

Week of January 20-26

POETIC JUSTICE

Scripture Reading: Read Revelation Chapter 16

You probably have heard the term, “poetic justice.” The concept it represents is ancient but the phrase itself was developed by Thomas Rymer, an English drama critic, in the 17th century. Rymer believed that all dramas and plays should inspire proper morals in the audience by having good triumph over evil. Virtues should ultimately be rewarded or vices punished. Put in modern terms, “the hero wins out over the villain.”

Since Rymer coined the phrase, a modern twist has been added to its meaning. Not only are virtues to be rewarded or vices punished, but they are to do so through an ironic twist of fate that is somehow connected closely to the character’s own behaviors or attitudes. For example, the villain Haman in the Old Testament account of Esther builds a gallows on which to hang Mordecai the Jew. Ultimately, he was hanged on his own gallows (Esther 7:9-10). In other words, he not only was punished for his actions in trying to kill Mordecai but he was put to death on the instrument which he built to kill him! It’s poetic justice.

Another example of poetic justice is found in our chapter reading today when the third angel pours out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water. The plague that follows turns the waters into blood. Immediately afterwards, the apostle John heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

Through church history (and through Israel’s history as well), righteous saints have suffered at the hands of evil people. During John’s day, Christians were being persecuted and killed simply because of their faith in Christ. Much blood was spilled in the first few centuries of the church’s existence but John envisions a time in the last days when even more blood will be spilled.

God, however, will execute justice on those who have persecuted his people. The cries of the martyrs for God’s righteous judgment on those who slaughtered them will not go unheeded as this chapter of Scripture makes clear. God will not just punish these evildoers but he will punish them with poetic justice. They will be forced to drink blood as a sentence for spilling blood. It is judgment that the altar (or perhaps the souls under the altar) finds fair:

*“And I heard the altar respond:
‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’”*

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Read through Esther and look for other examples of poetic justice (there are at least two more). The Lord promises to act with justice. Pray for faith to trust his poetic justice instead of seeking revenge.

Take-a-way: *When God judges, the punishment fits the crime.*