

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.19.2021

THE MARTYR'S CRY

I. INTRODUCTION

MAIN POINT: God assures the vindication of those who have faithfully endured suffering for their testimony of Christ on the Day of Judgment.

Revelation 6:9-11

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

II. THE OUTRAGE OF PERSECUTION

- Revelation is written to the early church who is already feeling the pressure of persecution and undergoing varying degrees of trials and suffering.
- But persecution is nothing new for the people of God.
- OT / NT Examples
- **Matthew 23:33-35** You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? 34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, 35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.
- Tens of thousands of Christians were killed in periodic and intense persecution under the Roman Empire.
- The Reformation saw many Protestants hunted down and killed by order of Rome.
- The 20th century alone saw more Christians martyred for their faith than the previous centuries combined.
- It is estimated that tens of thousands of believers are killed each year for their profession of faith in Jesus.
- Countless believers face hostility and persecution in their daily lives.

The Bible has so much to say about persecution and suffering for Christ

- **Matthew 24:9** "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

- **John 15:18-19** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
- One of the beatitudes calls those who are reviled and persecuted and spoken of falsely on account of Christ, blessed (Matthew 5:11).
- **Mark 8:34-35** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.
- **2 Tim. 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR

- When we read this as we should, that all of the events are part of a single scroll, we see that all of the inhabitants of the earth suffer the terrors of the horsemen, but the people of God doubly suffer as they face the hostility of sinful humanity that hates God and his people.
- The result of the four horsemen riding is persecution of Christ followers.
- Who are these souls under the altar? Those who had been slain. This identifies them with the Lamb who was slain. These are followers of Jesus who had been killed as he had been killed. Slain means slaughtered, butchered.
- They were killed because of their allegiance to the Word of God, the proclamation of the gospel, and for their confession of Christ, the witness they had borne of him.
- Letter to Smyrna: Jesus’ promise of eternal reward is for those who ‘faithful unto death’, they will be given the ‘crown of life.’ (Rev. 2:10)
- What does it mean that they are under the altar?
- It is an allusion to the altar of burnt offerings which was a piece of furniture in the Tabernacle/Temple.
- It was where sacrifices were placed after they were killed in preparation for the offering.
- Some of the blood of the slain animal was taken and sprinkled before the veil of the sanctuary, some of the blood was placed on the horns of the altar of incense, and the rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering. (Leviticus 4)
- The symbology here is striking—these martyrs in a sense are like human sacrifices.
- Their blood was poured out, as it were from God’s perspective, as a sacrifice, as a pleasing fragrant incense to him.
- **Psalms 116:15** Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.
- This was a comfort to persecuted believers reading this letter. Their loved ones who had been killed for their allegiance to Christ were in heaven!
- If they followed in their steps — they would be before the Lord in glory with him.
- Are we ready to be poured out as a sacrificial offering for our allegiance to Christ?
- Are we holding on to our lives or are we willing to lose it for the sake of Christ?

III. THE OUTCRY OF THE PERSECUTED

10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

- The cry of these martyred saints is “how long?”
- This parallels Zechariah’s vision, “*how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem...*” (Zech 1:12)
- This outcry is presented another way after the opening of the seventh seal and the presentation of the seven angels with the seven trumpets:
 - **Revelation 8:3-4** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.
 - In Chapter 5: the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints, and these were in the hands of the 24 elders before the throne.
- What is their plea?
- Their plea is for God to execute his righteous justice on those who have persecuted the saints.
- This is not a hopeless appeal! They know God is absolutely sovereign, untainted by evil, and that there is no falsehood in him.
- There is no thirst here for vengeance.
- Theirs is a cry of faith!
- They know what Jesus and his apostles taught concerning suffering.
- They know that God uses suffering in the life of the believer to purify and sanctify them.
- They know that suffering for Christ conforms us to the image of Christ.
- Theirs is not a prayer for the persecution to end or for revenge but rather a desire for God’s justice to prevail! It is for vindication!
- They are not asking IF God will judge and avenge but rather HOW LONG BEFORE he will judge and avenge their blood.
- Similar to the imprecatory psalms. (Psalms that ask God to bring judgment, calamity, destruction, or curses upon God’s enemies who are oppressing his people)
- Read Psalm 94 as an example of an imprecatory psalm.
- Our desire should be like the martyred souls—for the vindication of God’s holy name, for the manifestation of God’s justice.

11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

TWO RESPONSES TO THEIR OUTCRY:

1. THEY ARE GIVEN A WHITE ROBE

- The martyrs were given a white robe, the symbol of righteousness, purity, sanctification, perfect holiness before God.
- **Rev. 3:5** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.
- **Rev. 20:4-6** Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

- In a very real sense they have already begun to reign with Christ right now!

2. THEY ARE TOLD TO REST A LITTLE LONGER

- Their outcry has not been in vain. God has heard and has answered.
 - They must continue at rest until the full number of God's elect are brought in, especially those who are going to be martyred for their faith like they were.
 - How long is "a little longer?"
 - As long as God has ordained. God has an appointed time for this persecution to come to an end.
 - These saints are to be patient as God's plan unfolds in human history and time.
 - God will exact justice, judgment will come and that is sufficient motivation for us to continue to persevere in our witness, even as we may endure suffering on earth.
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- Rather than recoil at the thought of suffering and being persecuted, we should embrace it, God has called us to this.
 - Why does Christ tarry? This verse answers that question. He won't return until all those who are appointed unto eternal life are brought in.
 - We must not forget that God has appointed us as his ambassadors to bring the good news to the ends of the earth—we must faithfully proclaim the gospel.

IV. THE OUTCOME OF PERSECUTION

The opening of the sixth seal is the outcome of persecution—justice has come—the Day of Judgment has arrived.

Revelation 6:12-17 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

- What a terrifying day for all those who have rejected Christ.
 - It is called the great day of the wrath of the Lamb.
 - They are terrified of the one who came to save and rescue sinners and has now come to damn them for all eternity for slaughtering his people and rejecting his rule.
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- The question is asked— "Who can stand?"
 - Certainly not those who dwell on earth!
 - It will have been too late to repent!
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- But there is good news—Who can stand?—We can stand!
 - We stand now having been made righteous by the blood of the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world.
 - We can stand having been forgiven by the Lamb whose blood takes away our sin.

- We can stand as we will be able to gaze upon the face of the one who loved us and gave himself up for us...
- We will stand, clothed in white garments of righteousness, before the throne of God, singing the song of the redeemed.
- You will either flee TO the Lamb NOW in FAITH and TRUST or you will flee FROM the Lamb THEN in FEAR and TERROR.