

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Great Day of Wrath

Scripture: Revelation 6:9-11

Code: 66-25

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We have the great privilege again tonight of looking into the future. And I want you to take your Bible or one that is nearby, perhaps you don't have one, there's one in the pew there, and turn to the sixth chapter of the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation, the sixth chapter. And tonight we're going to look at verses 9, 10 and 11 in our ongoing study of this great chapter. Let me read these three verses, Revelation chapter 6, beginning at verse 9. "And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And there was given to each of them a white robe and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been should be completed, also."

As we begin an examination of this fifth seal and this most significant passage, it suits us to examine the thought of vengeance for a moment, because what this seal is all about is vengeance. It is a cry on the part of these souls identified here for the Lord to avenge our blood, to bring about judgment. It is not inconsistent with God to make such a plea, although you would imagine in the world today that such a God does not exist, people have recast God in the form that pleases them, and, of course, have eliminated any thought of His being a vengeful God. But the God of Scripture is a God of vengeance. He Himself says in Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine and retribution." Twice more in that same chapter, verses 41 and 43, He says, "I will render vengeance on My adversaries."

The psalmist affirmed the same truth about God when he wrote, "O Lord, God of vengeance, God of vengeance shine forth, rise up, O judge of the earth, render recompense to the proud." That's from Psalm 94. And the psalm ends this way, "The Lord our God will destroy." There are a number of what are called imprecatory psalms where the inspired writer of the psalm is calling for God to destroy the wicked, he's calling for God to bring about vengeance, the longest of those imprecations are found in Psalm 35 in Psalm 69 and in Psalm 109, and there are other portions of the Psalms with similar prayers for God to bring vengeance on the wicked.

In Psalm 79, for example, and verse 10 we read, "Let there be known among the nations in our sight vengeance for the blood of Thy servants which has been shed." God is a God of vengeance. The prophet Micah said, "For God...speaking in His behalf, chapter 5 verse 15...I will execute vengeance

in anger and wrath on the nations which have not obeyed." In Isaiah chapter 59 and verse 17 we see God putting on what Isaiah says, "Garments of vengeance for clothing." And verse 18 says, in Isaiah 59, "He will repay wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies." In Isaiah 63:4 we read, "God says He has a day of vengeance in His heart...in His heart."

In Psalm 64, and maybe we'll just look at this one and leave the rest for your own perusal, but in Psalm 64 I would just read three verses to you, verses 7, 8 and 9. "But God will shoot at them with an arrow...speaking of the wicked...suddenly they will be wounded so they will make him stumble, their own tongue is against them, all who see them will shake the head then all men will fear and will declare the work of God and will consider what He has done...and then, interestingly enough, verse 10 says...the righteous man will be glad in the Lord." It's a frightening thought, in one sense, isn't it? That the righteous could see the destruction of the wicked and be glad and be happy of that?

But there is that element. God is a God of vengeance and vengeance displays God's glory. And vengeance displays God's justice. And vengeance displays God's holiness. And vengeance displays God's righteousness. And when all of that is put on display and God is fully vindicated, the righteous will be glad.

Proverbs 25:21 says, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he's thirsty, give him water to drink." That's the other side of it, we're to be compassionate, we're to demonstrate the love of God toward sinners, just as the love of God was demonstrated toward us while we were yet sinners. There is a balance. We are to seek mercy and compassion, for those who are under the judgment of God, as well as seeking and longing for vengeance which puts God on display and vindicates His holiness and His righteousness.

In Romans 12 I think you see the same balance. It says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave...verse 19...room for the wrath of God, for it is written, `Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.'" And then the next verse says, verse 20, "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him and if he is thirsty, give him a drink." There is a day of vengeance coming, but that doesn't mean we treat sinners with revenge or vengeful spirits or retributive attitudes. Yes we long for the day when God's holiness and justice and righteousness is vindicated, but at the same time we know it's a fearful day for the ungodly, and in the meantime we reach out in love and compassion and mercy to them.

