

"A Manger and a Sword"

Revelation 19

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(this 1996 sermon was edited for 2003 but not used, I preached a different "Joy to YOU" instead).

Mary Ellen Ashcroft of St Catherine College suggested an interesting idea:

I'm certain many of you have seen and even used advent calendars.

On an attractive, festive background are 25 little numbered or dated doors or fabric flaps.

A new door is opened each day, marking one day closer to Christmas.

Behind each door is revealed some symbol or picture of Christmas.

There are doors with teddy bears, doors with presents, and of course the last door or flap reveals a picture of baby Jesus in a manger - Christmas day.

Ashcroft says that since our celebration of the **first** advent, the first arrival of Jesus, is supposed to help us prepare for the **2nd advent**, the second arrival, coming of Jesus, suppose we made up a 2nd advent calendar based on the pictures given us in the book of Revelation.

Instead of the first day's door having a gingerbread boy behind it, the door would have the pale horse of Revelation 6 ridden by death and followed by hell.

The 11th day's door would reveal a trumpet spewing out hail and fire mixed with blood.

The 14th day would show a high mountain melting into the sea from Rev 8.

The 20th day's door would reveal the angel Michael at war with the dragon.

And the last day - the 2nd advent would be the image of Christ from Rev 19 - sitting on a white horse, eyes as flames of fire and out of his mouth would come a sharp sword.

Is Ashcroft just being dramatic?

Well making an advent calendar of such events is a bit dramatic but it does make the point - when Jesus comes again it will be very different than the first time.

Would our lives be lived differently if we truly believed that the baby in the manger is coming again - this time with a sword of justice?

Revelation 19:11-16 "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... His name is the Word of God... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations... 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.

The very idea of Jesus coming to judge all humanity is not our preferred image of Him - especially not at Christmas
Such an idea seems a contradiction.

Isaiah 9:6 wrote, " For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Everyone loves the idea of "peace".

But peace is not just the cessation of hostilities – real peace comes as a result of justice.

There is no peace without justice.

So you see it is precisely because we do believe in the Jesus of the manger, the Jesus of Peace, that we must accept the Jesus of the sword, the Jesus of justice.

I. I want you to think with me first this morning about the necessity of justice.

Jesus came to straighten things out between people and between people and God.

That's what peace and justice are all about - straightening things out - making things right.

Criminals are called "crooks" because they're crooked not straight.

Justice is brought to bear to straighten them out.

Jesus came to make things straight - to make things equitable, fair.

We like justice - We like Robin Hood and Superman.

We like Saddam Hussein being caught and brought to justice.

The current motion picture and television industry plays on our sense of justice - They create stories of such injustice that we sit spell-bound waiting to see how justice finally prevails - how the bad guys finally get theirs.

In fact we have an insatiable sense of justice when it comes to us being treated fairly. We demand justice.

If you think about it for a minute injustice is, in a way, another word for sin.

Sin is also known as iniquity - or in another word "inequity":

Not equal, not right, not just.

Iniquity - inequity - the absence of equity or fairness in our actions or thoughts is sin.

All injustice is sin and all sin is injustice - either an injustice against God or an injustice against another human.

On the other hand holiness is the presence of equity and fairness.

It is doing the equal thing, the just thing, or the fair thing.

Where there is holiness there is the absence of injustice.

Where there is injustice there is the absence of holiness.

Jesus is holy.

In his acting, thinking, and speaking, he always is and does the right, the equitable, the just, and the fair thing.

If holiness is moral perfection - then indifference to sin would itself be moral imperfection - But Jesus is holy - he cannot overlook sin.

All sin, all injustice is a contradiction of who Jesus is and what he created people to be. Injustice is an affront to humanity.

Therefore all sin, all injustice must be dealt with.

One man wrote: The very character of Jesus, makes hell as necessary as heaven." (Pink in Attributes)

For Jesus to remain holy - to remain himself - he must be and do justice - he must put things right - He could not be holy if he was not just.

J.I. Packer said, "The final proof that God is holy is that he committed himself to judging the world - He cannot be indifferent to right and wrong." (Knowing God)

What makes justice necessary?

Holiness demands it.

God's very character demands it.

The way God created us demands it.

A moral universe demands it - we wouldn't and don't want it any other way.

Without justice sooner or later prevailing - life would truly be pointless - it would be impossible.

II. But not only is justice necessary it is certain.

I have probably told you on more than one occasion about the certainty of justice in my boyhood home.

One Sunday morning, my friends and I just couldn't pay attention in church and so we put our heads down behind the chairs in front of us assuming no one could see what we were doing.

Our note passing, whispering, and antics became too much for the pastor who was preaching at the time.

And he called us out by name and invited us to come and sit in the front row.

Now that was embarrassing.

But from the moment I realized it was my name among others he was calling out publicly, my greatest concern was not embarrassment but the absolute certainty of justice.

My father was in that worship service and I had no doubt that when I got home - a measure of justice would set things straight.

On such matters my father was very reliable.

Rev 19 describing Jesus' 2nd advent says of him, "he is faithful and true" - he is perfectly reliable.

God's great concern for his universe and his people is that they be holy, that they be just in all their dealings.

Sin and evil are a sickness, a moral cancer on God's creation that must be stopped.

The Bible says, Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul that sins will die.

A. W. Tozer wrote, "To preserve his creation, God must destroy whatever would destroy it". (K.of H. -113)

Justice will be done.

The Bible speaks of it this way:

Psalm 94:1-3, 6-7 " O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up O judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant? They slay the widow and the alien, they murder the fatherless. They say, 'The Lord does not see; their God pays no heed.'"

And the Bible responds:

"But the Lord will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness."

