

The Wrath of the Lamb

Revelation 6:9-17

Introduction 1) It is one of the most ironic and unexpected phrases in all of the Bible. It sounds contradictory, paradoxical, incredible: “the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16). A lamb, by its very nature is gentle, meek, passive. Few animals are less threatening than this one. And yet there it is in Holy Scripture for us to consider and contemplate: “the wrath of the Lamb.”

2) In chapter 5 we were introduced to this Lamb, a Lamb that was slain but now standing (5:6). There we also discover that this Lamb is also a Lion, “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah” (5:5; cf. Genesis 49:9-10). So this Lamb is Lion-like and this Lion is Lamb-like. But, in judgment, He pours out His wrath and fury on a sinful and rebellious humanity that has defiantly rejected His offers of forgiveness, grace and salvation.

3) Liberal and modernist theologians have been quick to extol and embrace the portrait of the meek and lowly Jesus, the gentle and compassionate man from Galilee. Now to be sure, He is all of these things: meek and humble, gentle and compassionate. However, this portrait is only a partial picture of the Savior revealed in the Bible. Scripture also reveals a Jesus who twice cleanses the temple (Matt. 21:12-17; John 2:13-22), who angrily condemns the hypocrisy of the scribes

and Pharisees (Matt. 23:13-36) calling them “serpents” and “a brood of vipers,” and who says more about the eternal fire and judgment of *Gehenna* (Hell) than anyone else in the Bible.

A balanced view of the Savior portrayed in the Bible must hold in balance His love and His holiness, His compassion and His justice, His grace and His righteousness, His mercy and His wrath.

In Revelation, the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of God is a reoccurring theme (11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, puts it all in perspective, “If men and women will not yield to the love of God, and be changed by the grace of God, then there is no way for them to escape the wrath of God.” (Wiersbe, 67). As those days approach, and then ultimately and climatically arrive, how should God’s children prepare to respond?

I. Those who are faithful to Jesus can anticipate they will suffer 6:9

- The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12, “all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” We see this truth lived out especially in those who are martyred for the Lamb, the Lord Jesus.

Knowing we could find ourselves in this chosen company, what is the posture, the mindset, we must adopt?

1) Be faithful to the Word of God

The 4 horsemen of the apocalypse have come forth leaving destruction, devastation and death in their path (6:1-8). John now sees the Lord Jesus open the 5th seal. He sees “under the altar the people slaughtered (cf. 5:6, 9) because of God’s Word and the testimony they had.” He sees martyred saints for the Savior. Why were they slain? Slaughtered? Because they remained true to the Word of God. They did not compromise the truth of God’s word even though it cost them their lives. They are “under the altar.” Whether this is the altar of burnt offering (Ex. 29:12; Lev. 4:7; 17:11) or the altar of incense is not important. Mounce notes, “The theme of sacrifice would suggest the former, but the prayers that rise (v. 10) seem to indicate the latter. There is no reason why in John’s vision the two should not blend together as one” (Mounce, 146). Faithfulness to God’s word may involve sacrifice, but such sacrifice is a sweet aroma to the nostrils of our God.

2) Be faithful in the witness you bear

- Their testimony, their witness, was also the cause of their martyrdom. They maintained their witness to Jesus regardless of the consequences. Ladd points out, “One of the repeated emphases of the entire New Testament is that it is the very nature of the church to be a martyr people. When Jesus taught that a man to be

his disciple must deny himself and take up his cross (Matt. 10:38; 16:24), he was not speaking of self-denial or the bearing of heavy burdens; he was speaking of willingness to suffer martyrdom. The cross is nothing else than an instrument of death. Every disciple of Jesus is in essence a martyr; and John has in view all believers who have so suffered.” (104).

- On December 8, 2014, the *Christian Post* carried the story:

**Vicar of Baghdad: Four Iraqi Christian Kids
Beheaded After Refusing to Convert to Islam,
Telling ISIS Militants ‘No, We Love Jesus’**

“Four Iraqi Christian children, who were all beheaded by the Islamic State, refused to betray Jesus and graciously died in his name when the ISIS militants gave them one last chance to say the Islamic words of conversion, the Rev. Canon Andrew White revealed in a recent interview... White recounted the recent incident when ISIS militants beheaded four kids, all of who were under the age of 15, when the kids refused to say that they would follow the Prophet Muhammad and told

the ISIS fighters that they will always “love” and “follow” Jesus.

“ISIS turned up and they said to the children, ‘you say the words that you will follow Muhammad.’ The Children, all under 15, four of them, they said, ‘no, we love Yasua [Jesus]. We have always loved Yasua. We have always followed Yasua. Yasua has always been with us.’” White said. “[The Militants] said, ‘say the words!’ [The Children] said, ‘no, we can’t do that.’ They chopped all their heads off.”

