

"The Return of the King"

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Revelation chapter 19, verses 11 through 21? It's page 976 in the Pew Bible. We are continuing our series in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, chapter 19, verses 11 through 21. I think many of us can look out at the world, and we can wonder at times, where is God? And if there is a God, why doesn't He come and make things right? If God is all good and all powerful, why doesn't He do something about the deep brokenness of the world, the evil and the injustice? Well, in our passage this morning, our passage this morning is about just that. It's about the return of the world's true King to bring perfect justice. So let me pray, and then I will read.

Father, indeed, all of our days are numbered and in Your hands, and we know that You have numbered this day and ordained this day for us. So we pray that as we now attend to Your Word on this first day of the week, this day of Christ's resurrection, by Your Spirit we would hear what You are saying to us and that we would respond with faith and with obedience. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

All right, Revelation chapter 19, starting in verse 11. Verse 12.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, Come, gather for the great supper of God to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great. And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies, gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, and the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh." Now, this text is not the last thing that Revelation is going to say about how God deals with evil and renews His creation. We will see in a couple of weeks that there's also in store a healing of sickness and tears, and a remaking of the created world to shine with the beauty of God's presence.

But we can't simply skip over the present passage. In many ways, this passage has been foreshadowed again and again in the book of Revelation. In chapter 6, remember the vision of the seven scrolls, we encountered there the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. In chapter 11, in the vision of the seven trumpets, we heard the angels declare, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. In chapter 14, in the midst of the vision of the dragon and the beasts, we saw the image of a great harvest as the Son of Man reaped the whole earth. In chapter 16, in the vision of the seven bulls, we saw a great gathering of the armies of the world to battle God, and then a loud voice came from the throne of God saying, in triumph, it's done. In chapter 17, in the vision of the fall of Babylon that we finished up last week, we saw that these evil forces will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is the Lord of lords and King of kings. So, in every major section of the middle part of Revelation, we've seen a foreshadow of the return of Christ to defeat evil. Each of these overlapping visions that make up this book have given us a glimpse of a coming King. And finally, here in Revelation 19, we get the fullest description of them all. And what our passage, I think, wants to convey is this, that there is a perfect judge who is coming with perfect judgment. There's a perfect judge coming with perfect judgment. Look at verse 15. It says, from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. In that verse, John is gathering together a number of Old Testament texts about the coming Messiah who would come and judge evil and liberate God's people from their

oppressors and bring about, in consequence, the renewal of creation. So, John is saying all those threads are about this coming day. The first of those texts is Isaiah 11, 3-4. The prophet Isaiah says that this coming King shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

[6 : 42] And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The next verse comes from Psalm 2. In Psalm 2, we hear about the nations raging and the peoples plotting in vain against the Lord and against his anointed. But in that Psalm, the Lord says to his son to the king, you shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

And the last text that John is pulling from here is Isaiah 63. In Isaiah 63, the prophet has just seen God save His people from His enemies, and then he asks, why is your apparel red and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? And God answers, I've trodden the winepress alone and from the peoples, no one was with me. I trod them in my anger, trampled them in my wrath. So you see, the Old Testament looked forward to a day when the perfect judge would come with perfect judgment. And this would be the end, the final end of evil and suffering and wrong. And Revelation 19 tells us that this promise will reach its fulfillment when the Lord Jesus returns. Now, I wonder how this idea strikes you. You know, if you're new to Christianity, it might seem a bit far-fetched, a perfect judge coming with perfect judgment.

And yet, let me encourage you for a moment just to suspend your judgment and look first at the character of the judge that's presented here. That's really the first thing for us to see as we push a little deeper into this text, and this will be our first main point this morning, is the character of this judge. And we see his character in verses 11 through 16. And I think we can sum up what these verses tell us about the character of Jesus, the coming judge, in two ways. First, he's a righteous judge. Look again at verse 11, then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse, the one sitting on it is called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. You know, doesn't a good deal of our resistance to judgment come from the fact that so much of our earthly experience of it is so deeply flawed. Human judges are not perfect. Too often we are swayed by public opinion or prejudice. We're liable to deceit, to inconsistency, to acting in self-interest. But here is a judge who's none of those things. He's faithful and true. Now, this isn't the first time Jesus has been called faithful and true. In the book of Revelation, we saw in chapter 1 he's called the faithful witness. Again, in chapter 3, he's called the faithful and true witness. Faithful and true.

