

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE AND THE ARMIES WITH HIM.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“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. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”—Revelation xix. 11—16.

THE beloved John was, above all other men, familiar with the humble Saviour. He had leaned his head upon his bosom, and better knew than any other of the apostles the painful beatings of his Lord's sorrowful heart. Never from his mind could be effaced the likeness of Christ, the visage more marred than that of any man. He had seen the dear sufferer on that dreadful night, when he was covered with gory sweat in Gethsemane; he had seen him after he had been buffeted and scourged in Herod's palace and Pilate's hall; he had even stood at the foot of the cross and seen his divine Master in the extreme agonies of death; and therefore the tender, affectionate heart of John would never permit his Master's suffering image to fade from his memory. Truly, if he had spoken to us in vision—in symbolic terms—concerning what he had seen of his Lord and Master here below, he would have described him as a footman going forth to the fight alone, with no armies following him, for all his disciples forsook him and fled; himself wearing no glittering armour, but with his garments dipped in blood and with his face smeared with shame. He would have told you how the solitary champion fought alone amid the dust and smother of the battle, and how he fell, and bit the dust, so that his foe set his foot upon him, and for a moment rejoiced over him. He would have told you how he leaped again from the grave, and trod down his adversaries, and led captivity captive. Such would have been,

only in far nobler terms, John's description of his first sight of his wrestling warrior Lord.

But now in the passage before us a door was opened in heaven, and that disciple whom Jesus loved saw what else he had never seen—what else he had never imagined. He saw the same warrior Lord, but after quite another fashion. If John had continued to look with the eye of sense at Christ and his followers even to this day, and had viewed the battle as it is to be seen in history upon earth, he would have said that he saw the same despised and rejected One at the head of a band equally despised and rejected, leading them to prison and to death. He would have told you how to this very day the banner of the gospel is borne aloft amid smoke and dust, and Christ crucified is proclaimed amid contention and ridicule. He would have drawn in black colours the scene of the battle, the great battle which is raging among the sons of men at this very hour. But now a door was opened in heaven, and John saw the scene *as God sees it*. He looked upon it from heaven's point of view, and saw the conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, between truth and error; saw it in heaven's own clear view, and he then wrote the vision that we also might see it. Oh, if we are sharers in this conflict, if we are following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, if we are pledged to the truth and to the right, if we are sworn to the precious blood of atonement, and to the grand doctrines of the gospel, it will do us good and stir our blood to stand on one of the serene hill-tops of heaven, above the mists of earth, and look upon the battle which rages still upon the earth, and will rage on till Armageddon shall conclude the war. If we can behold the scene, God strengthening our eyes, it may strengthen our hands for the conflict, our hearts for the fray.

When the door was opened in heaven, the first thing that the seer of Patmos noticed was *our Captain*: let us look at him, first. Afterwards he saw *his followers*; and then he marked *the mode of warfare, and caught a glimpse of the great defeat of the foe*.

I. First, then, JOHN SAW OUR CAPTAIN, the King of kings.

Let us notice his glorious state. He says, "I saw, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him." Whilst Jesus was here, as we have already said, he was a foot-soldier; he had to plunge knee-deep through mire and dirt, and walk as wearily as any of the rest of the warrior company; but now that he has ascended, though he continues still to fight, it is in another fashion. Of course, the terms are symbolical, and none will take them literally; but our Lord is here described as sitting upon a gallant steed, charging his foes upon a snow-white horse. This means that Christ is *honoured* now. He is no weary, dusty, fainting footman now, I warrant you. Time was when Solomon said that he saw servants upon horses and princes walking in the dust: and so it was with Christ: Pilate and Herod rode the high horse, and Jesus must walk in pain and dishonour. But now, like a greater Mordecai, he rides on the King's horse, for this is the man whom the King delighteth to honour. In royal state our Jesus goeth forth to war, not as a common soldier, but as a glorious prince, royally mounted.

