

Revelation 19: Powerful Words

Preface:

When I was growing up, my mom said a lot of things; I don't remember most of them. But I do remember "Watch your tone of voice!" and "It's not what you say, it's how you say it." I can hear her saying these things.

I *hated* "It's not what you say it's how you say it!" I thought this was bogus. Because I could very sweetly swear my siblings into the ground, right? And I have to disagree with my mom on this one. What you say matters. Words themselves have power. They have power.

A good word can change someone's entire day, right? Or someone's life: people have said things to me that I have not forgotten--good things and bad things. Words, spoken loudly enough and often enough by enough people can and have moved countries, leaders, institutions, shaped the way we view the world.

We generally don't pay enough attention to the words that we speak or write or type.

Revelation's Words:

And this is just as true of the words of Revelation as it is of anything else. What many of us go to, when it comes to Revelation, are the violent images Revelation presents to us. I hope that's changed a bit. And what we remember, often, is the violence that seems to come from God toward the Empire, not the violence from Empire toward Christians and others.

And because words have power, because the imagery of violence is so great and so pervasive, we don't always know what to do with it. We'll ignore it, and if we can't get away with that, for some reason, we'll just talk really fast when the topic comes up, and secretly wonder if God is nothing but bloodthirsty.

Today we're going to talk about how we can do better than this. Next week we're going to begin to talk about the movement John makes from the end of Rome to the end of the world, as we look at the most debated chapter in the most debated book in the New Testament, so that'll be fun. We'll talk about the end of the world, and all sorts of great things. But today: Revelation's violence and what to do with it.

Let's pray, and read the rest of chapter 19.

Prayer:

19:11-21:

I'm going to read the rest of Revelation 19 for us. We pick up at verse 11.

11 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 makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and

clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

19:11-21: True Significance

And this is a heavenly war, right? A vision of Heavenly War.

And it's clear from the beast and false prophet references that this vision focuses on Rome, on the Empire that's been the topic of so much of this book, and these two who have

been so antagonistic to John's Christians.

But I don't think John or his readers expected the fall of the Roman Empire to look like this vision in the world around them. I don't think that they expected to see a great hoard of birds, or Jesus on a horse, with a sword in his mouth. Remember this is vision stuff, not "this world" stuff, and we can't confuse the two. One of the most common tricks--conventions--of apocalyptic literature is that what we see in our heavenly visions reveals the truth about what is going on around us on earth.

John is given a very special gift, which is insight into the truth that stands behind the fall of the Roman Empire, which he knows is coming. This is why certain interpretations that say something like this will happen on earth in the future are, like, triply wrong.

What John is saying is that even though the fall of the Empire may look very different to us on the ground, on earth, this is the shape that fall takes in the heavenly spiritual realm, this is the real story behind Rome's fall.

Responses:

But a robe dipped in blood? A feast of corpses for birds? Whatever we ourselves might feel about this—and we each probably feel different things—non-Christians nearly always have problems with the stuff they see here. And if we ourselves have never been asked about things like this, well...that's probably something to reflect on, but we shouldn't be surprised at the question "If you serve a God of Love, if you say Jesus is God, why does Jesus seem so bloodthirsty in Revelation?"

Maybe they've read today's scene, maybe they've heard passages like Revelation 14, which we didn't read, but was one of the book's previous visions of the fall of Rome—because, again, Revelation keeps presenting things over and over for growing impact.

Revelation 14 has all these allusions to Daniel and other apocalyptic works, calls back to the classic image of judgment like “pressing wine” and “reaping. But the chapter has this terrible imagery:

“The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”

C'mon, right? blood as high as a horse, 1,600 stadia—it's something like 4,000 miles. Our immediate response—and maybe I'm projecting here—but is just to read on, really fast, and hope no one notices, Christian or not-yet-Christian, because I don't want the job of explaining this stuff. And this is only one more example of this sort of thing. It's all throughout this book.

But we can do better than skip by the violence like this that we see.

Violence Upended:

Let's start here: The utterly violent imagery we see in Revelation? It never actually happens. It never happens. No

angel with a sickle overtook Rome: ultimately, Rome was overtaken by Christianity. Jesus didn't show up on a white horse and chop people down with a sword, and hordes and hordes of birds didn't feed on the people he killed. Although certainly, the beast & false prophet are long gone, right? There is no Roman Emperor anymore, no Imperial Cult, no Christians being killed because they won't worship the Emperor as God. This is all over.