[9 : 39] Consider, friends, every word of Jesus is true. When you take metal ore out of the ground, it's full of impurities, it's full of imperfections. And what metalsmiths do is that they'll blast the ore in a furnace and melt it down so that all the impurities can be separated and removed. And what's left is the metal in its truest state. You know, so often our words are riddled with impurities and imperfections. We shade the truth to win approval, to avoid embarrassment, to serve our own self-interest.

But Jesus is always completely true. His words are like shining silver in an ocean of dross. But he's not just true. He's faithful. He's utterly reliable. What he sets out to do, what he promises, he fulfills. And he never disappoints. It's like the arrow that always flies straight and always hits its target despite the wind, despite the interference. It's faithful.

Jesus is a righteous judge because he's faithful and true, but also because he sees everything that there is to see. Verse 12 says, his eyes are like a flame of fire. You know, earthly judges can't possibly render a final judgment, right? Because they don't see everything that needs to be seen. All of our judgments in this life are provisional. And our judgments are always imperfect, and they're often flawed because we don't see everything. We can't. But there's nothing hidden from the sight of this judge. How does the human eye work? The human eye works by receiving light, right? It can only see what it receives. But we're told here that the eyes of this judge are like a flame of fire are like a flame of fire. They carry their own light. They bring to light everything that can or will be seen. So, if our hearts long for justice, if we look out at the world and we say, where is God? Then what we need is a judge like this, don't we? One who is faithful and true, one who sees everything that needs to be seen and can judge justly. And that is who Jesus is.

[12 : 26] The character of this judge is that He's a righteous judge. But He's more than that, actually. The character of this judge is not just that He's a righteous judge. We're shown here that He's also the rightful judge. He's the rightful judge. If there's to be perfect justice, then we don't just need a judge who's able to judge. We actually need one who has the right or the authority to judge.

And that's how Jesus is described here. Picking up in verse 12, we see that on His head are many diadems. That is, He's the sovereign ruler of creation. He wears the crown of every place, of every people. As verse 16 says, He's the king of all kings. He's the lord of all lords.

But how could that be so? How could He be this sovereign? Well, because this is no merely human king. Notice the next phrase, He has a name written that no one knows but Himself.

Now, what does that mean? That's a cryptic phrase, isn't it? He has a name written that no one knows but Himself. Well, a name in the ancient world was a metaphorical way of talking about someone's nature. And if Jesus' nature is so profound, so majestic, that no one can fathom it, no one but Himself. What must that mean about who Jesus is? Friends, there's only one whose nature is so profound that only that one can fully understand it. And that one is God.

Jesus is God. And because He is God, only He can understand the depths of who He really is. His ultimate nature is beyond merely human comprehension. And that makes sense of what we see in the next verse, the name by which He is called is the Word of God. That is, Jesus is the very self-expression of God Himself, God making Himself known.

[14 : 43] This is what we see in the Gospel of John, chapter 1, where John writes, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Revelation shows us again and again that there is one and only one God. This book is exclusively monotheistic, and Jesus Christ is included in the eternal being of that one God. Jesus isn't some second God or some lesser God, but He's one with the very nature of the God of Israel, the source and the goal of all things.

So this judge that we see here is the rightful judge, because He is the creator and originator of all things.

This one upholds the universe by the word of His power, as Hebrews 1.3 says. In Him we live and move and have our being. We exist because each moment He wills our existence in His good pleasure, and if He were to withdraw it, we would dissipate faster than a snowflake on a summer day.

He's the only rightful judge because He is our creator. Because He is our creator, He is our rightful judge. But He is our rightful judge for one more reason. John sees His clothing in verse 13.

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood. And yet this can't be the blood of His enemies, not yet, because the battle has yet to begin, right? Whose blood then marks the robes of this righteous and rightful judge? The blood is His own. It's His own. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has the right to take up the scepter and rule and judge the nations, is the Lamb who was slain.

[16 : 46] What John is showing us here is that this judge has stood in the place of the judged. stricken in punishment for rebels and sinners in their place.

What Revelation 19 shows us then is not a slaughtered lamb turned slaughterer, but one who in perfect truth and perfect mercy comes in perfect justice. A king who has laid down his life for rebels. A king who has extended his mercy to the ends of the earth through the non-violent witness of his suffering church. A king who now comes to reclaim his creation and remove every ounce of evil and injustice. He's the rightful judge because his robes show the stains of his own willingness to save. They show the stains of the cost He was willing to pay to procure mercy for all who simply believe, from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue.