Now as we look at Revelation chapter 6 tonight, we are going to come face to face with God's vengeance. The time of grace is really coming to its end. We are now in a seven-year period that we have called the time of Tribulation, it is also called the time of Jacob's trouble, with reference to Israel's role in it. This seven-year period identified in the book of Daniel as seven years, and identified again in the book of Revelation as to half of it being three and a half years, or 42 months, or 1260 days, this brief period of time is the time when God unleashes His vengeance, when God unleashes His judgment and His wrath on the earth like never before. Now there have been past

times when God's vengeance has been manifest, when God's wrath has been manifest, when God's anger has been revealed. And some of those times have even been called "days of the Lord," but this final time is greater than any other time to precede it. This is the seven-year period when Jesus Christ not only judges the ungodly but takes back the earth and the universe for His own possession.

Now you'll remember that in Matthew's gospel Jesus is recorded to have preached a sermon, we call it the Olivet Discourse, or the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, in which He discussed this period of time. And He said this seven years will be divided into two halves, the first half He called the beginning of birth pain. It's a very vivid term. When a child is to be born prior to the birth, there are a series of birth pains that get increasingly more intense and closer together as you get nearer to the great event of birth itself. And what our Lord is saying is there is a great event, namely the arrival not of a child but the arrival of the King, the Son of God. But as you get within seven years of that arrival, the birth pains are going to start to come, the earth is going to feel the pain. It will start out somewhat slowly and it will rapidly increase, the beginning of those birth pains will occur in the first three and a half years, and the furious pain will come in the second half and that our Lord designated as a time called the Great Tribulation. So the first half in Matthew 24:8 is called the beginning of birth pains, the second half in Matthew 24:21 is called The Great Tribulation, or the great time of trouble, pressure and pain.

Now interestingly enough, and this is something just to keep in mind for the chronology of all of this, as Luke looked at the same period of time in the twenty-first chapter of his gospel, as Luke at the same period of time and recorded our Lord's words in the same sermon, Luke added the fact that Jesus called that Great Tribulation time, that second half, "days of vengeance," according to chapter 21 verse 22. After the abomination of desolations which is identified as the midpoint by Daniel in chapter 7, which is also mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24, which is not mentioned in Luke 21 but the succeeding events are mentioned, so when he calls this particular time the day of vengeance, he's talking about the time after the abomination, after the midpoint, namely the second half. The fury of God's vengeance really hits following the midpoint. Luke calls those days, those days in the second half days of vengeance.

Now that is very important because that's consistent with what we're going to see here in the fifth seal. The chronology is very clear, the first four seals occur in the front part, the first three and a half, and they're the ones Jesus called the beginning of the birth pains, they happen in the first part. This fifth seal begins in the first part, stretches across the midpoint, is accelerated in the second part and is followed by the vengeance...the vengeance.

Paul saw this vengeance of God coming. In 1 Thessalonians...2 Thessalonians, rather, chapter 1, he says in verse 5, "This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God for which you're suffering, for after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when

the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire...here it is...dealing out retribution, or dealing out vengeance on those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus and they will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." So, Paul noted there was coming a day of retribution, or a day of vengeance.

Peter saw the same thing, the same kind of vengeance. Second Peter chapter 3 verse 10, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, the earth and their works in it will be burned up, since all these things are to be destroyed in this way..." then he goes on from there. There's coming a great day of God's vengeance which will bring about holocausts of destruction like the world has never known, a day when the just God and the righteous God and the holy God brings His long awaited justice on sinful men and women.

And it is true that believers rejoice in that day because it does put God's glory on display. It does bring an end to iniquity which we despise. It does vindicate the Lord who has been so mocked and abused. It does take back the universe from that usurper, Satan, it does bring in everlasting righteousness and end the reign of sin. So we do rejoice, we understand the gladness that was expressed by the psalmist. We understand the hope and the joy that was in the hearts of the apostles as they anticipated this event, even though it meant the destruction of the ungodly to whom they were sent for purposes of evangelism.

Again this dual feeling of joy and sadness is indicated in Revelation chapter 10. Turn over there for a moment. In one of the really rich chapters in this book, to which we will give great attention in the future, down in verse 9, John is told to take the book which is opened in the hand of the angel in verse 8, and he's told, "Take it and eat it," it's the book that describes the final judgment, "Take it and eat it, it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it and it was in my mouth sweet as honey, and when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter."

