

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 296

The Man on the White Horse

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 28th February, 2010**

Text: *“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him: and He went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6. 1, 2).*

The real purpose of this mysterious Book of the Revelation is to be a comfort to God's people in all ages, then and now. John wrote it to the suffering church of God in days of bitter persecution and he wrote it for the suffering church of God down to the end of time. The whole Book in mysterious, pictorial language sets forth this fight, this conflict between Christ and Satan, between the church and the world, and it is made clear that the church will suffer, and it is made clear that the powers of hell are strong, but it is made abundantly clear that Christ will be victorious and all His people will be victorious in Him. What a mercy this is!

So John was favoured to have these glimpses of heaven, to see a door opened into heaven. Before we come to all the mysteries and the seals and the trumpets and the false prophet and everything else, John was given a view of the eternal throne of God in heaven. He saw it in all its glory and majesty, and he saw that there was One that sat on it, Almighty God. He had this revelation before he had a revelation of anything else. Whatever was going to take place, whatever was not going to take place, there was always the eternal throne of God and always One who sits upon it, and He sits there victorious, triumphant. He sits there in complete control. And John saw that, and that was his resting place, and that was the resting place of the church of God then, and that is the resting place of the church of God now.

Then as the Book of the Revelation proceeds, he saw a book sealed with seven seals in the hand of Him that sat on the throne. It was the book of God's decrees, God's providence, God's purposes for then and the whole of the unknown way, and the challenge was issued: “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” In other words, is there anyone capable of taking this book into his hands? Is there anyone into whose hands the eternal Father can trust all His purposes, the welfare of

His church, the victory of His church, the overthrow of Satan, the unfolding of His providence? Is there anyone? And there was no-one. No-one could be found. It is no wonder that John said, "I wept much." And we need to weep much, if the book with the seven seals can never be opened, if the book with the seven seals can ever be in the hands of Satan or blind fate. And then John heard a voice: "Weep not," and he beheld "a Lamb as it had been slain." And then the Lamb approached the throne and took the book out of the hands of Almighty God, and the four beasts and twenty-four elders began to sing, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."

This chapter, chapter 6, begins with the opening of the seven seals and it is the Lamb of God who is opening the seals. You say, Mysterious language! Well, in simplicity it means this: as we meet this evening and the world is in confusion and all these sorrows are taking place which were foretold here, the dear Lamb of God holds the book. He is in complete control and all His purposes will be fulfilled.

"His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfil some deep design."

"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals." This was the first of the seven. In this chapter, chapter 6, you have six of the seals opened, and really it is a foreview of history right down to the very end of time. It culminates in the sixth seal, the last judgment. "For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Well, will you and I be able to stand in that last, great day? If all our sins and guilt and faults and failures and our wretched profession, if all these things are presented there, will you and I be able to stand? We read that thousands will pray to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and of the Lamb. Now are you taking it for granted? I dare not. Hour by hour, day by day, it is my chief concern. It is going to be a terrible day, "the great day of His wrath ... and who shall be able to stand," when all these things are brought forward, the books are opened, all your sins, your faults, your failures, your guilt? Our only hope is this:

"Now shouldst Thou me to judgment call,
Though Satan faced me there, and all

My dreadful sins appeared,
I should not fear, but boldly stand;
Through Jesus' pierced heart and hand,
I know I should be spared."

Now that is our only hope for the great day. That is the end of the chapter. That is the end of all things. "The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

But before all this takes place – and do not forget, it is all in the hand of Christ, all in the hand of the Lamb – there is the opening of the first seal. I believe this is different from the others. This is a blessed seal. "I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals" – the first one – "and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see." But just lingering here a moment, amidst all these solemn scenes and these mysterious scenes and perhaps we might say these frightening scenes, there is One there, Jesus, and He is spoken of as the Lamb of God. Well, we have the Lamb of God in prophecy in the Old Testament, the Lamb slain, the blood shed. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." But all pointing to Calvary, none sufficient really to take away sin or to atone. And then that day by the River Jordan – this glorious Person appears in the crowd and John points Him out: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The people knew what it meant. They knew what the lamb was, the sacrifice, the substitute, the cleansing from sin. And then you go to Gethsemane and Calvary and you behold the Lamb slain, and then you go to the Mount of Olives and up to heaven to behold the Lamb exalted. "Him hath God exalted ... to be a Prince and a Saviour." The Lamb of God. This is our only hope, our only plea, sinners feeling our need venturing on Him.

