

# A vision of judgement

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Preacher: Mark Jackson

[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning is from the book of Revelation, chapter 6, which can be found on page 1239, page 1239 in the Church Bibles.

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, with a voice like thunder, Come, and I looked, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow and a crown, and was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come, and out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come, and I looked, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine.

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature say, Come, and I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him, and they were given authority over a quarter of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

[ 1 : 35 ] When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth. The full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, and the great ones, and the generals, and the rich, and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? Thank you very much, Jonathan, for reading to us. Please do keep your Bibles open there on page 1239.

[ 3 : 03 ] And if you turn to the back of the service sheet, you'll see an outline of today's talk. Let me pray for us. Father God, we want to praise you afresh this morning for giving us your word.

Father, we praise you that as we read your word, we hear you speaking to us, you reveal yourself to us. Father, we want to know you better, we want to live for you more, we want to love the things you love, hate the things you hate.

So speak to us now, reveal yourself to us from this next part of Revelation. Teach us, change us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. I'd like to start this morning by reading out five headlines, five news headlines from the past week or so.

One. Human catastrophe grips Congo. Fierce fighting between government and rebel forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo has caused a humanitarian catastrophe.

Two. Five years for knife fight killer. A teenager has been sentenced to five years youth detention for stabbing a student to death instinctively.

[ 4 : 37 ] Three. Zimbabwe inflation hits new high. Millions of Zimbabweans have already run out of food or are surviving on just one meal a day.

Whilst Robert Mugabe clings on to power at all costs. Four. Rugby league player dies suddenly.

Wakefield Wildcats prop Adam Wateen has died suddenly and unexpectedly after collapsing during a training session, the West Yorkshire club said. Five.

Aid worker shot dead in Kabul. The Taliban said they shot Gail Williams, 34, because she was spreading Christianity through her work for UK-based serve Afghanistan.

Five headlines from the last week or so. Do you ever find yourself wondering what is going on in the world? I was having dinner with my sister on Wednesday night and out of the blue, and she wouldn't call herself a Christian, no prompting from me.

[ 5 : 42 ] She said, Mark, you know, I just don't know what's going on in the world. Seems this country, at least, is going downhill big time. Do you ever find yourself having similar thoughts?

As you see a world of terror and teenage stabbings, a world of poverty, persecution, a world seemingly in self-distract mode.

Do you ever ask what's going on? And the question, surely, is more pertinent as us as Christians. I mean, God's supposed to be in control.

Isn't he? That was the message of chapter four. And Jesus has conquered sin, death, evil. That was the message of chapter five. So if God's in control and Jesus has conquered, why a world of conflict and killing?

Why a world of death and destruction? Why the world we live in? What's going on? Revelation six begins to give us an answer.

[ 6 : 48 ] First, it tells us that we live in a world under God's judgment. We live in a world under God's judgment.

Because in verses one to eight of chapter six, Jesus opens, begins to open the seals of the scroll. The scroll, which we saw last week in chapter five, represents God's plans for the future.

And what we see as we look first at the first four seals is as Jesus opens them, we see God's plans of judgment. Judgments on the world now.

Let's have a look at verse one. Now I watched when the lamb opened one of the seven seals.

And I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, come. And I looked and behold a white horse. And its rider had a bow and a crown was given to him.

[ 7 : 52 ] And he came out conquering and to conquer. And we see the same pattern repeat itself for seals two, three and four.

So Jesus opens a seal. One of the living creatures around God's throne calls out the horse. And the rider of each horse is given authority by God to do something.

So in verse two, there's this white horse. And the rider is given a crown. Authority to come out conquering over the world and to conquer.

This is not the conquest of Jesus, not the conquest of the gospel. These are people bent on human conquest. The Genghis Khans, the Mohammeds, the Hitlers, the Mugabis of this world.

Then in verse four, there's a red horse, red the color of blood. And this rider is given permission or authority to take peace from the earth.

[ 8 : 55 ] Wars, friction, conflict. So that men slay one another and knife each other and assassinate and murder and kill.

Then in verse five, there's this black horse with a pair of scales for weighing out food. But the cost is extortionate. A quart of wheat for a denarius.

A bowl of Weetabix for a day's wages. Three quarters of barley for a denarius. Three slices of bread for what you earn in a day.

And yet at the same time, luxury items stay the same. Do not harm the oil and wine. The voice from the throne room says.

Poor struggle to make ends meet. Rich continue to wine and dine. Then in verse seven, verse eight, sorry.

[ 9 : 58 ] There's a pale horse. The color of death. Just like its rider, whose name is death. And death is given authority over a quarter of the earth to kill.

Whether by sword. Sword of Allah, holy war. By famine. A loaf of bread costing millions of Zimbabwean dollars. Pestilence.

Be it some plague, meningitis, hospital superbugs. By wild beasts of the earth. Eaten alive by sharks, lions, whatever. And Hades follows behind death, sweeping up those he's killed.

And taking them off to Hades. It is a grim picture. Of conquest.

