

Have you ever seen the Mel Gibson movie *The Patriot*? Early in the film, one of Gibson's character's sons is murdered while trying to free his oldest brother from capture at the hands of a ruthless British colonel because the oldest son had served in the army of the American rebels. Gibson's character, Benjamin Martin, sets off with two other sons to carry out a calculated ambush against the detachment of soldiers transporting his oldest son to the British base to be executed. As the ambush progresses to hand-to-hand combat, the cool and calculated ambush devolves into blinding rage and fury, exacting vengeance upon the soldiers under the command of his son's murderer. Gibson's character bludgeons his last victim with a tomahawk until the soldier's body was nothing more than a mangled mess, and he was soaked in blood.

It's a striking scene. When you watch it, don't you find yourself cheering for Gibson's character? As it ends with all three sons, even the eldest who has seen the horrors of war, standing shocked at what their gentle father had done, don't you find yourself giving approval? Who wouldn't want that, and more, if the same happened to them and they had the opportunity and skills???

Don't you think there are 19 sets of parents in Uvalde, Texas who would want the same themselves today, had not

that young man consumed by such evil been killed by a law enforcement officer on the scene? Many, like Heraldo Rivera, are glad the young man is dead. Are you one of them? Would you, given the opportunity, wield the tomahawk of Benjamin Martin?

Maybe you have heard people ask through media outlets or in your own conversations, "Where is God in all of this?" or "If God really exists, how could he let this happen?" Have you found yourself asking those very questions?

Now, that young man probably committed that great evil at least in part to show the world how angry he was. And to prove his anger he attacked little children who had done nothing to him. It was completely senseless and unprovoked. But a growing problem we're seeing in our culture among young men is that they would rather be dead and infamous, than alive and anonymous.

But what about evil in this world that at least in a way makes sense? What about the evil in this world committed against Christ and his Church because Christ is Christ, and his children follow him? Something Jesus told us would happen.

What about this secular world that attacks you for holding to Jesus? Look at some of your brothers and sisters in

different parts of the world who are second-rate citizens in their countries, who risk losing their livelihoods or even their lives simply because they are Christian. Or look at how many in our own culture characterize us as nothing more than backwards simpletons at best and bigoted servants of Satan at worst. Don't you want to snipe back at them, maybe even take vengeance?

Or what about the religious progressives who have deluded the minds of many, all the while claiming to be part of the Church? What about the false teachers who put lies in the mouth of your Savior God, claiming that abortion is something divine and that homosexuality and transgenderism is simply how God has made some people to be? Or what about those false teachers who turn good works from a *response to grace* into its own *means of grace* whereby they play a role in saving themselves? Or the false teachers in the church who say *you* must make a decision to ask Jesus to come into your heart to be your personal Savior? Or what about those who take Christ's gospel and turn it into a prosperity gospel of God helping those who help themselves and love him more than others? Don't you want to snipe back at them and take vengeance? Don't you want to root out these weeds for whom Jude says **blackest darkness has been reserved forever?** (Jude 13) Don't you look at all this and wonder where Jesus is, and why in the world he left the world when he knew things like this would happen? Wouldn't it be better

if he were here...if we were reigning together with him now???

Well, that's what the disciples thought as we heard in our first lesson this evening. **"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"** (Acts 1:6) No. That is not our place. To believe, teach and do so would make us false teachers. To take vengeance like Gibson's Benjamin Martin in *The Patriot* on the enemies of the Church both within and without would make us no different than the abortionist who commits murder and prematurely ends the Time of Grace of a person bought with the precious blood of Christ.

You see, friends, Jesus did not leave us when he ascended into heaven. He only left the earth physically. He is still with us every day, among us and in our hearts through faith created and sustained through Word and sacraments. What's more, he is sitting on his throne ruling over all things for our good. I know it does not look like it from our perspective, but that is why it is **NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT WHAT WILL BE.**

What you and I see now is angering and painful, even dreadful. But what will be on the Last Day and in eternity not only shows us that Jesus will carry out perfect vengeance on our behalf, but also drives us to do what Christ has called us to do, to preach his Word that others would be spared that dreadful end. And John sees in his vision what the angels proclaimed to him and his fellow apostles 60 years

earlier, **“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”** (Acts 1:11).

John writes: **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 makes 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. Out of his mouth comes 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.**

Jesus comes with the names **Faithful** and **True**. He is faithful to his Word and his people, and only truth comes from his mouth. And his judgments are perfect because they are carried out in pure righteousness, unassailed by sin as ours certainly would be. That means any who face his wrath have deserved it and therefore there are no mistakes.

They will not be able to escape God’s wrath any more than grapes cannot escape the crushing forces of feet in the winepress. And notice our **KING OF KINGS**

AND LORD OF LORDS looks much like Gibson’s character, Benjamin Martin!!! Jesus carrying out his vengeance on the Last Day and for all eternity is a filthy affair! His robe is stained with their blood as he strikes them down with his holy Word that comes from his mouth like a sharp sword!

Jesus’ **eyes are like blazing fire** so he sees and knows all things. Nothing escapes his notice. No enemy can hide himself from our warrior King who wears **many crowns** displaying that he has all authority in heaven and on earth.

But notice where are we in all of this? **The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.** This probably refers both to God’s holy angels and to us. But notice our robes. They are white! Not only are they white because we will have **washed [our] robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb** (Rev. 7:14), but they stay white! This reminds us that this battle of vengeance and judgment is not ours but Christ’s alone!!! Jesus has already fought all our battles for us. He lived a perfect life fighting against every temptation for us. He suffered the bitter agony of the cross for us. He conquered death and rose from the grave for us. And now, at the end of all things, nothing changes. Jesus still does it all for us!!!

And John sees this as a feast Jesus has prepared for his enemies: **And 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 mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Friends, remember it is **NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT WHAT WILL BE**. John's vision of our ascended Christ gives us confidence even as we face constant opposition and worse. As we continue to spread the gospel, we can be certain that Jesus will triumph over every foe. Not one enemy from the greatest to the least, neither the enemies outside the visible church nor within will escape his wrath. Oh, they can gather against us and our Lord as much as they like, but it will do them no good. They are doomed to fail because no one can stand against him who is the **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**. That means there is no place for us to be like Gibson's character in *The Patriot*. We do not need to

bloody our own hands to support the gospel's cause. Even when our enemies appear to be winning, their defeat is already guaranteed.

And in sweet juxtaposition to the feast prepared for our enemies, Jesus promises a different feast for his faithful people. Two verses before our text, John's angelic tour guide proclaimed: "**Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!**" (Rev. 19:9). Ah, this is also why Christ our Savior has ascended into the highest heavens. His work on earth is done. He rules over all things for the good of his Church so that through his orchestration of history he can at last bring all those whom he has invited to his great wedding banquet!

And what a glorious feast it shall be! There will stand Christ, glorified and yet still bearing the marks of his passion, not gruesome with the gore of Golgotha, but glorious marks of God's great love for us! And we too shall stand before our perfect bridegroom, not at all wearing the tattered clothes of our sin, nor showing the shame of all our spiritual prostitutions. Rather, we will stand before Christ who himself has cleansed us **by the washing with water through the word so he can present [us] to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish; but holy and blameless** (Eph. 6:26,27).

So, remember that for now in this life, it is **NOT WHAT YOU SEE, BUT WHAT WILL BE**. Amen.