

As a child, anytime I whined that something was not fair, my dad would respond, "Fair is you being in hell right now." Theologically true, but harsh. And certainly would be offensive even to many believers.

The judgment of God is one of the most unpopular ideas of Christianity. It is something that people want to abandon and reject. It is seen as old-fashioned and something from antiquity, but now we know better. People will say things like the Old Testament God, as if that God is the one who is wrath. and Jesus is the kind God who does nothing wrong and only leads us in love.

But, what we need to see is the truth about God's judgment. And we need to understand that not only is it good and just, but it is right. Nowhere can we get a better understanding of the judgment of God than at the end of the world. When God's judgment finally starts falling on the entire world. When it comes, it tells us what we need to know about God.

This morning we are going to look at the first six seals. The Lamb will break them and the judgment will come. I will not give you all the answers of what it will look like or when it will happen. But I do want us to see what this passage means for us today and now. And what it reveals to us about the judgment of God and how it is ultimately good.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation 6

I. God is (gracious) even in judgment (v. 1-8).

We expect and want these to be the final judgments.

But they are just the beginning.

And God holds back for much of this.

Even for the seals that are poured out on the world at the end.

God still is gracious.

The world still does not get everything that it deserves.

It is not as bad as it should be.

There is some debate and wonder.

When do these seals take place?

What will they look like?

Even those who believe much of Revelation is in the future think some of these seals are being fulfilled now.

I am not totally sure.

We will talk a little bit about it.

We will probably talk more about it on Wednesday Night.

I think that these are in the future.

But this morning I want us to have a big-picture view.

We will fly over the passage trying to find to main ideas.

I want to be looking at the passage from high above asking what does this mean?

What is it trying to teach us?

How does it point to Jesus?

What does it want us to do?

Because once we understand the larger picture,
then we can wrestle with the smaller questions.

It will help us get a handle on the passage.

Verse 1, **"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!""**

The judgment of God can only come because of Christ.

All of these seals are going to be opened.

And each of these seals are the seals of judgment.

But what we need to see.

What we need to be reminded of is Who opens them?

Who is bringing this justice and judgment upon the world?

Who will unleash the four horses of the apocalypse?

It is the Lamb.

The lamb of God.

The lamb who was slain.

Jesus Christ.

He is the one who does it.

And He, like we talked about last week, is the only one worthy.

The only one who can judge the world is the one who has no sin.
The only one who has never failed.
He is the only one who can judge us all purely and without bias.
He knows what it is to be human.
He knows the struggles and daily temptations that we face.
He faced them Himself, but He conquered.
And so He can open the seals.

We can trust the one who does this.
Because we know He is good.
We know His judgment will not be undeserved or unfair.
It will not be too much.
He will not let the wicked or evil get away with anything.
And whatever He does is right and true.

And He is the lamb who was slain for us.
He died in our place.
The judgment and justice He brings into the world is something that was first brought against His own flesh.
He died and spilled His blood for us.

And so now He brings judgment.
The seals are opened.
One of the living creatures speaks out and says, "come"
Verse 2, **"and I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer."**

This is where we hear of the horsemen of the apocalypse.
A rider comes out and is given authority and power to conquer.

We will talk on Wednesday night more about the identity of these riders and what it means.
We can go over in detail some of the different interpretations.

But I told you at the beginning of the series.
I do not have all the answers of Revelation.
And I think the purpose of this book is not to tell us all things about the future so we can have it all figured out.
But it is meant to give us hope.
It is meant to be obeyed.
And it is meant to point us to Christ.

So, I want us to look the primary idea these seals are trying to get across.
I do think that this first horse is actually Jesus.
Because this horse does not seem particularly judgmental or punishing.
There is not necessarily anything negative here.

The only possible negative is the reference to conquering, but war comes from the second seal.
Others try to say this is the antichrist imitating Christ on the white horse at the end of Revelation.
And this is the antichrist and Satan conquering the world.
It could be that, but I am not sure.

It seems more natural to read this as Christ and the gospel.
Which this was what everyone thought this horseman represented until at least the 11th century.
But it seems to me that this is the gospel going forth throughout the entire world.
Because so far in the book conquering has always referred to believers and the church.
The voice that calls forth for this seal has a voice of thunder, which always accompanies Christ or God.
The white horse is the same horse Christ will ride in Revelation 19.
It just seems the most natural to be the gospel.

