spent the last years of his life on the island of Patmos. Jesus came to John and revealed to him what the future of the church would be like. There's no chronology in the Revelation; John saw everything happening at the same time. There's no geography here; John saw events taking place in lots of different places at one time. There is no specificity here, no details. John uses titles not names and the titles can fit all kinds of people. But with visions and symbols John helps us understand how the ascended Jesus deals with people who oppose and attack the good news. He tells us about Jesus and them and what that means for Jesus and us.

So, What About Jesus and Them?

Part of what Jesus showed John was that Satan and his followers would attack Christ and Christians to the end of time. In this vision John describes what he has seen as the central character in this world-wide war: **I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called faithful and true.** This wasn't the first white horse John saw, and it wasn't the first rider. But the others were fakes and forgeries. This rider is **faithful and true.** This is Jesus.

Jesus warned his followers about the fake Christs who would try to fool and finagle his followers. We have plenty of experience with them, don't we. They twist the teachings of the Bible, they invent appealing ideas of religion, and then they sell them to gullible people and put money in the bank. What America calls higher education is filled with hucksters who reject the miracles of Scripture in the name of science and common sense. Pleasure sellers sell stuff to pleasure seekers who want life to be easy and fun. They all claim to be the real thing, the genuine article, the key to happiness. Jesus knows who they are, and he knows where they are. But Jesus is better than all of them put together.

John could see that. **On his head are many crowns.** Not one crown, not even two crowns like King Charles III wore at his coronation. Many crowns. Not cheap crowns that disintegrate when inspected; not loose crowns that enemies can steal and claim. **He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.** Jesus doesn't need an ID or a driver's license. When you see the "golden arches" no one has to say McDonalds. When you see the power of Jesus, nobody has to ask, "Who's that?" **His name is the Word of God.** No one can see God, and no one can hear God. God exists in the vast limits of an eternal universe. But Jesus is God's communicator. Jesus speaks what God wants people to know. Jesus speaks to us in love because God loves us. Jesus carried out God's love for us on the cross and he now bequeaths God's love for us day after day. But Jesus also speaks God's anger, and he enforces God's anger. Jesus does all this because he can. John saw this: **On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

The Jesus we know is a Jesus who smiles. Even when we sin Jesus welcomes us back with open arms and a wide grin. But there is another side of Jesus that we don't often see—or at least we think we don't see. John saw it: **His eyes are like blazing fire.** Jesus' anger is a hundred times hotter than the anger of a mother whose little boy was murdered by a mass shooter or the anger of a father whose little girl was killed by a drunken driver. John saw the same divine anger that Isaiah saw: **He will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment.**

With that white-hot anger Jesus **judges with justice and wages war.** John can see it: **He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.** You stomp on grapes and your clothes are covered with the red color of wine. And so, Jesus is **dressed in a white robe dipped in blood from battle.** The battle between Jesus and the enemies of the church is ferocious and vicious but Jesus never retreats, never surrenders, and always triumphs.

I know you understand that the war Jesus fights for us isn't like the wars in Vietnam or Ukraine. There aren't any attack helicopters and missile systems here. John wrote: **Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which**

to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. Jesus rules and reigns with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. St. Paul called the good news the *dynamite* of God. Weapons of war can obliterate cities, but the good news about Jesus changes hearts and minds. Guns and bullets can kill people, but the gospel enables us to drown the sinful nature day after day. Armies can destroy lives, but Jesus' forgiveness restores lives. Wars end and pretty soon another war starts. When this war ends, there will be peace forever. Jesus will bring the peace and Jesus will keep the peace.

Sometimes we kind of feel like we're in this faith/life alone or that the church is in this alone or that Bible-believing Christianity is in this alone. Society is against us, liberal churches are against us, the educational system is against us, changing lifestyles are against us, and sometimes even our government seems against us. We hold to Jesus' promises; we believe that he takes care of us. But what about them? They seem to get all the headlines, catch all the breaks, win all the battles. But we need to do what John did in the Revelation: take a wider view and scan the horizon of history. Notice how many popular prophets died with no followers and lie forgotten in their graves. See how many theories and philosophies have been debunked and disavowed, how many godless lifestyles have been destroyed by disease and plague, how often pleasure vanished with financial depressions and old age. Scan the time since Jesus ascended and count how many babies were snatched from Satan in Holy Baptism, how many godless pagans destroyed their idols and followed Jesus, how many Christ-haters (think of St. Paul) were forced to their knees and then raised to believe by the love of Christ. Search the church's story and you will see one victory after another and with each victory you will see the annihilation of Satan and the enemies of Christ. And then you will learn about Jesus and them.

Can you see yourself in John's vision? **The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.** There we are, right there. Jesus may be heaven, but we are riding our lives with him. We are sharing in the glory of his victory and wearing the robes of his righteousness. No wounds from battle on us; no specs of blood on us, no sins staining us. We are heaven bound. Like those followers who watched Jesus ascend, we are going home with great joy. Amen.