So, Jesus is both the righteous one and the rightful one. If there's going to be justice, who else should stand in the place of the judge? Who else but Jesus?

We can trust Him to render judgment that is perfectly just, perfectly impartial, perfectly good, and the stains on His robe prove it to be so.

Now, before we move to the second paragraph and our second point, let me pause just for some application here. If you believe that Jesus is this coming judge, that He's the only one who has the right to make the final judgment, then this should change how you and I approach wrongdoings in this life, from minor offenses to major injustices. We reflected on this earlier in our series in Revelation, but it's worth mentioning again. Only a belief in the coming justice of God will allow you to be just in this life. Here's what I mean. You know, if there is no perfect and final judgment for wrongs in this life, then our hearts will seek to enforce that judgment ourselves.

[19 : 21] And if we aren't able to enact it, then at least we'll be enforcing it in our own hearts, in our own minds, in our own thoughts. But inevitably, we will not do so perfectly. We will always exact more than was taken. We'll always want to make the other pay. And that simply just perpetuates the cycle of offense and the cycle of violence. You hurt me, I'll hurt you, and on it goes. And the only way to de-escalate that cycle of offense and violence is to not retaliate, to not pay back.

Now, this doesn't mean we don't remove ourselves from those who are harming us. We should. This doesn't mean that we don't call evil evil in this life. We should. This doesn't mean that we refuse lawful means to protect those who are being harmed and to stop those who are doing the harming.

We should. But the only way to act from a place of something that approximates real justice and not vengeance is to believe that the real and perfect justice will come. I don't have to make the other person pay. I can even pray for their repentance. I can even pray for their good.

And even if reconciliation in this life is not possible, I can forgive them and not seek their harm because there's a perfect judge, a righteous judge, a rightful judge, and we can entrust the work of final and perfect judgment to Him. So, John shows us first the character of this judge. That's verses 11 through 16. Next, he shows us the reality of the coming judgment. There's a perfect judge coming with perfect judgment. We see the reality of this judgment in verses 17 through 21. Now, on the one hand, the reality of judgment is good news. John speaks of the beast and the false prophet being thrown alive into a lake of fire. Now, you'll remember that the beast and the false prophet were introduced back in chapter 13, and they represented sort of two parts of an unholy trinity along with the dragon, that great accuser and enemy of God and His people. And we saw in that chapter that the beast rose up imitating the work of Christ, but instead of peace, he came with power and with violence and made war on the saints and drew the whole world away after him. And then the second beast rose up, the false prophet, imitating the work of the Holy Spirit and issued forth the propaganda of the first beast, convincing the world to rush headlong after him in worship.

And of course, there have been many, many manifestations of this beastly activity throughout history as human-centered empires rise and issue forth their propaganda and go about their agendas of conquest and victory and prosperity. These two beasts are the heart of injustice, oppression, the strong devouring the weak, the haves over the have-nots, and all the sad reversals of the oppressed then turning and becoming the oppressors themselves.

[22 : 57] But worst of all, here is the heart of the dethroning of God as the rightful king of creation. The beast and the false prophet put themselves in the place of God and direct worship away from the true God to their own distorted image. And this twisting of human worship away from the only one worthy of worship, that drawing humanity away in false worship is what brings death and violence and lust and greed and boredom and exhaustion. And the tendrils of these metaphorical beasts seem so deep, so intractable, that we seemingly cannot extricate ourselves. If there is no final judgment, what hope is there for the world?

We need a righting of these wrongs. We need an end to the deception, to the lies, to the oppression, to the false worship, to the violence. If there is no final divine judgment, what hope is there for us?

And yet that is what we see here. The beast and the false prophet gather their armies, but the battle is seemingly over before it begins. Suddenly, swiftly, they are thrown into the lake of fire, never to return. Deception, lies, oppression, all gone. They are judged perfectly once and for all.

Creations finally liberated from their destructive hold by the perfect judgment of the one true King. There is hope for the world.

And Christian, I hope you see that if this is how history ends, then as we walk in the midst of history, we need not fear the powers of this world, and we need not live for their approval. These things that look so magnificent, so scary, so powerful now, we need not live in fear of them. We serve a greater King.