Of bloodshed. Of inequality. Of unexpected death. And it is a picture of the world we live in today.

[ 11 : 05 ] Of the conquest in Congo. Of the bloodshed on the streets in London. Of the poverty, inequality in Zimbabwe. Of unexpected deaths.

In rugby training sessions. This is not a vision of the future here. This is a vision of today. Jesus opening the scroll.

That we saw last week. History between Jesus' first and second coming. Metaphorically speaking, these four riders of the apocalypse. They are galloping around the world now. And perhaps the shock comes.

When we realise that behind each of these horses. Each of these horses causing all this havoc in the world. Lies the authority of God himself.

So it all starts from God's throne room. The scroll. Jesus is the one opening the seals. It's the living creatures round the throne.

[ 12 : 08 ] Calling out the horses. And God gives the riders the authority. Verse 2. A crown was given to him. Verse 4.

Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth. Verse 6. The voice in the midst of the four living creatures. Calls out the cost of prices.

Verse 8. Death and Hades were given authority. Over a quarter of the earth. God is the one behind it all.

Not the devil. Not free will. Behind all the news headlines. Of this world lies the authority of God himself. To ask then the question from the start.

What's going on in this world? Here is part of the answer. It is being judged. Judged by God.

[ 13 : 14 ] We live in a world under God's judgment. So we shouldn't be surprised when we switch on the TV.

Pick up the newspaper. And read of the next international conflict. Or latest gang war victim. Or unexpected death. Because God tells us here. This is the world we will live in.

Until Jesus' return. As Jesus opens the seals of the scroll. And unravels the future story of our world. This is the story that God has written.

A world under his judgment. Because of our rejection of him. A world where the cost of turning our backs on God. It's on display for all to see. It's on display. It's on display. So we shouldn't be surprised at what's going on in the world.

But then. Nor should we be fearful. Or worried about the future. That there's good news here. Because actually God is behind it all. Remember chapter 6 comes after 4 and 5.

[ 14 : 19 ] We've seen in chapter 4. God is all powerful. Sitting on the throne. Ruling perfectly. The all loving God of chapter 5. When the person of Jesus was slain for us.

So contrary to what we might at first think. It's actually reassuring to know that God is behind it all. Because it means the world isn't spiraling out of control. The world isn't going downhill big time.

The world is not in self-destruct mode. Rather this is what we see around us. Is God's good and righteous judgment on his world. God knows what he's doing. We can trust him with it.

There's nothing to fear. Nothing to be worried about. And actually because God's behind it all. Conquest, the bloodshed, poverty, unnatural death.

Because God's behind it all. Well he's perfectly capable of bringing it all to an end. And that's just what we see happening in verses 12 to 17.

[ 15 : 26 ] Secondly then. A world facing God's final judgment. So this really is at the end of the world as we know it.

Have a look at verse 12. When he, that's Jesus, opened the sixth seal. I looked and behold. There was a great earthquake. The sun became black like sackcloth.

The full moon became like blood. The stars of the sky fell to earth. Like figs falling to the ground. The sky vanished.

Like a scroll that's being rolled up. Just like rolling up a blind. And every mountain and island was removed from its place. Now this is symbolic language.

The end of the world won't literally happen like this. Any more than there are literally for riders of the apocalypse galloping around the world now. No, it's symbolic. It stands for something.

[ 16 : 28 ] And it stands here for the end of the world. The end of the world. The end of the world. The end of the world. The end of the world in rebellion against God. This is what the world is facing.

This is where God's scroll will lead to. A final judgment. Where God will judge the entire world. Not just a quarter of it. All of it.

All of it. When every thought, word and act will be judged. When all evil will be dealt with. When all unrepentant sin paid for.

This is a world facing God's final judgment. And we can see from verses 15 to 16. That this judgment will be both total and terrible.

Total because no one will escape it. Verse 15. The kings of the earth. The great ones. The generals. The rich. The powerful. Everyone.

[ 17 : 30 ] Slave. And free. Doesn't matter who you are. How successful you've been. Everyone. Will face the judgment of God. It's total. And it is terrible.

Terrible. Because what the people say on that day. End of verse 15. Listen to what they say. Everyone. Slave and free. Hid themselves in the caves.

And among the rocks of the mountains. Calling to the mountains and rocks. Fall on us. And hide. Us from the face of him. Who is seated on the throne. And from the wrath of the Lamb.

And for the great day of their wrath has come. And who can stand. On judgment day. Every person who does not know and love the Lord Jesus.

Will cry out for the mountains. And the rocks to fall on them. It's a horrible thought. We all know how horrible and terrible death is.

[ 18 : 30 ] But on judgment day. Even death will seem attractive. People will prefer to be crushed. By huge boulders than face the judgment of God. It's total.

It is terrible. And it goes without saying that you don't want to face it. Everyone needs to turn to Christ. A seeker's forgiveness. And I know people laugh today.

At the thought of a final judgment day. Laugh at us. For it. But God is clear in these verses. That this is what's coming. This is what the world faces. A judgment day.