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come."

It is a beautiful subject, the Lamb of God. But this is the wonder, amidst all this mystery and confusion and sorrow: there is the Lamb of God exalted in heaven and He is in control and the book with the seven seals He holds in His hand. It will never be held in anyone else's hand. He will never let it go. All my concerns, your concerns, the church's

concerns, the world's concerns, sorrows, joys, are all in the hands of the Lamb of God who once died at Calvary.

"I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw." "Come and see," he said, and John says, "I saw." And it was a wonderful sight. Now let me be clear. Different interpreters have had very different interpretations of the first seal, but I am one of those who believe this is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ here spoken of. We have in this chapter – people often talk about it in literature – *the four riders of the apocalypse*. This is the first rider, and I feel that this Man on the white horse with the crown on His head who was going forth conquering and to conquer is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May I just remind you what we read this morning (chapter 19), and it was very, very similar: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God." So in Revelation chapter 19 we are told without any doubt who this Man is, that it is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, The Word of God.

"I saw, and behold a white horse." In ancient times, whenever there is mention of a horse, it always suggested one thing. It does not today, but horses in Biblical times were invariably used in battle, not in things like agriculture, farming, travel. They were used in battle. So immediately we are reminded there is a conflict, there is warfare. "Behold a white horse." And a white horse symbolises two things. First of all, it symbolises purity. This is nothing to do with sin and Satan and vileness and wickedness; this is a white horse of purity. And secondly, the white horse symbolises victory. This is the white horse of victory. We have this wonderful revelation of a victorious God and Saviour before we have all the rest of these terrible seals, the unfolding of providence, the unfolding of history.

"I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him." You would think if He was going into battle, He would be wearing a helmet, but He was wearing a crown, because He is going forth to victory. He is a King. This is King Jesus. He

has a crown on His head. He once wore a crown of thorns, but He now for ever wears a crown of glory. There is a crown that His Father placed on His head when He ascended triumphant into heaven. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.”

“A crown was given unto Him.” Every sinner saved by grace gives a crown to Him. You put the crown on His head, don’t you?

“Let everlasting glories crown
Thy head, my Saviour, and my Lord.”

You can say that; you believe that; you think that, don’t you? If the Lord gives you a crown, you put that crown upon His head. You give Him all the glory for your salvation. “A crown was given unto Him.”

“Behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow.” He not only has a bow, but He has a quiver full of arrows, and they are divinely formed arrows, divinely appointed arrows, and they are sharp, and He never misses His target. We have a very similar passage to this and the one in Revelation 19 in the forty-fifth Psalm, that glorious picture of the King going forth into battle, and there we read, “Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee.” You say, This glorious King, and He has enemies? Well, the word says, “The king’s enemies,” and you and I are enemies by nature to Jesus, everyone of us by wicked works. You believe that, do you? Have you ever had to confess it? Have you ever had your enmity removed? Our carnal hearts are enmity against God and we are rebels against Him. What do we say of this great and glorious King? “We will not have this Man to reign over us.” The whole human race in enmity against God, rebels against God, enemies against God. This glorious King has His bow and He has His arrows.

“I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow.” In the Middle Ages, our army was famous for its archers. The Battle of Agincourt, the English archers did not miss their aim. The French army did not stand any chance against them. O but this glorious Archer who sits on the white horse and carries a bow! Some of His enemies will be slain with everlasting destruction, but some of His enemies will receive the arrow in their heart dipped in the love and blood of Christ.

“Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee.”

“I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow.” He never misses His aim. These arrows where He has a purpose of love and mercy, they weaken and they wound and they slay. There is a quiver full of arrows that He has in His holy Word and these arrows are fired. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” It is an arrow in the sinner’s heart. You have crucified the Lord of life and glory. It is an arrow in the sinner’s heart. Peter stood up in all his humility and simplicity on the Day of Pentecost but his Saviour was with him and He enabled Peter to fire a few of these arrows and three thousand of them hit their mark.

They wound and they weaken and they slay. They slay all that enmity that you once had. They weaken your strength in the way. They wound you. Let me tell you this: if the Lord Jesus in love and mercy has shot an arrow into your heart, however much you wriggle, you will not be able to get it out. We tried, some of us, but we could not get it out. It is only the Lord who fired that arrow who can take it out and then apply the sovereign balm of Gilead to heal your wounds, to give you life instead of death, the blood of Christ applied by the Spirit of Christ. O but these arrows, to bring a sinner down in helplessness, weak and wounded and sore, in full surrender at the Saviour’s feet, and then the love and the mercy and the forgiveness and the salvation and the heaven that Jesus bestows!

“Behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow.” Have you ever come to that place where you have had an arrow in your heart, where it has brought you prostrate in full surrender to the Saviour’s feet to crown Him King of *your* life?

“Thou dear, almighty Lord,
My Conqueror and my King,
Thy sceptre and Thy sword,
Thy reigning grace I sing;
Thine is the power; behold, I sit,
In willing bonds, beneath Thy feet.”

“Behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him.” I have often told you the little story of how in the Napoleonic wars, Lord Nelson completely overcame the French fleet and the French admiral, smiling, came on board Nelson’s flagship to make

the surrender of the French fleet. Nelson stood there without a smile, unbending. He said, “Sir, first your sword.” The French admiral unsheathed his sword and laid it down at Nelson’s feet. Then Nelson smiled and shook his hand and embraced him.

“Thine is the power; behold, I sit,
In willing bonds, beneath Thy feet.”

What is it? “A foe received a favourite, an alien made a child.”

“I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him: and He went forth conquering and to conquer.” It is a beautiful word: “He went forth conquering and to conquer.” Now you can never say that of any of the great soldiers of history. They said that the Duke of Marlborough never fought a battle that he did not win, but when he went into battle, he did not know he was going to be victorious, and at the great Battle of Blenheim, he wondered whether he would be victorious. But the Lord Jesus goes forth in the divine certainty that He is going to conquer.

“He went forth conquering, and to conquer.” So just let us look at this wonderful subject, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ coming into this world of sin and sorrow, and He came, born as a helpless Child at Bethlehem. He was there in Mary’s arms, but He had come forth from heaven conquering and to conquer. He was going to conquer Satan and sin and death and hell and overcome the curse of a broken law. He was going to triumph over them all. And He came with the certainty of it. That word was written prophetically of Him as He came from heaven to earth: “He shall not fail.” He came forth conquering and to conquer.

You have His temptation, that awful temptation in the wilderness. “He Himself hath suffered being tempted.” But He came forth conquering and to conquer. You see it right through His life, the various assaults of sin and Satan and wicked men. He came forth conquering and to conquer. And then you see Him going to the garden and the cross, and He knew that conflict that was before Him, and His holy soul shrank from it in Gethsemane, but from Gethsemane He went forth triumphantly to Calvary, knowing that He was going conquering and to conquer. We sing sometimes,

“I sing my Saviour’s wondrous death;
He conquered when He fell.”

