

“Christ Defeats All His Enemies”

Revelation 19:17–21

There is something revolting and nauseating in the opening words of our text today: “Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.’”

Our text sounds like cannibalism—the eating of human flesh. Now even people who claim that there is no absolute standard of right and wrong find cannibalism disgusting. Any person who practices cannibalism does not recognize the uniqueness of being human, but the Christian, who knows that every human person, from the moment of conception until the moment of natural death, possesses the image of God, knows, on the basis of God’s Holy Word, that humans are unique among the creatures. The human person, even after natural death, still possesses the image of God, as does the risen and ascended Son of God in heaven. Every human person is intrinsically valuable. Every human life is worthy of protection.

Some people like to go to contests where people wantonly beat up their opponents within an inch of their life. Cruelty is contrary to the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” which requires that each of us do what we can to preserve human life. If we are not to kill, then we are not to do anything that tends in that direction.

Here in our text is the Son of God, the perfect image of God, the true humanity, calling to the birds of prey—carrion birds, scavengers—calling for them to eat and devour the flesh of human persons. The point is not to justify cannibalism. The point is to highlight the reality of everlasting punishment. God is perfectly just. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The person who rebels against the commandments of God and pursues a life of sin, despite the clear warnings of Scripture, will die and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He will hear the fateful words, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” It is not that the God of heaven despises humanity. Rather, it is that sin committed as deliberate defiance of the God of heaven earns his eternal wrath. The only way a God of perfect justice can forgive sin is for the sin to have been punished in the person of the perfect Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin will be punished either way: in the person of the offender, or in the Person of the perfect Substitute. God loves his image in the human person, but the person who despises his image and commits crimes of violence against other human persons, and against his elect—who are part of Christ’s very body, the church—and who urge defiance and rebellion and mutiny against the God of

heaven, and prevent his precious little ones from worshiping him in Spirit and truth but persecute the church of God—will spend eternity being justly punished for their crimes against the God of heaven, and this present text with all its grotesqueness illustrates something that all of us must endeavor with all our hearts to avoid, and that is eternal punishment. “Flee from the wrath to come! Flee to Christ for mercy! Amen!”

The angel “standing in the sun”—that is, directly in front of the sun—is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a fitting place for him who is the Light of the world. He makes his important proclamation from the skies, and summons the birds of prey, whose natural environment is the skies, to a great feast, to feast—to *gorge*—on carrion, that is, the dead and putrefying flesh of Christ’s enemies. Note that the call for the birds of prey to come is given *before* the battle, announcing the certainty of victory. Victory is assured! There can be no doubt: Christ’s kingdom will surely come; Satan’s kingdom will surely be destroyed. Christ will be victorious in this world. It cannot fail to happen.¹

This is an encouragement in a world where the true church of Jesus Christ is often small and underfunded, and where Christ’s enemies enjoy popularity, wealth, crowds, and the praise of men.

One commentator observes that “There are two feasts in chapter 19. There was the marriage feast of the Lamb in verse 9, and now there is the great feast of God here in verse 17. The guests at the marriage supper are those who trust Christ, those redeemed from their sins by his blood. The guests at the great feast of God here in 19:17 are the birds, who will feast on God’s enemies. Refuse the grace and love and goodness of God, and you deserve to be eaten by great birds of prey. The point of 19:18 is that neither status, influence, nor insignificance will exempt anyone from God’s justice. The gospel is a leveler of persons because neither wealth nor status brings anyone closer to God than another—everyone is in need of justification by faith in Christ. The judgment is also a leveler of persons because neither advantage nor disadvantage will affect the justice of God.”²

John’s language is borrowed from God’s invitation through Ezekiel “to every bird and beast of the field” to devour the corpses of his enemies, the armies of the heathen who had made war upon Israel (Ezek. 39:17ff.):

“And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD [אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה], ‘Speak to every sort of bird and *to every beast of the field*: “Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may *eat flesh and drink blood*. You shall *eat the flesh of the mighty, drink the blood of the princes of the earth*, of rams and lambs, of goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. You

¹ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*,

² *Preaching the Word* commentary (PocketBible)

shall eat fat till you are full, and drink blood till you are drunk, at My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you. You shall be filled at My table with horses and riders, with mighty men and with all the men of war,” says the Lord GOD [אֶדְנִי יְהוָה]””” (Ezek. 39:17–20).

Here in our text is the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ issuing an invitation to all the birds that fly in midheaven, the birds of prey, inviting the eagles to the Great Supper of God, where they may glut themselves on the flesh of Christ’s enemies: 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. Israel is now a sacrificial corpse, fulfilling our Lord’s specific prophecy, “Whosoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (Matt. 24:28).

There is no longer anyone who can drive away the scavengers, fulfilling the prophecy of Deuteronomy 28:26, “Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away.”

Scientists that study birds of prey—vultures, buzzards, condors, etc.—draw attention to their important role in cleaning up dead animals, which helps to maintain a healthy ecosystem. God gave these birds strong stomachs that can handle dead flesh.

The totality of the Warrior’s victory is so great that not even the slain bodies of his opponents remain. All traces of the beast’s armies are obliterated. Finally, considered systematically, judgment never occurs apart from accompanying grace. The judgment of Pharaoh is the liberation of Israel. So also here, the judgment of the beasts and their armies cleanses the earth of their idolatry and liberates the saints.”

The punishment of the wicked will be *total*. None who rise up against Christ will survive. The punishment of Psalm 2 will be fulfilled to the letter: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” God requires of all men and institutions nothing less than complete submission to the lordship of Christ. The meaning is clear: Those nations that refuse to submit to the lordship of Christ will be utterly destroyed.

But the promise remains: “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Ps. 2:10–12).

Today is the day of salvation. As of this moment there is still time to repent. But God’s patience has a limit. Time will come to an end. Eternity beckons. Do not despise Christ’s warning. Call upon him to save you today. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Amen!