The Apostle Paul said this way:

Ephesians 5:6 "Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of such things (sin, injustice), God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

The Bible also declares, Hebrews 9:27 "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

Anticipating modern man's response (which has been the response of the unbelieving for hundreds of years) the Apostle Peter wrote, 2 Peter 3, "You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, saying, 'Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning.'"

"But the day of the Lord, the justice of God will come, and the heavens and the earth will be destroyed" and all our injustices will be fully known.

The vast majority even of professing Christians think of God as an indulgent old man who doesn't personally like to sin but leniently overlooks the indiscretions of his children. (Pink p 44)

But that is not the God of the Bible:

For God says, Psalm 5:5 "I hate all workers of iniquity, inequity, injustice.

Remember God's word through Paul in the letter to the Romans 2:5 "Because of their stubborn and unrepentant hearts, they are storing up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath when God reveals his justice.

Justice is certain - Jesus is coming again to put things right.

III. But not only is justice necessary and certain, it is also applied fairly.

Here is the way God describes it:

Romans 2:6 "God will give to each person according to what he has done...For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."

When Jesus comes again he will judge with a perfectly fair justice.
 He will not administer blind justice.
 He knows every intent of the heart and he will set
 everything straight.

Jesus will never condemn the innocent and will never clear the guilty.
 If you stand on your own before those blazing eyes of Jesus at
 the judgment, know that you will be treated fairly, justly.
 And fairly and justly means getting exactly what you
 deserve.

Here is the way God says it:

Heb 10:28-31 "Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died
 without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How
 much more severely do you think a man deserves to be
 punished who has treated as an unholy, unworthy thing the
 death of Jesus? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to
 avenge; I will repay.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands
 of the living God."

The justice meted out when Jesus comes again will be fair.
 And the greatest penalty will fall on those who knew about
 Jesus and his right to rule in their lives - but didn't care.

336 years ago a wise man wrote,

"When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by most
 of mankind, I am of the same mind as he who said, 'The
 greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and goodness to
 an ungrateful world.'"

But think not sinners that it will always be so.

100 years ago, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow quoting from a Puritan
 preacher of 200 years earlier wrote:

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind
 exceedingly small: Though with patience He stands waiting,
 with exactness grinds he all."

Nothing is so sweet as the patience and goodness of God and
 nothing is so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire." (Pink quoting Gurnell
 p86)

God will fairly judge every sin.

And when I think of that, I don't want justice - for justice would mean I'm doomed.

IV. Not only is God's justice necessary and certain and fairly applied but I want you to see who executes that justice.

The Jesus of the manger is also the Jesus of the sword.

In a way the celebration of Christmas does a great disservice to people's idea of Jesus.

Most Americans have sentimentalized the idea of Jesus in a manger.

We have a Jesus who is meek and mild.

He is pictured as someone who wouldn't say "boo" and would avoid all trouble.

In the minds of too many, the baby in a manger grows up to become a placid, pale, gaunt, unaware, above it all, a mystic - a casper-milque-toast." (from Phillips "your god is too small p26ff)

What a lie of Satan.

Jesus is not mild and harmless.

His love does not nullify his justice.

His grace does not mitigate his wrath.

Jesus birth was not to emphasize home, motherhood, warmth and hospitality.

He came to bring peace through justice.

Don't let sentimentality overtake your knowledge of Jesus - He is no baby - He is the judge.

And he will justly administer wrath against all ungodliness, all injustice.

Revelation 19 is a picture of that day when Jesus comes again. When JESUS puts everything right.

- Yes, Justice is necessary - God and all his creation demand it.
- Yes Justice is certain - Jesus is coming again to exercise justice on the earth.
- Yes, Justice will be fair - Whatever a man sows that he will reap.
- And yes, Justice will be executed by Jesus himself - the Jesus of the manger is the Jesus of the sword.

V. But lastly this morning I want you to see the choice God gives us.

Justice will be served in one of two ways - God offers us the choice.

Way # 1 is found in Rev 19:15 speaking of when Jesus comes again: "Out of Jesus mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the peoples. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of almighty God."

By his word he will slay them.

He will crush them.

John further describes that final judgment day by writing: Revelation 20:11ff "And I saw a great white throne. And the books were opened and the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the book. And they were all thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

That's one way justice will be completed.

It will be fair, it will be certain, and it will be final.

But there is another way justice can be completed:

The other way is through what Jesus has already done.

Jesus became a human being (that's why the baby) so that he might set things straight.

He came to satisfy justice - to put things right between people and God.

And what Jesus did was take God's judgment against sin -God's just punishment of sin - on himself.

The penalty of divine justice was poured out on Jesus.

Never was there such a demonstration of God's hatred for sin, as when the wrath of God was let loose on his own son." (Charnock quoted in Pink p44)

All the iniquities, all the inequities - the sins of God's people were laid on Jesus - he was substituted for us - he died in our place.

Justice was served!

The judge became our savior.

And those who trust in him to forgive them on the basis of his death for them will be saved from the wrath to come.

Grace does not eliminate punishment. (Boice Theology 255)

Grace simply means that not everyone will have to experience it.

Either Jesus experienced punishment for you or you will experience it for yourself.

Justice will be served.

It is impossible to shut Jesus out of your life.

All we do now by ignoring or following the Jesus of the manger is determine how you will relate to the Jesus of the sword.

Either you are his child by grace or you are his enemy under sentence of wrath.

Justice will be served.

I urge you today to regard the present patience of the Lord as your opportunity for forgiveness and life.

I beg you to take Jesus seriously.

The coming Judge of all the earth offers himself to you today as Savior.

Prayer

Prayer Hall