When He cried, “It is finished,” that was a conquest. Then He died and was laid in the grave and He rose triumphant. That was a conquest. And now exalted in heaven, by the Spirit He still goes forth conquering and to conquer. One thing, He is going to conquer every enemy, every foe. There are many today. There are evil men, there are all the powers of hell let loose, but they are defeated foes of the Lord Jesus with the crown on His head and the bow in His hand, and even now, even this evening as we meet for worship, He is going forth conquering and to conquer. Now you young people, be clear on this: it is the cause of Christ that is the victorious side. You see the conflict, you see the struggle, but be clear on this: it is the cause of Christ that is the victorious cause. He is the almighty Victor, the almighty Conqueror. The crown is already on His head, and He is going forth conquering and to conquer. Didn’t we sing in our last hymn this morning, “He all His foes shall quell”?

And then you see here the everlasting security and safety of His people. They can never perish because their almighty Saviour is going forth conquering and to conquer all His enemies. So He said, “Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He is going forth conquering and to conquer. And then in gathering in all His chosen, all those to whom He has a purpose of mercy, one by one He is going forth conquering and to conquer. It started when He was on the cross, the dying thief, an inveterate enemy, and the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ conquered him, and you read so much of the conquests of His grace in the Acts of the Apostles. It has been going on ever since, especially times like the glorious Reformation, the Evangelical Revival in this country, the Saviour going forth conquering and to conquer in the hearts and lives of men and women and girls and boys as He subdues them by His grace and victorious brings them to His feet and shows mercy to them.

Have you ever read about the great Napoleon when he was in exile on the island of St. Helena? Perhaps Napoleon had more conquests than anyone in modern history. One day he was quiet in thought. Some of his servants, or his guards, asked him what he was thinking. He said, “I have made many conquests and founded a great empire, but it was by force.” He said, “I have been thinking of the Lord Jesus, and He made His conquests and founded His empire by love.”

“He went forth conquering, and to conquer.” So personally He conquers in the new birth in calling a sinner by grace. But then there is our hidden conflict. There is indwelling sin, the lusts that rise, the pride, the enmity, the evil thoughts. He is going forth conquering and to conquer them. Beloved friends, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” The Lord is going to conquer. You know what Joseph Hart says: “Christ, who conquered for us once, will in us conquer too.” He conquered for us at Calvary; He will conquer in us now.

“He went forth conquering, and to conquer.” The wonderful conquests of His grace! And He is bringing all His beloved people safely through to heaven. They all have a battle. They all have a conflict. But their glorious Conqueror is with them, and because He conquered, they too will conquer. And so here you see the certain perseverance of every sinner saved by grace and you see the certain victory of every sinner saved by grace. Now not every child of God dies like our William Gadsby, shouting, “Victory, victory, victory through the blood of the Lamb!” Now not every child of God dies like that, but every child of God is blessed with that same victory that William Gadsby had, victory through the blood of the Lamb. “They overcame” – every single one an overcomer.

“And has He not His promise passed,
That thou shalt overcome at last?”

“They overcame ... by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” This glorious Conqueror, still going forth conquering and to conquer and leading on all His beloved people, even the weakest, even the feeblest to victory and the victor’s crown. In another place John saw them in heaven.

“I ask them whence their victory came,
They with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to His death.”

Nothing in self, everything in Christ, this glorious Saviour, but this almighty Conqueror.

Well, beloved friends, what a subject and what a theme and what a victory! And may it be your mercy and mine to have a personal interest here, the victories of the Lamb.

“I saw, and behold a white horse: and He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto Him; and He went forth conquering, and to conquer.”

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Hail, mighty Jesus! how divine
Is Thy victorious sword!
The stoutest rebel must resign
At Thy commanding word.
Deep are the wounds Thy arrows give;
They pierce the hardest heart;
Thy smiles of grace the slain revive,
And joy succeeds to smart.
Still gird Thy sword upon thy thigh,
Ride with majestic sway;
Go forth, sweet Prince, triumphantly,
And make Thy foes obey.
And when Thy victories are complete,
When all the chosen race
Shall round the throne of glory meet,
To sing Thy conquering grace;
O may my blood-washed soul be found
Among that favoured band!
And I, with them, Thy praise will sound
Throughout Immanuel's land.

B. Wallin