And if anything. God's judgment now. The world we live in today. What we saw in the first point. Is evidence of that. Like contraction pains.

That tell the mother the birth is coming. Well God's present judgments. Tell the world of his coming final judgment. And let me just say.

[ 19 : 30 ] If you are someone here. Wouldn't call yourself a Christian. God doesn't want you to face his wrath. I know the people in verse 16. Use this phrase. The wrath of the lamb. But if you just glance back.

To chapter 5 verse 9. Describing Jesus here. It says. Worthy are you. The lamb. To take the scroll. And to open it still. For you were slain. Jesus is.

The person who's died for you. Who shed his blood for you. Who was slaughtered. Like a sacrificial lamb. So that God's anger would fall on him. And not on you.

God doesn't want you to face his wrath. He's not some capricious. Malicious taskmaster. Just waiting. For his opportunity. To punish you. When you die. He loves you. In the person of Jesus. He's died for you. And right now.

He's limiting his judgment. To just a quarter of the earth. So that people can turn to Christ. And know his forgiveness. And know his love. And not his wrath. Now for the majority of us here.

[ 20 : 39 ] Who have turned to Christ. This vision of judgment day. I mean. It's certainly a reminder to us. Of what we've been rescued from. And how good God has been to us.

That we can rejoice in the love of the lamb. And not face the wrath of the lamb. And it's certainly a reminder to us. To be out there. Telling the world. About God's final judgment. So that we've been deceived.

■■ hábt before. And this is where I want us to spend the remainder of our time. The fifth seal in verses 9 to 11 is not a judgment per se, but another insight into the throne room of God. Although this time it focuses in on those who have been killed for standing up for Jesus. Listen to their cry and see what you make of it. I'll read from verse 9. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth. Then they were given each a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. Now how do you feel about the martyrs cry? Do you feel uneasy? I feel uneasy. I'll tell you why at first hearing. Because it sounds vindictive. Avenge our blood. Sounds like the language of religious war, of malicious revenge.

But the thing in, these are cries from heaven. The martyrs are in the presence of God now. Their hearts wash clean from all sinful desires. In other words, this is a godly cry. A godly longing for justice. My mate had his car broken into last week and had his iPod nicked. And relaying the story to me, he said, it was just totally wrong for that guy to do that, to nick my iPod. And I hope the police catch him. Fair enough, I thought. A godly cry for justice. At the same time, just after that, he said, you know what, Mark, you need to be praying for me. Because I'm really struggling with feelings of, you know, how dare he do that to me. And if I see him, I'll give him what for?

Ungodly cries for revenge. So can you see that there is a godly cry for justice? And there is an ungodly cry for revenge.

[ 23 : 55 ] And here on earth, we wrestle with both. But in heaven, there is only the godly longing for justice. And this is what the martyrs are crying out for. This is what Gail Williams is crying out for right now.

For justice to be done. For evil to be paid for. For God to vindicate his name and his people. It's a good thing what these martyrs are crying out for. And it's why God doesn't correct them.

Rather, he tells them to rest a little longer until the full number of Christian martyrs is complete. The justice they long for, it is coming. It's a good thing for them to long for it.

To long for God's final judgment. I think that's where the application is for us. We're being shown this insight into heaven so that we have these godly desires. A longing for God's judgment.

Not in the ungodly way for personal revenge. But in the godly way for God's justice. Now, don't get me wrong.

[ 25 : 10 ] God does call us to love our enemies. To pray for our enemies. To forgive our enemies. But at the same time, God wants us to be longing for his judgment.

Longing for God to right all wrongs. Longing for God to punish unrepentant sin. To rid the world of evil. To bring in the new creation.

To vindicate his name. Do you long for God's judgment? It just sounds so counterintuitive, doesn't it?

We think judgment bad, salvation good. But God wants us to see that judgment is good too. It's good to know that justice will be done.

It is good to know that evil will not have the last say. It is good to know that God will judge all that is wrong with this world.

[ 26 : 07 ] God will judge and the more we see the goodness of God's judgment, the less we'll be embarrassed about it. The more we'll actually long for it like the martyrs in heaven.

It's not right when people blaspheme God's name before you don't like it. It's not right when people make you feel stupid for being a Christian.

And a day is coming when that will all stop. God will vindicate his name, he will vindicate his people. It's not right that people kill instinctively.

It is not right that people murder Christians for their faith. And a day is coming when justice will be done. God's judgment is a good thing.

As we experience a world under God's judgment, as we live in a world facing God's final judgment. It's something that we can long for. It's something we can praise God for.

[ 27 : 23 ] Let's pray. Father God, we do thank you that a judgment day is coming.

When justice will be done. When you will vindicate your name and your people. Thank you that we can be certain of it because you are behind everything that is going on in this world right now.

And so we ask that you would move our hearts so that we would have this same longing as those martyrs in heaven. Not an ungodly cry for revenge, but a godly cry for justice, for judgment to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And I want to pray now.

James questions is, go home.