Martyrs for Jesus appears repeatedly in Revelation (7:9ff; 13:15; 18:24; 20:4). They are an ever occurring presence in the church’s history. Faithful to the Word and in their witness, many seal their witness to Jesus by their blood.

II. We should trust our sovereign God to do right according to His time

6:10-11

- Pastor Adrian Rogers used to say, “God is never early and He is never late. He is always right on time.” We know this is true. However, there are times when we struggle to believe it. This is especially the

case when injustice and suffering is involved. When those occasions arise, and they will, what should we do?

1) Pour out your heart in prayer 6:10

- They martyrs of verse 9 now “cry out with a loud voice, a *phonē megalē*. Their cry, “Lord (*despotes*, a term used for the master of slaves; emphasizes absolute authority and power and used only here in Revelation), the One who is holy and true (cf. 3:7), how long until you judge and avenge our blood from those who live on the earth” (3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8)?
- This is the only prayer of supplication in the Apocalypse. It is short and simple. It begins with a reverential address that leads to a plea for justice (Mounce, 284-85). The pattern of the imprecatory Psalms is evident (Ps. 6:3; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13). This has caused some to question the appropriateness of this prayer when you consider the words of Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:34) and Stephen at his stoning (Acts 7:60). Thomas Glasson is straightforward in his assessment, “It should be frankly recognized that this is not a Christian prayer (Mounce, 147). To this charge two things can be said:

1) Divine retribution and vindication is a prominent OT theme

(Deut. 32:35; Ps. 64:7-9; 79:10; 94:1-2, 23; Mal. 4:1-2).

2) Divine retribution and vindication is an important NT theme

(Luke 21:22; Rom. 1:18; 12:19-20; Heb. 10:30).

The Prayers of these martyrs is heartfelt, sincere, and biblically grounded. They do not cry out for personal revenge or vengeance, but for divine justice. Further, they trust all of this into the hands of our sovereign Master and Lord. “This is how I feel! I will leave the rest up to you my God.”

2) Rest in the providence of His plan 6:11

God’s care for these martyred saints is made clear in verse 11. “A white robe was given to each of them. “The white robe symbolizes blessedness, dignity, honor, purity, victory; and most of all the imputed righteousness of Christ. They are then “told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed...who were going to be killed just as they had been.” More “fellow slaves” of Christ and “brothers” of Christ are yet to shed their blood for Jesus. Until then, rest, be patient, trust in the Lord of all the earth who will do right (Gen. 18:25). Osborne is helpful here, “the emphasis is on divine sovereignty. God knows each one who is to be martyred, and will

vindicate them all at the proper time, which will be soon” (Osborne, 289). God’s delay does not mean He does not know. It does not mean He does not care. He knows and He cares. So rest. Justice has been determined and justice will be done. “Those who have died for the faith (and those who will yet die), have not suffered in vain. They are secure because they have the robe of Christ’s righteousness” (Goldsworthy, *The Lamb and the Lion*, 51). Yes, we have His righteousness and we can trust in His judgment.

III. When the Lamb comes again the signs will be clear for all to see

6:12-14

- In verse 11 the martyrs for Jesus are told to wait, “to rest a little while longer.” They are not told to wait forever. The great day of the wrath of the Lamb is coming. Indeed it is coming much sooner than many expect. Far too many will not be ready.

1) Judgment is initiated by Christ 6:12

“Then I saw Him open the sixth seal.” John sees Jesus break this seal just like He had broken seals one thru five. All that has happened and is about to happen is under His sovereign control and direction. This is “a divine doing.” He has “the whole world in His

hands.” What follows leaves no one in doubt.

2) Judgment is cosmic in scope 6:12-14

The Lamb opens the sixth seal and cosmic upheaval is the result.

The Bible repeatedly promises such happenings when our Lord draws history to a close (Isa. 13:9-10; Joel 2:10-11; 2:28-32; 3:14-16; Matt. 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-37; Luke 21:25-28). Some very fine Bible scholars view these judgments as only symbolic, perhaps signifying political and social upheaval. I believe, however, it is better to understand these end time events as genuine descriptions, in apocalyptic terms, of God’s direct intervention in eschatological judgment. The imminent end of history has come.

“A violent (*ESV*, “great”) earthquake occurs.” Earthquakes often accompany a divine visitation in Scripture” (Ex. 19:18; Isa. 2:19; Hag. 2:6; Matt. 24:7; 27:51). Zechariah 14:4 tells us when Messiah comes again, “On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, forming a huge valley, so that half the mountain will move to the north and half to the south.” Cosmic upheaval also impairs the light of the sun so that it is darkened like a dark cloth made from goat’s hair and worn in times of mourning.

