

In case you were not aware Christmas is coming and we look forward to celebrating the baby who was born and laid in a manger – ah coochy coo! That is all very nice and harmless and won't upset anyone.

We might even see beyond that to the purpose for Jesus coming into the world, coming as our rescuer, dying on a cross to take the punishment we deserve because we have opposed God and his will for us. That's still nice even if we mistakenly feel we don't need a rescuer.

However, when we read a passage like this from Rev 19 and hear the Bible speaking of Jesus coming as judge well that is not acceptable to many people.

I was at a conference recently where judgement came up and one clergyman simply said "I can't accept a God of wrath".

I realise that to speak of judgement and God's wrath is not nice. It's not comfortable and for some it doesn't equate with our idea of lovely Jesus meek and mild.

I was driving along the M4 on Tuesday evening having watched a magnificent victory for the boys in red over the mighty Marlow when suddenly I lost some power and the car slowed from the very fast 60mph down to about 40 and a warning light came on.

What a pain to have that warning light on. Well it was and it wasn't. Because I had experienced this situation before I knew what action to take and the warning light was a help in encouraging me to take the right action so that I got the car home.

In one sense the message of God's wrath and of the judgement that will happen at the end of time when Jesus returns as King is a bit of a warning light to us to help us look at our lives and make sure that we are ready for his return so that we do, as it were, finally get home to heaven.

The return of Jesus as Judge does remain a warning sign to all who have not yet submitted their lives to Jesus as King.

Because the language John used to describe events which are beyond human understanding is very graphic and pictorial it might help us this morning to think of what is being said here in a way a bit like a play.

You go to see a play and you watch the cast perform, the people who have small parts, the chorus or whatever and of course the main characters. Then the play comes to an end the curtain falls and the rises again. The chorus come on stage, then those with small parts and finally the main character comes out to take their final bow.

The passage here begins "then I saw heaven opened" the curtain of heaven has lifted and what does John see? "there before me was a white horse". A white horse was the symbol of victory and on the horse was a rider who is Jesus. John sees the main character of the Bible narrative there on this

horse. The armies of heaven, that is the angelic hosts, which we might see as the chorus, come out later, as we see in v14, because the whole focus is on the main character. The reason for coming out however is not to take a bow but to bring judgement and execute the wrath of God upon those who have opposed God and his will.

1. His judgement will be just v11-12a

The clear statement here is that “with justice he judges”.

The judgement of Jesus will be just and fair because of who he is. Here he is described as faithful and true. He is true and he is consistent and his judgement will reflect his character. Friends when Jesus comes to judge the world he will not act unjustly. There will be no accusation that this is unfair or unjust. His judgement will be perfectly just. Nor should we fear that he will make any mistakes. V2 “his eyes are like blazing fire”. That means he is able to see everything. We live in an age where it is not always easy for the forces of law and order to know who is their enemy. The terrorist may well be hidden from their gaze. Just this week in the press was a report of how bomb-makers in Yemen are seeking to develop ever harder-to-detect devices to smuggle on board planes bound for Western countries. We can't see the enemy. However with God it is not so. As we are reminded in Psalm 44:20-21 “If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart?”

God knows each one of us and he knows where our heart is and so when it comes to judgement he knows those who belong to him and are safe and those who oppose him and who will come under his wrath.

So many times people have come to me with questions about God's judgement and often what the question boils down to is will God be just? It is as if somehow we believe we are more just or more loving than God.

Friends God's knowledge is much greater than ours, his justice greater than ours and his love for people greater than ours so we need have no fear that judgement will be anything other than just. However the very fact that Jesus will return as the final word of judgement should be a warning light to us to take a good look at the way we are living our lives.

2. His judgement will be right v12b&16

I wonder what your world view is?

I was reading in the press this week of the extension of some of the prison camps in North Korea and that possibly up to 200,000 people are being kept in such camps. Then I saw something of the horrors of what is going on in Central African Republic as the Seleka gunmen run riot through the country. Indeed I got an email on Friday saying one of the Bible Translation team in the capital Bagui

had been shot and killed. So many areas of conflict so many bad things happening in the world. What is your world view are we in the words of Private Frazer from Dad's Army "all doomed"? What is your world view?