The utter violence that we see in Revelation 19: it never actually happens.

No "Holy War" takes place on earth.

So what do we do with the violence? Because the images are still there, the words on the page won't go away. I think we first do with it what we always do with anything we find in scripture, and first check it against other things we see. (cf. Barr, "Doing Violence," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, pp.97-108 for a chapter that has influenced not only my thinking on Revelation, but particular the following discussion.)

Violence Upended: I

Things like Revelation 5:5-6, which we've talked about before. We stand waiting with John to behold "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," open up seals on a scroll that, once opened, will stop Rome from their murderous evil. But...there is no lion: what we see with him is "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered."

We remember that the Lion of Judah's capability and power come out of its chosen suffering. The end to the evil that

Rome is doing only comes about by the death of the Lamb, not the violence of the Lion. Jesus' weakness is his strength. This is one way violence is upended.

Violence Upended: II

We can see, maybe, chapter 12 of Revelation, where we learn about how the devil, the enemy of God, of Jesus, of the church was kicked out of God's space and came to wreak havoc on ours:

“And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” And the dragon chases down God's people, slanders God's people, goes off “to make war against...those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.”

We learn importantly that the “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

And again, we see that it's not violence that wins against the devil. Triumph over the devil comes from the Lamb's shed blood and Christians' witness to it. Our triumph over evil is derived from the Lamb's first triumph, and the persecuted Christians in Revelation overcome the evil demands of the empire by holding firm to everything they know about Jesus, even though suffering comes of it.

Violence Upended: III

We can see even in today's passage, in Revelation 19, that the power of Jesus in this heavenly battle isn't a sword he's swinging all over the place; chopping people up. In fact, Jesus' power is a double-edged sword coming out of this mouth, "verbal power," as one person puts it.

The sword represents words, speech. The sword represents words. And in the heavenly battle scene it is Jesus' words that overcome the beast's armies.

This reminds us, maybe, of the way the devil's slander against God's people in Revelation 12 took the form of a river that came out the dragon's mouth, but God allowed the earth to swallow up those words and protect God's people.

Here again, words are a weapon...but the people who have sided with the beast in this vision can't overcome Jesus' words, because the one standing behind their power, the devil, has no words anymore. The devil's slander is empty.

Violence Upended: Tools

And what we see is that for all the terrible violence in these images, the tools of triumph are suffering and words. Again, for all the terrible violence in these images, the actual tools of triumph are chosen suffering and faithful words.

And while the violent heavenly visions are just that— heavenly visions—the suffering of Jesus, and the testimony of Jesus are real things, right? Jesus did die, the Lamb really was slaughtered, and Jesus' followers have never stopped voicing witness to what happened in Jesus' death, holding "the testimony of Jesus" out to the world.

One author notes that “at every juncture in [Revelation] where good triumphs over evil a close examination shows that the victory is finally attributed to Jesus’ death” (Barr, 101). It’s Jesus death, and the words we speak about Jesus’ faithful death that crosses the gap between the violent heavenly visions John sees and the world we actually live in. Jesus’ heavenly triumph, which is violent, is actualized in faithful words and chosen suffering.

The images in the visions are “violent and bloody,” they’re repulsive sometimes to our ears. But what John is saying is that *when his readers suffer like Jesus suffered at the hands of Rome, which will happen if they hold to the testimony of Jesus and reject the Imperial Cult, they are accomplishing in the heavenly realm the overthrow of the Empire.* When his congregations suffer at the hand of Rome, they are actually, in the heavenly realm, overthrowing the Empire.

This is why, over and over in Revelation there is a call “for the patient endurance of the saints” never, ever a call to violent action. It isn’t a patient endurance to violently overthrow Rome. It’s a patiently enduring clinging to Jesus’ testimony in the face of the suffering the Empire is going to cause in their lives. This is the nuts & bolts, the mechanics, of Rome’s downfall. Endure, speak faithful truth, choose suffering, Rome will fall.

Violence Upended: Toward Answers

One of the biggest answers we have to questions about the violence we see in Revelation is the fact that the violence is turned upside down on its head by the real life suffering and faithful witness of Jesus and his followers who hold to his

testimony. The action of revelation, the real action, is suffering and words, not violent vengeance.

Violence Upended: Unsatisfying Answers?

But the violent imagery remains, right? And Revelation implies that when we patiently endure suffering like the Lamb we follow, and we bear the testimony of Jesus as the small persecuted Roman Church we are, what it looks like in the heavenly realm is violently and terribly slaughtering evil.