By a horse is denoted, not only honour, but *power*. To the Jews the employment of the horse in warfare was unusual, so that when it was

used by their adversaries they imputed to it great force. Jesus Christ has a mighty power to-day, a power which none can measure. He was crucified in weakness, but where is the weakness now? He gave his hands to the nail, and his feet to be fastened to the wood, but he does so no longer. Now has he mounted on the horse of his exceeding great power, and he ruleth in heaven and in earth, and none can stay his hand, or put him to dishonour, or dispute his will. O you that love him, feast your eyes upon him this day. It is not for me to speak; to do so were but to hold a candle to the sun; but gaze upon him for yourselves, and let your eyes be satiated with the image, as you see him, once despised and rejected, now taking to himself his great power.

Here is symbolised *swiftness*, too. Christ must walk when he was here, and go from city to city, scarcely getting through them all till his time was accomplished; but now his word runneth very swiftly. He has but to will it and the voice of his gospel is heard to the utmost ends of the earth; their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Everywhere is the gospel preached, if it be but for a testimony against them, and to-day is fulfilled before your eyes the words of the prophet Zechariah, "The Lord of hosts hath visited his flock, the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle, and they shall fight because the Lord is with them."

The colour of the horse is meant to denote *victory*. The Roman conqueror, when he enjoyed a triumph, on returning from a campaign, rode up the Via Sacra on a white horse, and the Romans crowded to the house-tops to gaze upon the hero as he exhibited his spoils. Now Jesus Christ is admired of angels and elect spirits, who throng the windows of heaven to gaze upon him who is glorified by his Father. There is a pale horse, and his name that sits on him is Death, and there is a horse red with blood, and yet another black with judgment; but his is a white horse, significant of comfort and of joy to all that know and love him. He comes to fight, but the fight is for peace; he comes to smite, but it is to smite his people's enemies; he comes as a conqueror, but it is as a delivering conqueror who scattereth flowers and roses where he rides, breaking only the oppressor, but blessing the citizens whom he emancipates.

Again, I say, I scarcely like to speak upon this theme; it seems too great for me, but I would bid the saints of God who have wept at Gethsemane now lift up their eyes and smile as they see that same Redeemer who once lay grovelling beneath the olive trees now riding on the white horse. Your Lord at this moment is no more despised, but all the glory that heaven itself can devise is lavished upon him.

John looked into the open vault of heaven, and he had time, not only to see the horse, but to mark the character of him that sat upon it. He says that he that sat upon him was called *Faithful and True*. By this you may know your Lord. He has been a faithful and true friend to you. O soldiers of the cross, when has he ever deceived you? When has he failed you, or forgotten you? Faithful? Ah, that he is, faithful to every word that he has spoken. And true? Do you not recognise him, for is he not the truth—the very truth of God? Has he not kept every promise that he has made you, and have you not found his teachings to be everlastingly settled upon divine veracity?

And faithful and true has he been to the great Father. The work he undertook to do he has accomplished. He has in nothing drawn back from the covenant engagements under which he laid himself of old. He stood as the surety of his people, and he has been faithful and true to that smarting suretyship. He came to be the deliverer of his elect, and he has wrought the deliverance. He has not turned either to the right hand or to the left, but he has been faithful and true to every pledge which he gave to his Father for the deliverance of his chosen. Ay, and even his enemies, though they give him many a black word, cannot say that he is not faithful and true. He has not played false, even to the basest devil in hell, nor has he deceived, in any respect, the basest man that lives. Nor will he, for when the day comes to keep his word of terror, he will make the penalty tally to every syllable of the threatening, and mete out vengeance with a line and judgment with a plummet, and even his adversaries, though they shall for ever rue the fact, shall confess that his name is Faithful and True. They called him many ill names when he was here, they said he had a devil and was mad; but now it is acknowledged that his name is Faithful and True. *We* acknowledge it with intense delight, and are glad to think that he leads the troops of heaven to the fight.

