

The Judge Who Is Faithful & True

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*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 wages war.*

REVELATION 19:11

The grad student dialoguing with me was heavy with questions posed by her agnostic friends about hell and God's judgment. She found it hard to reconcile the God of love and the message of forgiveness with visions of fiery torment. As we talked, I explained that there are many orthodox Christian views of what the final judgment will be like, but the *main* thing Christians are asked to do is to trust Jesus as the Judge. She was visibly relieved.

For whatever reason—we might blame Dante or folk religion or medieval superstition—we often imagine God's judgment to be impersonal and cold, like a mass execution or a bomb detonated from a distance. But Revelation deliberately shows us *Jesus* involved in the judgment of the nations. I think there are two reasons for this.

First, justice and judgment are two sides of the same coin. To enact justice, one must execute judgment. If we want Jesus the Mighty God to set the world right, he must deal with injustice and evil together. Here the justice and judgment of Jesus are depicted in a vivid way that would have held sway in first-century minds: a warrior on a horse with a sword. But we must be careful with our assumptions here.

Which leads us to the second reason why Jesus is shown as the one who carries out justice and judgment: The Jesus who is returning is the same Jesus who came. *There is no change of identity between advents.* “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8); this conviction helps us consider *how* Jesus enacts justice and executes judgment. On the cross, Jesus died in solidarity with the sinner and the sufferer. He bore the weight of God’s judgment on evil.

If we were to ask how Jesus responds to injustice and evil, the answer is *he bleeds*. Judgment fell on him so that justice—wrongs being set right—could come to all. When we see Jesus coming like a warrior whose robe is dipped in blood, the blood could well be his own. After all, this is a king like none other. Jesus embodies might and power in a way we’ve never known before.

Yet this passage doesn’t leave us without a warning. There are those who resist this king, who insist on their own way, their own rule, their own empire. For them, life will meet its end. The gruesome images of being devoured depict the erosion of life.

The King of Kings brings life by his death. But if you resist his life and insist on protecting your own, instead of life you will get death.

Judgment and justice belong together. And the one who will carry out both is Faithful and True. Will we trust him with enacting justice and executing judgment?

Consider Revelation 19:4–21.

How can your knowledge of Jesus and his first advent speak into your understanding of the Second Advent? Of the justice and judgment of the King of Kings?