Chosen Suffering's Heavenly Force:

And that makes me a little uncomfortable, you know?

I don't necessarily want anything I do to look like terrible violence, even if it is only in a vision. But the fact that the violence is vision-only-violence and not "real life violence" is exactly where the power of the words of Jesus we speak and the life of Jesus we live is revealed.

We live in a world that is bloody and terrible and violent, right? The Pandemic has clouded over this news, a little—but just a little. It takes very little time to find out just how much overwhelming violence happens every single day in the world. The threat of violence shuts things down all the time: schools, programs, churches, downtowns. Doing violence is no big thing, and some of our favorite movies and books and TV shows have a murder or two, right?

Which is crazy, as Christians: but still is the case. Terrible violence is normal in this world. In fact, if it weren't for how exaggerated the violence is in these apocalyptic visions, we wouldn't even notice it. We're accustomed to violence. But for all our acceptance of violence around us normal, as part

of the world and the way we choose to entertain ourselves, we and others still don't want to see it the way we see it in Revelation.

And yet, as I said, violence is understood in this world. Especially by those who use it to get what they want, and Rome used it to get what they wanted. They were a totalitarian Empire. Their "world peace" came by way of violence and their roads were lined with crosses, and what we have to understand is that John is communicating in a way that could be understood by the powers that be if they dared to see it that *their time was over*.

And at the same time he does this, he reveals that the power his churches have is not the power the Empire has; it's anti-violent. It's chosen suffering and faithful words.

He basically turns on its head the reason to use violence, and says that with every one of the persecutions Rome takes against the Lamb's followers, they are acting against themselves. Every Christian they force to "patiently endure" persecution is a chop at their own feet. The devil didn't get it; he thought he was making headway against the Lamb and his followers when he was attacking John's churches, but really, he was a dragon gnawing on his own tail, devouring himself.

The violence we see in the visions of Revelation, when we look at it on this side of the heavenly realm, it's the exact opposite of violence. Even if the images bother us, what counts in Revelation is "this world" behavior. What matters is that the Lamb suffered, and we endure suffering in his name.

Our suffering and our patient endurance and the testimony of Jesus we bear undermines the violence in the world around us, and in fact, destroys it in the heavenly realm with the same force that in this world we are being destroyed.

What Can We Say? Honesty

So when someone asks us about these images of violence, what can we say?

We can first be honest, and say, “Yeah, this is terrible stuff, isn’t it?” We can acknowledge that Revelation depicts images of holy war, and they are gruesome and bloody.

What Can We Say? Heavenly Visions and Real Lives

But we can go on to explain that even as these violent visions occur, they are undermined by the real lives of John, and his churches, which were lives not of visionary violence, but of patient endurance, of chosen suffering, of bearing the testimony of Jesus. Jesus was the first person to overcome the most violent real life thing--death--by suffering through it, so that he could be a model for the rest of us. The slaughtered Lamb, whose power comes from his death and the condemnation he speaks against his enemies is the real power that destroys the devil.

What Can We Say? Understandable But Not Understood

And what John is doing is speaking to the demonic powers that control the Empire in their own language with threats—promises, really—that they understand.

And just like today, they couldn’t get it: No one who is used

to getting things done by violence can ever believe that suffering and witnessing to Jesus can be stronger than it is. The devil just can't understand that violence is not the last word in the universe. The chosen suffering of Jesus is, and still every time where Christians patiently endure suffering in Jesus' name, they prove it.

It's because God first loved us that we love at all, and it's because Jesus first suffered death on our behalf that we partner with Jesus' suffering and take persecution on the chin until evil is overcome by it. We never stop giving testimony to Jesus and that really does eventually overcome the evil that's against us.

What Can We Say? Different Context

And, look. These answers may not be satisfying. If that's the case, I think it's largely because we're just too far removed from targeted violence and persecution, for any reason, much less because we're Christians.

And we shouldn't feel guilty about that, but we should try to acknowledge that in our context, such violence seems barbaric and old-fashioned and hypothetical. This morning, in the world, it's not. It is daily life. In those places, the way John makes violence look like weakness would be such a hard thing to hear, to "patiently endure" would sound like a foolish, idiotic thing, not a good idea.

But it would make sense to us that our patient endurance, the testimony of Jesus we share—the words we speak and life of suffering we live—would take on violent power in spiritual places against the evil that is daily torturing us. This would be perfectly reasonable, if not an outrageous

challenge.