[25 : 21] So, on the one hand, this reality of judgment is good news. God will right the wrongs. The perfect judge does see the wrong and evils that you see, and He will come with all power and all goodness and make an end to all that has gone wrong. But on the other hand, if this reality of judgment is good news, on the other hand, the reality of judgment is deeply unsettling.

We know that the only hope for the world is perfect divine judgment, but if there is perfect judgment to come, what hope is there for me? And what hope is there for you? Because when the King returns, all will be judged.

The picture of the birds gathering to a feast, friends, it's meant to be arresting. It's meant to be shocking. If that image shocks you, it is supposed to. And the point of verse 18 is that this judgment that is to come will be completely impartial. None will be exempt.

So, when the perfect judge comes with perfect judgment, where will you stand? The reality is it's easy to point a finger at evil and oppression out there, right, done by the greedy, done by the

powerful.

But are those not the same threads in my own heart? Do I not also reject the rightful place of God in my life and seek to chart my own course according to my own ends?

[27 : 15] And friends, don't you as well? And in so doing that, it's not as if we've put ourselves in a neutral position in the cosmos, right? We don't occupy a sort of spiritual Switzerland. There's no such thing.

No, in our sin, in our self-centeredness, we've actually allied ourselves with the armies gathering against God in Revelation 19. We've put ourselves in league, wittingly or not, with the very systems of beastly deception and oppression that we profess to despise. The very activity that we point to and say, where is God? We ourselves are the participants. And the finger points to us.

So where will you stand in this judgment? Evil, friends, must be punished. God is too good to let evil simply be ignored or excused. And our lives will all meet the gaze of the one whose eyes are like a flame of fire. All will be revealed. And perfect judgment will be rendered by His Word.

How will you face this judgment? The only hope is this. The only hope for sinners, for you and me, is the blood on the garments of the returning King. Evil must be punished. That is how good God is. But in His infinite mercy, He willingly died as a substitute to pay the punishment for every evil, every wrong, every lie, every act of pride, every act of cowardice, every selfish motive of everyone who repents and believes in Him.

The only hope is to bow yourself before this King and accept His death as the rightful and righteous payment for your sins and take Him as Lord.

[29 : 40] But the time to make this choice is now. C.S. Lewis writes this in Mere Christianity.

He says, God will invade the world to put an end to evil and injustice. And he goes on and says, but I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does.

When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks onto the stage, the play is over. God is going to invade, all right, but what is the good of saying you are on His side then?

When you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else, something that never entered your head to conceive, comes crashing in, something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left.

For this time, it will be God without disguise, something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature.

[31 : 04] It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up.

That will not be the time for choosing. It will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not.

Now, today, this moment is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance.

It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, now is the favorable time.

Now is the day of salvation. God made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

[32 : 10] There's a perfect judge coming with perfect judgment. Place your trust in Him now and bow your heart to Him as King. When this justice comes, the world will be put right.

The earth will be liberated from evil. The trees will clap their hands. The rivers will rejoice when the King returns, because the curse of sin will be lifted once and for all.

And the choice before all of us is whether we will lay down our arms now and surrender to the love of this King before the final judgment comes.

Because, friends, He offers forgiveness and amnesty to all who believe, simply through faith. He's done it all. And if you receive His grace now, then you can face that day with confidence and with joy.

And you can face every day until then with confidence and with joy. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge that before You this morning that we have often had such a small view of who You are in Your majesty, Your glory, and Your holiness.

[33 : 42] Lord, forgive us as Your church for domesticating You. Lord, we thank You for domesticating You. You are the coming King and the perfect Judge.

We worship You this morning. But we thank You that Your heart is a heart of mercy towards sinners. We acknowledge that because of who You are, our Creator, our Redeemer, there is no refuge from You.

But because of Your merciful heart and the work of the cross, there is abundant and ample refuge in You and with You.

So even now, God, I pray that You would cause a turning of hearts to You in true repentance and faith that today might be the day of salvation, the favorable day.

And would we, Your church, live as those who know that perfect justice is coming? Would we continue to lay down our arms of bitterness, of unforgiveness, of animosity, of thinking that the petty political machinations of this world have any eternal significance?

[35 : 11] God, forgive us. And let us live as Your people in the abundance of assurance that comes from knowing we serve a risen King.

And would we go forth after Him to love and even to suffer as You have done for us, Lord Jesus. We pray this in Your mighty name. Amen.