The world view of the Bible, which is at the heart of this passage here, is that God is in control. Yes there are forces of evil which reject God's will and purposes and bring chaos and suffering to our world but one day they will be brought under the rule of Christ and judgement will be worked out and it will be right because Jesus alone is fit to Judge. Here in v12 it says "on his head are many crowns, that is he is sovereign he is King and that is drawn out again at the end of the passage where his name is King of Kings. He is the universal sovereign ruler over all the nations who will one day be subject to him as King.

This letter was originally sent to Christians in Rome who were struggling under Roman persecution. As they read these words it might not have made their situation any easier but it was a vital reminder that it is God not the Roman Emperor who reigns and that ultimately his reign will be perfect and complete. The whole of creation will come under the reign of God. The message from this passage and elsewhere in the Bible that Jesus will come as judge over the whole world is a message of comfort to those who are prepared for his coming.

But of course Jesus has not returned yet. The play still continues and the final curtain has not yet come down and the rider has not yet come out on the white horse so

3. Preparing for judgement

As John penned these words he was sure what he wanted for his readers and that was to be reassured that their struggles were worth it and one day their oppressors would face the wrath of God while they themselves would know God's pleasure. But what does it say to you and I today? It has been a terrible week of weather and especially down the east coast.

It seems a warning was sent out to people early in the morning but giving them less than a day to take action. Many people were evacuated. As it happened nothing could be done to save some homes and in Hemsby, a village in Norfolk, seven families lost their homes to the sea. However, others heeded the warning acted and their homes were saved from the onrushing tide. Listening on the radio I heard of others whose houses were secure and therefore the warning message only reassured them in that security but I did hear of some going out to help others protect and save their homes.

Now I say this to help us understand about preparing for the coming of Jesus as judge.

We recognise that Jesus will return and while 2000 years have gone since his first coming his return is certain and the reason for delay is so that we have time to prepare, "The Lord is not slow in

keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

The warning has gone out to encourage us to get our house in order to recognise Jesus as Lord and to come in repentance for our sin and accept his love.

The illustration of the problems round our coast helps here. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matt 7:24-27)

Jesus knew, and we must recognise, that with some people no matter how many warnings are sent they will not hear. I hope that none of us here this morning or listening on download are in that category. God is a great God of love and he has shown us that by sending his Son Jesus to die on a cross so that by faith in him we might know God's love be forgiven our sin, restored as God's children. However he is also a just God and if we will not come back to him and accept his love then one day we will have to face the wrath of God. It is a warning and in sadness I recognise that for some the house of their lives cannot be saved because they will not heed that warning.

However I hope that some of us here or listening on download will take seriously this warning of God's wrath because as God makes clear "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek 33:11). The warning light in my car and the warning sent out by the Environment Agency were there to cause us to act. This warning needs to be seen alongside the love of God as an encouragement to us to respond to that love while we have time. God wants none of us to perish.

For many of us here this morning as we hear these words of warning, while they may make us uncomfortable because we are much happier speaking of God's love than his wrath, they do bring us a similar reassurance as to that intended for the original readers. They remind us that, as followers of Jesus and those who take his word seriously, we are, as it were, building the house of our lives on rock and so yes the storms may come and life may be tough but ultimately we are secure in him and one day we will be with him in heaven and there will be no more pain and suffering. So as we hear the warning we know we are secure and safe. However that should not lead us to complacency for others we know, those contact people we spoke about earlier in the year in relation to DISCOVER may well still be in the same situation and need help and need to be rescued. So we continue to

pray that God will turn their lives around and we continue to act to help them perhaps, as I was saying last week, by inviting them to our Christmas services.

The warning in my car, the warnings sent out by the Environment agency were not comfortable to see or hear. I didn't look at the light in my car and say "Oh how nice, how pretty that is". This warning that comes through the passage of the return of the one whose name is the word of God and King of Kings to bring about the final judgement on the evil of this world is not comfortable in many ways. However it does reassure those who are following Christ that the pains and injustices of this life will not be forever and then it encourages us to help those at risk to find in Jesus that same assurance and safety.