And it fits contextually.
Because before all of the judgments come, there is the offer of grace.

God's judgment is always mixed with mercy.
And it is always preceded by an opportunity to repent.
It is another chance to turn from sin and turn towards God and the gospel.
And the kingdom of God conquering.
So this conquering is not saying the whole world becomes Christian.
But that everyone has a chance to respond to the gospel.
And many do.
But here is how the gospel is judgment.
Those who hear the gospel.
Who hear the truth of Christ.
Who hear the story of Christ's life and death and resurrection.
Those who hear all of the offerings of grace and the warning of judgment.
When they hear it and ignore it, it will lead to greater judgment.
There is nothing worse for your soul than rejecting the gospel.
And it will be worse.
And there is a worse judgment for those who have an opportunity to respond to grace and do not.
Just like the towns who rejected Christ's disciples face a harsher judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah.
Because they heard the gospel proclaimed and ignored it.

So before any of these judgments come, the world gets another chance.
One last time to respond to the gospel before the punishment is handed out.

It is grace that the gospel is offered one last time.

Verse 3, **"When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, 'Come!' 4 and out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword."**

We need to see the mercy here.

God's judgment in this moment is not harsh.

He simply removes His blessing.

There is only peace in the world because God allows it.

Because Christ blesses and bestows His peace upon us.
Yet, He takes His peace back and withholds it.
He removes His blessing.
And when the peace of Christ leaves, the world descends into chaos.
This is what happens when we reject Christ.
He will eventually reject us and we have to face the consequences.

There is still mercy here.
God does not come yet and bring war and devastation.
He does not force people to turn against one another and fight.
He just removes His grace.

Throughout history people have complained why God allows evil.
Why do bad things happen to good people?
Those are worthy questions to ask.
But one of the things we forget and do not recognize, is that God prevents far more from happening than we realize.
Even now in our world, God holds back evil.
But one day He will stop.
He will listen to the world that wants nothing to do with Him.
He will remove His hand of blessing.
He will remove His peace.
And He will let us have the peace of the world.

The Roman Empire was famous for their peace.
They called it the Pax Romana, the Roman peace.
It was the peace and security that came from their empire.
They claimed to bring true and lasting peace.
This is God saying, okay you can have your peace.
He removes his peace and lets them have the world's peace.
One day this is what God will do.
All the people who claim the world would be better if religion went away and Christians stopped their hatefulness will have their way.
God will stop bringing peace into the world.

And He will let humanity do it themselves.

Sometimes the worst thing is being given exactly what you asked for.

Verse 5, **"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. ⁶ 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!""**

The horseman brings famine.

It makes food so scarce that what remains is ridiculously expensive.

This discussion about wheat and barley is how expensive things are.

For most of my life I have listened to people complain about how expensive things are.

What we complain about just changes.

Recently it has been eggs.

They have been bad up to 10 dollars a dozen.

Let me put this verse in our context.

How would you feel if eggs were \$100 for a dozen?

Because here, a quart is a whole day's wage.

A quart is about a day's worth of food.

And the three quarts of barley are enough food for a family.

And prices are 6 or 8 times more expensive than normal.

Take your monthly grocery bill and multiply it by 8.

And it is pointing out that food is rare.

It is not just uncomfortable, but now it is leading to starvation and death.

People will not have enough food to eat.

And what we see, is that even here something is held back.

Not everything will be touched and destroyed.

But here we see God is still limiting the judgment.

He does allow famine to come.

But he does not allow it to be total or complete.

He sets the limit on inflation.

There is even a specific price mentioned here.

Because God will not let it get one bit worse than He wills.

Even though it is punishment, there remains mercy.

It does mention not harming the oil and wine.

Some see this as the rich being unaffected and only the poor will suffer.

That could be it.

But I think it is more likely this is pointing out God's grace even in famine.

He is limiting the spread of the famine.

And even here, His judgment holds back.

Verse 7, **"When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"⁸ 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 fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth."**

The fourth horseman and judgment is death and the grave.

Things and judgment continue to get worse.

They are given the authority to kill 1/4 of the earth.

It will kill with war, famine, violence, disease, and wild animals.