So part of the problem of the images in Revelation is simply that we have it really, really good. Most of our society experiences violence from a distance. This context argument might not be all that persuasive, but it's honest, and that counts for something in heaven, even if we think it's evasive or lame.

Conclusion:

Next week we're beginning to leave Rome behind and talk about the end of the world and final judgment.

The stuff we've talked about today has deeply influenced my life.

I avoided Revelation for a long time largely because it was so ugly, and the visions of John were so terrible. When I discovered that the power of God in those visions is really the suffering of the Lamb and that it's the testimony of Jesus that really overcome evil I felt freedom for the first time to explore this book without feeling guilty or disgusted.

I'm still not comfortable with the violence; I'll never be, unless my life changes dramatically. I'm just too far away from persecution, from violent suppression—it's not a language I speak.

But in the end, John turns violence inside out, right back on top of itself. It comes down on his churches, and as they endure it, continue to speak Jesus' words and words about him, and suffer, they become rubber and the devil glue, it bounces off them and in the heavenly realm sticks tightly to

the evil enemy of the Lamb. The evil one and all his comrades take the pain that they've been forcing upon others. They drink from their own cup.

Revelation never justifies violence. We act devilish when we choose violence in this life. At the end of the day, John's churches were able to suffer and bear witness so well that Rome was overcome and we ourselves, way down history's line, are here today. So it turned out okay.

Hopefully we can keep the same forward momentum they had, modeling ourselves after Jesus, overcoming violence in the world by taking it, just taking it, with Christ's words in our mouths, until the heavenly battles against evil that still go on in the world are won.

Revelation 19: Extras:

Images:

Even among us, depending on how much or how little time we've spent with this book, or what we've been taught about it before this series, or our general personalities--if we're more oriented toward mercy or revenge--even among us there are going to be different responses to this stuff.

Some of us might say, "Oh, well, you know, it's just evil being judged." Shrug our shoulders, and not have any real difficulty with these passages. Some of us might be embarrassed that this is in the Bible, and avoid it because, you know, we're good at avoiding things that we don't really have answers to. For some of us, the reason we don't read Revelation more often is because of imagery like this.

But regardless of *our* thoughts on this book,

Locating Ourselves: 19:1-10

So. Last week we saw as people bemoaned the loss of Rome. This chapter opens with, as one person puts it “the heavenly answer to the...lament over the prostitute’s demise.” (Keener, 459). The author goes on to talk about how the passage that was read to us is a promise for John’s readers--and for us, too--that Joy is coming, that vindication is coming (ibid.).

And we see important things here. We see the declaration that “the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready,” we’re told a beatitude: “blessed are those who are invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.” And this has meaning for us, right? For any of us who’ve been to a wedding or the banquet after: there’s joy in this, it’s an honor to be invited, and you know that you’re there to rejoice over the bride and groom, you’ll probably work a little harder to look nice, to pick up a gift, maybe.

But for John’s Jewish-Christian readers, this “wedding supper of the Lamb” would also have reminded them of the images in the Old Testament, like in Isaiah 25, of the banquet God will lay out for his people when “the age to come” finally arrives, the time when all things are set right, evil judged, pain over. And stuff that isn’t in our Bibles, but was common religious reading during the time before Jesus arrived, it also emphasized this belief that in the time when God would finally take away all pain and hurt, there would be a wedding feast, a banquet: this was common expectation, and Jesus even alludes to it in the gospels.

And God's faithful people are supposed to dress up for this celebration, too: only what we wear are our "righteous deeds." In the context of Revelation, this is not getting all mixed up in Babylon's stuff, in the Imperial Cult & emperor worship.

And at the end of the passage that was read to us this point is hammered home again, when John gets ready to worship the divine messenger, the angel he sees in his vision: but the angel says, "Don't do that! I'm a fellow servant with you and your siblings who hold to Jesus' testimony. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy."

Locating Ourselves: "the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy"

And we can get hung up here, but what we need to notice most is that in our testimony of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is active and alive. Many Jewish believers thought the Spirit wouldn't be loose until that great banquet age arrived, you know: but this is a corrective: Listen, in Jesus the Spirit is loose, and that day that Joel talks about looking forward to, when God says "He'll pour out his Spirit on all people," and "sons and daughters will prophecy" is totally tied to the testimony Jesus gives, and those who give that testimony: Christians.

