

Faithful and True

Jonathan K. Dodson | Revelation 19:11-16 | December 20, 2020

We've been tracing the Hebrew word for hope *zera* through the Bible this Advent. Beginning with Genesis we saw the promise that the *seed* of the woman (Eve) would one day crush the head of the serpent (Satan) undoing the mess Adam and Eve made. This promise resurfaces in 2 Samuel where God makes a pledge to David that his *seed* will establish a kingdom where God will dwell with man forever. It is partially fulfilled in Gospel of Luke, where a child is born in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord! Who grows up to overthrow the oppression of sin making peace with God possible. Then at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 22, we're told Jesus, the descendant of David sends us a testimony. The book answers a lingering question: Will the seed of David deal with sin and injustice once and for all? Our passage answers with several images: *eyes of fire, double-edged sword, many diadems*.

Eyes of Fire

It's no news there's injustice in the world: George Floyd, genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya, millions of aborted babies, sex trafficking, unequal access to COVID vaccines, and on and on. We've been passing judgments all year long on politics, race, pandemic. So when we reach a passage like this, you'd expect it to resonate. Finally, justice. But instead, we recoil: robes dipped in blood, fire from the eyes, striking the nations. Suddenly, we're apprehensive about justice, seeing it as regressive, backwards. This is a strange feature of modern life: we cry for justice on the one hand, while rejecting it on the other. One side: No justice, no peace; the other side, Hey, Don't judge. Which makes you wonder, Is *justice* we're really after? I did a thought experiment with friends this week by asking: When you are treated unjustly, do you typically respond by seeking justice or seeking revenge? We thought about it for a bit, and then one person who is in sales said, When another salesperson gets the sale by cutting corners, I hope something goes wrong with the sale. I don't want them to succeed. He admitted he didn't really want justice for the customer, or a good ethical rating for his company. What he wanted most was for his coworker to suffer, wages garnished. Vengeance. Someone else described the intense difficulty of being around a family member who has acted unjustly. Instead of addressing right and wrong with the family member, they confessed to ignoring them, refusing to even sit across the table from them. No talk of truth or justice, just plain old vengeance. Make them suffer. Rub it in their face. Now there's a tension here isn't there? There is a real social injustice, but at the same time a real absence of just character. Cut corners, lack of ethics *and* I'll show you; I wish ill on you for stepping on my toes, my ideas, my territory. So while there is real outer injustice that needs righting, there's also an lack of inner justice that needs attention. How do we deal with this tension? Lady Justice is often depicted holding scales, blindfolded, to signify impartiality. But Jesus' eyes are wide open *and on fire*. Why? Fire in the eyes doesn't mean Jesus sees angrily; it means he sees purely. He has white-hot, pure, perception. The same description appears at the beginning of the book where Jesus' eyes of fire see through seven churches. Six are embroiled in unjust behavior: sexual immorality, idolatry, false worship (1:13ff). He sees all and calls them to repent or else. Why? Because he's a regressive, backwards killjoy? No, because he is just and sees things we do not see. Take sex outside of marriage. It snatches the benefits of a committed relationship without the

security of a covenant. It mocks the archetypal marriage between Christ and his Church. Jesus doesn't sleep around on us or refuse to commit. He pledges himself mind, body, soul. The point here is that the eyes of fire not only see everything but all the way down to how things are supposed to be. Jesus sees justly. He knows and sees things we can't. By contrast, our entire world has been turned upside down by an imperceptible virus. We have serious **vision problems**. One vision problem is *blind optimism*: acting blind to injustice when we can really see. As if there aren't racial, sexual, political, economic injustices everywhere. Like the person who lays in bed eyes closed pretending to be asleep so we don't have to get up, the blind optimist lies to themselves so they don't have to confront reality. Another vision impairment is *bitter judgmentalism*: claiming to have eyes of fire when your vision is clouded. Bitter judgmentalist takes the responsibility of conviction and judgment out of God's hands. This rampant in callout culture. ILL. You mean to tell me that in your thirty years of wisdom, you see everything clearly, all the nuance, every heart, and act accordingly? Bitter judgmentalist believes they've worked it all out and hold others captive to their superior judgments. No room for self-doubt because you see with fire. Is it any wonder relationships are burning to the ground? We all have vision problems. None see purely. Is there any hope for justice?

Double-edged Sword

In our second image, the heavens rupture and a rider on a white horse descends with a double-edged sword. We're told *in righteousness he judges and makes war*. His judgments are just and so are his tactics. His character is 100% righteous; vision 20/20, and his name *Faithful and True*. This means justice is real because Jesus is true. So how does he carry it out? With a sword that protrudes from his mouth. The awkward image tells us something about the sword—that it's verbal. Jesus slaughters not with weapons but with words. In chapter one, the same sword is called the Word of God and it's double-edged. Why? It cuts two ways. **One** cut clears away deceits and illusions, winning people from immorality, idolatry, and false worship. It's described as the testimony of Jesus. Jesus says: I want to free you from illusions and deceits, your filthy use of sex, money, power, and justice. I want to liberate you from your poor judgment so badly, I'm going to open heaven and ride into your world...through a womb. The Lord of heaven descends into a trough. The Word of God reduced to midnight cries, for you and me. The **second** way the sword cuts is to slay the nations. If you're unwilling to receive the testimony of Jesus, then his Word won't save you; it will judge you. If you continue to insist on your words over his Word, your judgments higher than his judgments, then the sword of truth can't free you; it will condemn you. And your rejection of his Word will stand as evidence in his eternal court. So Jesus says, *I'm so serious about justice I will open the skies and ride into the world on a white horse, sword in hand. You can have your lies, but you must perish with them.* Good News: it's not too late for the testimony of Jesus to sink in. And we all need it to. How? *Confess your blind optimism: for closing your eyes to injustice and refusing to act justly in all of life. Confess your bitter judgmentalism: for taking God's place as judge and executioner of all.* Resolve to live all of life according to *his* words. See, if we absorb this vision the word of God will become the most important, most cherished, most defining words in our lives.

Many Diadems

The final image, diadems. What are they? They aren't the wreaths given to victors in the games. Diadems are crowns. And Jesus has *many*. Possibly because he's taken from other kings. See, any power, any righteousness, any true judgment is his. Wherever there has been justice, it has been borrowed from him. Jesus is stacking up the crowns. He is the *King* of kings, singular among plural. *Lord* of lords. An *exclusive* claim. It's not enough to add Jesus to your pantheon of beliefs; He has to rule them all. It's not enough to seek justice; you have to be just. It's not enough to attend church; you must attend his glory. It's not enough to be a good person; you have to be a worshipping person. And that thought, King of kings, diadems upon diadems, should force us to our knees in *worship* (10). Who can stand? John, the recipient of this vision cannot. Here and in chapter one he falls down, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. As should we all, but Jesus does not leave him for dead. He lays his hand on him to lift him up, But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore (1:17). Jesus outlives death. And he is here this morning extending his hand to you saying, Do not fear. Trust in me, and I will give you life. The one who slays with his words, also gives life by his Word. Our application this morning? Worship God. Trust the Faithful and the True. Cherish his words, and let them define and save your life. For he is alive forevermore.