Death itself will come from everywhere.

It will be devastating.

Imagine what would happen if 1/4 of the earth suddenly and quickly died.

But we again see mercy.

Yet death and Hades are coming as a judgment

But it is only coming on a fourth of the earth.

Their authority is limited.

And it is given to them by God.

He is still the one in control.

He is still the one who allows or does not allow punishment.

He does not give everyone over.

He does not give up all of His authority.

When do these things take place?
What exactly will happen when they come?
We do not seem to know or to see what it will look like.

I believe that these will come in the future.
I do not think they have been released yet.
Some interpret these to mean when Christ rose they were let loose on the earth.
Which is why there is so much war, famine, and suffering.
But there has been this suffering before Christ came.
I don't think any of it is new yet.
I think the horror is still yet to come.
And I do not think we are meant to understand it yet.
We do not need to know the wars and famines.
We just need to know that they are coming.

These things are released onto the earth.
We need to see what they are only not here now because Christ holds them back.
They have been sealed.
The judgment will come, but it is not God's hand.

And in many ways, these horsemen are the result of our sin.
It is what sin leads to.
It is what the world has chosen and asked for.
It wants nothing to do with God.
It wants to be left alone.
And so God turns authority over to mankind and death comes.

We have spent a lot of time here.
But I hope that you see even here with the horsemen,
God is still gracious and merciful.
Even in judgment.

II. We should (long) for God's judgment (v. 9-11).

It is good when we long for God's judgment.

We see God being gracious even in judgment and we want more.

We long for Him to stop and punish the wicked, to overthrow the oppressor, to dethrone the tyrants, and to give evil people what they deserve.

There is a righteous longing for judgment.

There is a righteous longing for God to come into the world and make things right.

This righteous longing is what we should have.

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."**

Here we see and hear the voices of the martyrs.

Those who took up their crosses to follow Jesus and then died for Him.

We hear the voices of Stephen, John the Baptist, Polycarp, and Jim Elliot.

They cry out.

Verse 10, **"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?"**

They want God to finish His work.

To bring justice and judgment.

To stop holding back and make all things right.

Now there is a difference here.

There is a way to wrongly long for the judgment and vengeance of God.

And there is a right way to long for the judgment and vengeance of God.

One is simply longing for punishment for the wicked.

It is a wrong desire to see people you dislike have to suffer.

It is like the longing of Jonah who only wanted Assyria to die.

It is what my children feel when they come to tell me how their brother sins and I need to be sure to punish him.

And the laughter they feel when the other one is sent to timeout.

We also see it when I laugh and rejoice when I hear someone who I don't like has just had their house burn down.

That would not be a righteous desire for God's vengeance.

And then there is a righteous longing.

It is a desire not for the wicked to be punished and to suffer, but for justice to reign.

It is the desire for Christ to make things right.

And this is a good desire.

We are right to long for Christ to fix the world.

To see the world rid of evil and sin.

The reason that we do not pursue vengeance in the world.

Is because we trust that on the Day of the Lord true vengeance will come.

We trust and desire that God will do what must be done.

And this desire is a good one.

This is what we long for.

And we see the holy ones long for it.

The martyrs and those who have died for the faith.

Who went to their death willingly want God to make it right.

Verse 11, **"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."**

But look at how God responds.

He tells them no.

He will bring the day of judgment.

The final judgment and vengeance will come, but not yet.

But God does not just shove them off and say no.
Because even in the final days.
Even here in Revelation at the end of the world,
God's judgment comes slowly and not all at once.

The martyrs are given a white robe.
They receive part of their reward for their faithfulness.
They have conquered and kept the faith.
And they are given new clothes of purity.

But God tells them to rest awhile longer.
To wait and trust that the day is coming, but not yet.

Something must happen before the day can come.
There are still more waiting to be martyred.
There are more believers who must yet die for their faith.
More followers of Christ who must yet suffer.
And more disciples who will conquer.

Part of this sounds negative, because more must die.
But it is still yet grace.
That God will allow more to join the blessed company of martyrs.
Those who will still be killed for their faith.

What we need to do is join in the voices of the martyrs.
We are rightly inspired by their faith and long to be like them.
We should be like them in their desire to see this day come.
We can long and pray "come Lord Jesus."