John still looked, and as he gazed with opened eye he marked *the mode of action and of warfare* which the champion employed, for he says, "In righteousness he doth judge and make war." Jesus is the only king who always wars in this fashion. There have been brilliant exceptions to the general rule, but war is usually as deceitful as it is bloody, and the words of diplomatists are a mass of lies. It seems impossible that men should deliberate about peace and war without straightway forgetting the meaning of words and the bonds of honesty. War still seems to be a piece of business in which truth would be out of place; it is a matter so accursed that falsehood is there most at home, and righteousness quits the plain. But as for our King, it is in righteousness that he doth judge and make war. Christ's kingdom needs no deception: the plainest speech and the clearest truth—these are the weapons of our warfare. The Jesuitical craft which speaks not what it means, the priestcraft which undermines the faith of men in God to teach them faith in their fellow men, the falsehood which does not teach a doctrine at the first but gradually insinuates it into feeble minds, the craft which creeps into houses and leads astray silly women, who are in bondage to their lusts—this has nothing to do with the kingdom of Christ. "In righteousness doth he judge and make war." He bids his champions come forth with nothing but his word, and speak that word faithfully, as they receive it, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. He tells his people, wherever they are, to live righteously, soberly, and in all integrity, and he himself shakes off, as a man shakes off a viper from his hand, anything that is unrighteous, everything that is contrary to truth and holiness. This is our champion, and I warrant you are right glad that he sits on the white horse, and has the upper hand. Since he fights after this fashion, the more of such warfare the better for mankind.

John, gazing still into the open door, saw a little—not much—of the person of his blessed Master. And, of course, he looked, first, into *those eyes*, those dear eyes which had so oft been filled with tears, and that at

the last were even red with weeping. John gazed into them, or wished to do so, but he had to cover his own eyes, for they were dazzled. He says, "His eyes were as a flame of fire." Think of your Master on the white horse with such eyes as these to-night. Why are they like flames of fire? Why, first, to discern the secrets of all hearts. There are no secrets here that Christ does not see. There is no lewd thought, there is no unbelieving scepticism, that Christ does not read. There is no hypocrisy, no formalism, no deceit, that he does not scan as easily as a man reads a page in a book. His eyes are like a flame of fire to read us through and through, and know us to our inmost soul. Oh, think of this, and if ye have ought of deceit tremble before him in whose spirit there is no guile. Those eyes like a flame of fire belong to our Champion that he may understand all the plots and crafts of all our foes. We are sometimes alarmed; we say that the machinations of Rome are very deep, and that the plots of infidelity dive very low. But what mattereth it? *His* eyes are like a flame of fire: he knows what they are at. He will confound their politics, he will expose their knavish tricks, and still lead on his host conquering and to conquer. Let us never fear while he is on the white horse with such eyes as his.

It was natural that John should carry his glance from the eyes to *the brow*; and as he looked at our champion on the white horse he saw that on his head were many crowns. The last he had seen there was a crown of thorns; but that was gone, and in the place of the one crown of the briars of the earth he saw many crowns of the jewels of heaven. There rests the crown of creation, for this Word made heaven and earth: the crown of providence, for this man now rules the nations with a rod of iron: the crown of grace, for it is from his royal hand that blessings are bestowed: the crown of the church, for be it known to all men that there is no head of the church but Christ, and woe unto those who steal the title. He is head over all things to his church, and king in the midst of her. Yes, on his head are many crowns, placed there by individual souls that he has saved. We have each one tried to crown him in our poor way, and we will do so as long as we live. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, and therefore well may multitudes of diadems fillet that august brow which once was belted with thorns. Glory be unto thee, O Son of God! Our hearts adore thee to-night as we contemplate thee on thy white horse.