John is also making reference to the things he mentioned in his letters at the start of the book (cf. Keener, 452). In chapter 2 of Revelation, in the letter to Pergamum, John records the words "of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." Jesus. And Jesus tells the church at Pergamum, don't give into the teaching of Balaam--a reference to an old

testament prophet who led Israel away from God by saying it was okay to worship idols. The Holy Spirit isn't in that teaching, that false prophecy of the Balaam character. Instead it's in our testimony, our witness to Jesus, which in this vision of Revelation is totally validated.

Concerning Revelation 19:11-21: First

First John sees heaven opened, with a white horse & a white rider, and this rider is piled up with all sorts of descriptions and labels that point us to Jesus: He's named Faithful, True, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," "the Word of God." The rider is Jesus, right? And he's wearing many crowns, he has fiery eyes, leading a heavenly army of people similarly dressed, in robes of white linen. And the descriptions and names that are his remind us of things we've seen already in the first two chapters of Revelation, when we learn that Jesus is on his way. (Keener, 451ff.)

And the notion that Jesus is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" riding a white horse would remind Roman hearers of the Parthian King, the Emperor over Parthia, Rome's great enemy, who claimed the title "king of kings." Parthia was to the east of the Empire, and "king of kings" is a common Old Testamentin fact, we see in the Old Testament that this "King of Kings" label was one that was often applied to eastern kings (ibid.).

The point, of course, is just how deluded Rome was: Parthia should have never been their worry: It should have been Jesus.

But Jesus' robe is dipped in blood, and exiting his mouth is a double-edged sharp sword explicitly "with which to strike

down the nations.” And again, we who are familiar with our Old Testaments would maybe remember Isaiah 11:4, which talks about what the Messiah will be like when he arrives, and how he’ll “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he’ll slay the wicked” (Keener, 452).

And this robe dipped in blood that Jesus wears is tied directly to the statement that he “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” Both of these are images tied together in a metaphor in Isaiah 63 that talks about God’s judgment on Israel’s enemies as treading a winepress.

Concerning Revelation 19:11-21: Second

And as this army marches past, John sees another angel, who calls hoards of birds together to come to “the great supper of God,” in order to--quoting here--“eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” You do not want to be invited to this dinner, right? But this image wasn’t new for John’s first readers; it was common in greek dramas and historical reports of war, and it’s Old Testament imagery that’s used in places like Ezekiel and Jeremiah to talk about terrible, terrible war (cf. Ibid.).

Concerning Revelation 19:11-21: Third

And the vision keeps going, as John sees the real agents behind the Empire--the beast and the false prophet who tricked people into devil worship, they gather their allies to them.

But we see them gathered with their allies, these two main

agents of evil who have been acting throughout Revelation to coerce John's churches into taking part in the Imperial Cult, in worshiping the emperor, they are tossed into "the fiery lake of burning sulfur," which I'm sorry to say we can't talk more about until next week: and then all the rest who are there are killed by that sword coming out of Jesus' mouth, and that huge flock, huge swarm of birds, eat their flesh until they can't eat anymore.

Revelation 14:

Some background information on this: what you'll hear in Revelation 14 sounds an awful like what we hear in Revelation 19, and again, that follows the way Revelation keeps showing us three-fold look at what's happening to Rome.

And it seems to me (and some others) to be the case that what we see is another version of this vision of the fall of Rome. Remember: Revelation isn't a linear book. It doesn't move from point A to B to C to D. Time is screwy in this sucker.

14: Responses:

So: Revelation 14. I'm starting at v6, and I'll intersperse a comment here or there: You can listen or read along.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

8 A second angel followed and said, " 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, 10 they, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." 12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. (patient endurance, because we've talked about how holding to Jesus' testimony, and coming out of Babylon, not worshipping the Emperor or taking part in the Imperial Cult: it all means an enormous amount of work)

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." (Again: thank God, because patient endurance gets old after awhile, right?)

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was

sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

Now: there are clear allusions to the book of Daniel here, to other apocalyptic works, to the same image of winepress-as-judgment that we already talked about and other Old Testament metaphors of judgment as a harvest. We see Jesus, too, "one as a son of man," presiding over this scene. But we're talking this morning about Revelation's imagery, and c'mon, right? C'mon, right? blood as high as a horse, 1,600 stadia--it's something like 4,000 miles. Our immediate response--and maybe I'm projecting here--but it's just to read on, really fast, and hope no one notices, Christian or not-yet-Christian, because I don't want the job of explaining this stuff. And this is only one more example of this sort of thing. But we can do better than skip by the violence like this that we see.