But we should be sure that when we long we do so rightly.
We long for it to come in a desire to please God.
To see His justice come.

We must understand that it is not coming right away.
It will not come as quickly as we want it to come.
But it will come.
Soon and very soon.

We must resist the desire now to punish and seek revenge on our own.
We must resist the desire to see the wicked suffer here and now.
We must resist the desire to inflict cruelty on our enemies.
Instead, we trust and long for God alone to bring justice.
We do not trust the vengeance of God to human agents.

III. God's final judgment is more (terrible) than we could possibly imagine (v. 12-17).

This is the final reason God's judgment here and now is gracious.
This is why God does not rush.
This is why God seems so slow to return.
This is why God does not answer the prayer of the martyrs right away.
And it because when that day comes.
The time that it appears.
The day that justice and judgment is unveiled.
That day is far worse than anything we can imagine.
And it begins to come when the 6th seal is opened.

Verse 12, **"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,"**

Earthquakes typically begin at times of great judgment.
And everything that happens now.
At the moment of judgment is apocalyptic and hard to imagine.
I don't blame anyone for not wanting to take these words literally.
I understand why many just want to interpret Revelation as only spiritual and symbolic instead of also revealing the literal future.
Because what is described here is awful and terrifying.

The Sun disappeared and becomes black.
I don't think it is just an eclipse.
The sun is almost covering itself in sackcloth and ashes.
It is like the sun is mourning because of God's judgment.

The moon will be full and turn blood.
As the Nile River turned blood in God's judgment, so will the very cosmos.
I understand why some may want to see these as only describing a little eclipse, it seems to be far worse than that.

Verse 13, **"and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale."**

The stars will not begin to fall.
They will not only fall away and disappear.
It is not like they die and become black holes disappearing from our sight.
The image is that they fall from the skies to the earth.

Just like a tree shakes off the leaves or the fruit drops when a wind storm comes.

The storm of God's judgment will blow.
And the stars themselves will shake like leaves.

Verse 14, **"The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place."**

The blue sky will vanish away.
Like a scroll being rolled up.
Or a book being closed.
The clouds will just fade away.

And every mountain and island up and moves.
We are told to have faith that moves mountains.
But our God moves them all.

Now what will all of this look like?

How will it feel?

What will happen in the cosmos?

Well, it will be so terrible it will shake everyone on the earth.

Verse 15, **"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,"**

It causes everyone to run and flee.

Picture the disaster movie.

Where the tidal wave is coming into the city.

Or the earthquake is shaking the world.

The monster is stomping towards the people knocking down mountains.

And everyone just runs and stampedes away.

They all run for safety.

From the highest and the richest to the lowest, they flee.

Because the richest and most powerful cannot find safety.

They flee.

Verse 16, **"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 is it not just that they run into caves and rocks.

They actually are begging for death.

They would rather die than have to face the wrath of God.

They see God is on the throne.

They understand that Jesus is the victorious lamb.

They know that this is just and righteous.

And they just want to die.

Verse 17, **"for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"**

When this day comes, God brings payback and justice.

There is no escape for the wicked.

The reason we can wait for this day, is because it will be horrifying and terrifying.

No one will be able to complain or say someone got off easy.

God's judgment will fall, and everyone will kneel.

Who can stand?

Who is allowed to be there?

Who can endure without begging for death?

Only those who have already knelt.

Only the ones who have fallen in worship to the lamb will be able to stand boldly before the throne of God.

Because the good news of the gospel is that Christ already took the wrath of God.

Christ endured not the anger of God or His rage.

But Christ took the judgment and punishment that all of us should have faced for our sins on His own body.

He has already paid the price for us.

And the question we have is whether or not we accept the gift of Christ.

Whether we will accept that Christ has died for us,

Or whether or not we want to try and do it ourselves.

Because every human being will face the wrath of God.

And we can either have done it in Christ, in union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Or we will have to do it on that final day and face it alone.

The gift of Christ is that He already faced judgment.

And we can find salvation instead if we will cry out to Him now.

God is (gracious) even in judgment (v. 1-8). We should (long) for God's judgment (v. 9-11). God's final judgment is more (terrible) than we could possibly imagine (v. 12-17).

The creatures say come.

Come now to Jesus and find escape from that day, before it is too late.