Looking at him still, John saw one thing more, namely, *his vesture*. He says that his vesture was dipped in blood. Oh, but this is the grandest thought about our Master wherever he may be, that he is ever a red man wearing the bloody garment. As the atoning sacrifice he is at his best. We love him as we see the white lily of his perfect nature, but the rose of Sharon is the flower for us, for its sweet perfume breathes life to our fainting souls. Yes, he bled, and this is the greatest thing we can say of him. His life was glorious, but his death transcends it. A living Christ, a reigning Christ—we are charmed as we think of this; but oh, the bleeding Christ, the bleeding Christ for me! As the blood is the life, so is his blood life to us—the life of the gospel, the life of our hopes: and one delights to think of him that, though he rides the white horse, he has never stript off the bloody shirt in which he won our redemption. He looks like a Lamb that has been slain, and wears his

priesthood still. Whenever he goes out to conquer it is with this harness on, this vesture dipped in blood. Oh, preach him, ye his servants, preach him in his blood-red vesture. Ye shall never see souls saved if ye portray him in any other kind of coat. Ye take his own garment from him, and put on that of another, and ye pretend that ye are making him more illustrious as ye put on him a scarlet robe; but his own blood is his beauty and his triumph. Let him come before us in that, and our hearts shall crown him with loudest acclaim.

One other thing John saw, and that was *his name*. But here he seems to contradict himself. He says that he had a name which no man knoweth; yet he says that his name was the Word of God. Oh, but it is all true; for in such a one as our Master there must be paradoxes. No man knoweth his name. None of you know all his nature. His love passes your knowledge; his goodness, his majesty, his humiliation, his glory, all these transcend your ken. You cannot know him. Oh, the depths! If you plunge deepest into the mystery of the incarnate God you can never reach the bottom of it. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father." And yet you do know his name, for you know that he is "the Word of God." And what means that? Why, when a man would show himself, he speaks. "Speak," said the philosopher, "that I may see you." A man's speech is the embodiment of his thought. You know his thought when you hear his word, if he be a truth-speaking man. Now, Christ is God's word. That is his heart, spoken out to you. His inmost thoughts of love are printed in great capital letters, and set before you in the living, loving, bleeding, dying person of the incarnate Son of God. Thus is he called the Word of God, and in that capacity it becomes us to delight ourselves exceedingly in him, and to exult because he is now riding triumphantly upon his white horse.

II. Thus have I bidden you gaze at what John saw. Time chides me, however, and I can only ask you next, if you have seen the brightest One of all upon the white horse, just to look at HIS FOLLOWERS. "The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses."

See, then, that *Christ has a great following*—not one army, but "armies," whole hosts of them—numbers that cannot be counted. My Lord is not the chief of a small band, but he has a great host. There be some who think that all Christ's followers go to their little Bethel, and so they all sit down on the top of their own Mount Zion, and sweetly bless the Lord who shuts out the rest of mankind. But I tell you your little Bethel would not make a stable for the horses of his lieutenants. He has great armies following him, for a countless number out of every people and nation and tongue has he redeemed with his most precious blood.

And these that follow him, you notice, are *all mounted*. They followed him on white horses. They are mounted on the same sort of horses as himself, for they fare as he fares: when he walks, they must walk; when he bears a cross, they must carry crosses, too; but if ever he gets a crown, he cries, "They shall be crowned, too." If ever he gets on horseback, he will have his saints on horseback with him, for it is not like him that he should ride and they should walk. Remember Alexander, and how he kept up the spirit of his soldiers. Whenever the troops were thirsty, Alexander would not drink; and when they marched

on foot, Alexander footed it with them. So is it with our Master—he has been marching here in the rough ways with us, and he will let us ride in the glory-ways with him when the time shall come.

The armies of Christ followed him on white horses. Look ye a little steadily at these white horses, for I want you to observe the armour of their riders. Cromwell's men wore at their side long iron scabbards, in which they carried swords, which oftentimes they wiped across the manes of their horses, when they were red with blood. A dreadful story that to read, brave as were those Ironsides. But if you look at these troops there is not a sword amongst them. Not a scabbard dangles ; not a piece of metal flashes back the sunlight. Neither helmet nor cuirass is there, nor does there seem to be a pistol at the holster. They are not armed with lance or pike, and yet they are riding forth to war. Do you want to know the armour of that war? I will tell you. They are clothed in white linen, white and clean. Strange battle array this! And yet this is how they conquer, and how you must conquer, too. This is both armour and weapon. Holiness is our sword and our shield. This is pike and gun. If we but live as Christ lives and follow him, we shall conquer, for no sword can come at him that lives to God,—since, should it slay his body, it cannot touch his soul : he lives and conquers still. Think of this, and never ask for any other harness but this in the day of battle.