The moon likewise is affected and appears like the deep, red color of blood. Some speculate that worldwide earthquakes will produce catastrophic volcanic activity spewing ash and smoke throughout the atmosphere, and that this causes the darkening of the sun and the reddening of the moon. Whatever the cause, all of this is a sign of God visiting His world in judgment. But, there is more.

“The stars of heaven fall.” The word for star simply refers to any celestial body, large or small, having the appearance of a star. A meteor or asteroid shower is possibly in view and they “fall to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind.” John then writes in verse 14, “the sky separated like a scroll being called up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place.” Precisely what this describes we can only guess. What we do know as there is a total cosmic meltdown. The Day of the Lord has arrived in its climatic and eschatological reality. The Wrath of the Lamb is here! On that day no one will be in doubt as to what is happening and who is bringing all of this about.

IV. The nature of God’s judgment is comprehensive 6:15

In Acts 10:34 Peter says, “God doesn’t show favoritism.” James 2:1-9 is even more direct. “If you show favoritism, you commit sin and are

convicted by the law as transgressors” (v. 9). Just as God’s salvation shows no favoritism among the nations, neither will His judgment.

1) One’s position in life will not matter

When the Day of Judgment arrives, no one will be excluded or excused. Those who normally get special treatment will get none.

“Kings of the earth, the nobles, the military commanders, the rich, the powerful,” they will not escape the wrath of the Lamb. Their sense of status and privilege will vanish in an instant when they stand before the Lamb (v. 17). Untouchable in this life, they are totally vulnerable to the One whose piercing gaze is like a fiery flame” (1:14; 2:18; 19:12). On that day, all earthly status and privilege will count for nothing.

2) One’s social status in life will not matter

“Every slave and free person” will have to do business with the Lamb on that great day. No one gets a pass. All must and will give an account. Divine judgment is the great equalizer. The free person will be held accountable by God. The slave will be held accountable by God. From the Roman emperor to the lowest slave, all social distinctions evaporate before the judgment bar of God. Fee notes, “Following these various forms of “the mighty,” John finally includes

everyone else, both slave and free; and with this he has simply included all of the known human race that made up the Roman Empire” (101). The nature of God’s judgment is comprehensive. We all must give an account.

V. The horror of God’s wrath is even greater than death 6:15-17

You would think that all of this would drive people to God in brokenness, confession and repentance. However, that tragically is not what happens. Here, as well as in 9:20-21 and 16:11, there is no repentance or sorrow over sin. Faced with the awesomeness of God’s wrath, people “plead for a violent death (cf. Isa. 2:10, 19-21; Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:20)” [Duvall, 109]. Death is more desired, foolishly I might add, than a relationship with the Lamb who was slain on their behalf.

1) No one can hide from divine judgment 6:15-16

Like their primordial parents Adam and Eve, human persons became fearful and irrational fugitives. They “hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.” They even talk to the mountains and rocks asking them to be their executioners: “Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb.” This is utterly amazing. “The sacrificial Lamb has now become their Judge.... They hide from his face, whereas believers are comforted by the promise that one day they will see

God's face (22:4)" [Duvall, 109]. However, no one can hide from the omnipresent and omniscient God. No one can escape, as we see repeatedly in Revelation, the fiery gaze of the Lamb (1:14; 2:18: 19:12). Hide from Him who sees all things? Sin truly makes us stupid. It turns us into fools.

2) No one can stand before divine judgment 6:17

The time of Jacob's trouble is here (Jer. 30:7). Daniel's 70th week is upon us (Dan. 9:24-27). The Great Tribulation is come (7:14). The Day of the Lord has arrived. The great day of the wrath of the Lamb visits planet Earth.

Only one question remains: "Who can stand? The answer: No one! No one can stand! Rather than turn to Christ in faith they hide in fear. And did you notice verse 16? **They know who has come and what has come!**

Knowing it is the Lord and His judgment, they run rather than repent. They flee rather than turn to Christ in faith. The great and awesome Day of the Lord is here. The end has finally arrived. What will men do? What can they do? No one can stand before divine judgment. No one. Oh, but wait until we get to 7:9-10!

Keener is right: "The impact on the reader is...complete: There is no security, no firm ground to stand on, nothing in the universe to depend on except God himself. The rest of creation will collapse" (NIVAC, 225).

Conclusion

There is coming a great day for every one of us when we will come face-to-face with the Lamb. We will either stand with Him in His salvation or stand before Him at His judgment. We will either rejoice in His glorious grace or be terrified before His righteous wrath. Grace or wrath? Forgiveness or condemnation? Where will you stand? Take your stand for the Lamb, King Jesus, now. There is coming a day when it will be too late.