Yet I have said they were all on horses, which shows you that the saints of God have a strength that they sometimes forget. You know not that you ride on a horse, O child of God ; but there is a supreme invisible power which helps you in contending for Christ and for his truth. You are mightier than you know of, and you are riding more swiftly to the battle and more rapidly over the heads of your foes than ever you dream. When a door shall be opened in heaven to you, and you get to the battle's end, you will say, "Bless the Lord, I, too, rode on a white horse. I, too, conquered when I thought I was defeated. I, too, by simple obedience to his will, and keeping the faith, and walking in his truth, have been more than conqueror through him that loved me."

And is not this a grand sight, this man—this bonny man, as Rutherford calls him—on his white horse, and all these bright ones following after him in all their glorious array.

III. And now we must close, for the bell has tolled just now to show that the hour is up, but we cannot end till we have spoken of THE WARFARE. What is this warfare? There cannot be war without a sword, yet if you look all along the ranks of the white-robed armies there is not a sword amongst them all. Who carries the sword? There is one who bears it for them all. It is he, the King, who comes to marshal us. He bears a sword. But where? It is in his mouth! Strange place! A sword in his mouth. Yet this is the only sword my Lord and Master wields. Mahomet subdued men with the scimeter, but Christ subdues men with the gospel. We have but to tell out the glad tidings of the love of God, for this is the sword of Christ with which he smites the nations. Be his mouths, my brethren ; be his mouths, my sisters. Tell to your children in your Sunday-school classes, tell to the poor in the corners of the streets, tell by your little printed pamphlets if you cannot by your voices, all the story of how he

loved us and gave himself for us, for this is the sword of our warfare, it goeth forth from the mouth of Christ. Let us be content to fight with this and nothing else.

But for those who will not yield to it our Leader has a hand as well as a tongue, and he says that he will rule the nations with a rod of iron; and if you will read history through you will find that all nations that reject the gospel have to suffer for it. I select one instance. The gospel came to Spain years ago, and multitudes of the nobility were converted; but they had their *auto-da-fés*, and burnt the saints, and the accursed Inquisition stamped out the gospel in Spain; and to this day the nation cannot rise. It will, I trust, by God's forgiving mercy; but for centuries she that ruled the nations and covered the deep with her armadas has been sitting grovelling in her poverty and sloth, for Christ has ruled her with a rod of iron, and so will he rule all nations that reject the testimony of his mouth. If the sword of his mouth be not heeded, then cometh the last of this dread warfare—and may God grant that we may never know it—when his foot shall do it, for he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Ah, what a crush must that be which will come upon the clusters of Gomorrah from the foot which once was nailed to the tree. Who stamped that sinner's soul and crushed it down? Was he an angry angel with a sword of fire? It was the Christ of God, the man of love; rejected and despised. Fiercer than a lion on his prey is love when once provoked. When love turns to jealousy its fires are like coals of juniper, which have a violent flame. Beware, ye despisers, lest ye continue to despise. Submit to the sword of his mouth, lest ye be smitten by his hand. Be wise when once his hand begins to smite you lest you have to feel his foot, for it is all over then.

May you and I have a white horse each with which to follow Christ. But we never shall, unless we are his followers *here*. We must put on the snow-white garments now. Here they are ready for you. The righteousness of Christ will be given to any man who accepts him and believes on him; and when your snow-white garments once are on, he will give you the horse of his sacred strength, and you, even you, following in the track of your gallant leader, shall ride on shouting "Victory, victory, victory, through the blood of the Lamb." The Lord bless you, for Jesus's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation xviii.

21—24; and Revelation xix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—45, 324, 351.