This is the bittersweet attitude of judgment. There is a sweetness in it because it is vindication for God. There is a sweetness in it because it brings in everlasting righteousness. There's a sweetness in it because it destroys sin. And there's a bitterness in it because it devastates the ungodly.

We don't carry around a message of vengeance. Certainly Jesus hanging on the cross said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Certainly Stephen when he was being stoned by the ungodly said, "Lay not this sin to their charge," which is another way of saying forgive them. Certainly Paul said I could wish myself accursed for the salvation of my kinsmen, the Jews, and Paul also said, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," and he went on to say, "It had been given to us by God the ministry of reconciliation and we beg you, be reconciled to God before this retribution

falls."

The Bible even says God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. It says God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. I suppose it is illustrated by the very same psalmist who wrote the imprecatory psalms in which he called down the fire of God on his enemies is the very same psalmist who when he had the opportunity, as recorded in 1 Samuel 24 and 26, could have taken the life of his enemy, Saul, and spared his life because he had compassion and he had mercy and he cared about the man's soul.

But God's Spirit will not always strive with man. And there will come an end to the time of grace. In Acts 17 the Apostle Paul preached that. He said God has been somewhat tolerant in times past, but there is coming a day...he says in verse 30 of Acts 17...a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man...that is Christ...whom He has appointed. There is coming a day when grace is over with and judgment falls.

It is that very anticipation that is in view in the fifth seal. It is this seal which indicates to us this anticipation. Now you have noted in each case there's a force working. Seal number one, the force was...what? Do you remember? Peace. Seal number two, the force was war. Seal number three, the force inundating the earth was famine. And seal number four, the ashen horse, the force was pestilence resulting in widespread death.

There's another force in this fifth seal and it's rarely ever discussed by commentators. I could find one commentator who really got a grip on this force out of, say, a dozen that I read. The force here...the force here is vengeance. But behind it is prayer. We could almost say that the force is the prayer for vengeance. The vengeance doesn't come in the fifth seal, the prayer does. And if we remember the promise of James that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, then these have to be powerful prayers because they're being offered by people who are already in heaven and they have no taint of sin left in them. So here are the prayers of the perfectly righteous and those kinds of prayers are a force and they're prayers for vengeance and those prayers will be answered.

Now remember, the final seven years of judgment began to be anticipated in chapter 4 as the throne began to move with thunder and lightning. The actual judgment starts here in chapter 6 and runs all the way through chapter 19. And it all begins with opening the seven-sealed book, or scrolled. The first four angels, we've already seen, they came on the scene in response to the opening of the first four seals, and there will be false peace and war and famine, pestilence bringing widespread death that will kill one fourth of all humanity.

So we already know the world is facing a period of unimaginable trouble. The dream of the optimist for a better world doesn't fit God's Word. The ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ, the worthy Lamb, is

assured. As the book of Revelation makes plain, He will bring over the earth His reign at the expense of Satan, demons and ungodly men. He will bring in a kingdom of righteousness that will follow the pouring out of the wrath of God on all the ungodly. So we're looking at the beginning of this judgment, this time of wrath.

It is delineated, as I said, through these seven seals. It includes, as we shall see, seven trumpets which come in a very brief time and seven bowls which come in an even briefer time in rapid-fire succession. We're still in the first half of the seven-year period as we come to seal number five. The second half, the days of vengeance, haven't been unleashed yet. But this is the prayer for vengeance.

Now as we look at these three verses I want you to notice three features, just to break it down so you can sort of follow along. We're going to look at the persons involved, the petitions they have and the promises they receive...the persons involved verse 9, the petitions they have in verse 10, and the promises they receive in verse 11. This is absolutely fascinating. And there's much to learn and we have to put it together with the rest of the record of prophetic literature to bring it in to clear focus, and we'll endeavor to do that tonight.

Let's look, first of all, at the persons involved. Verse 9, "And when He broke the fifth seal I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained."

Now you'll notice that he sees some souls there and they are the persons involved. Now we'll get to them specifically, but let's start at the beginning of the verse. "And when He broke the fifth seal." And remember now, the seven sealed scroll is the title deed to the earth, He is unrolling it. And every time He unrolls it and breaks another seal which was put on ancient documents to keep the information in there hidden from public view, every time He unrolls the next section, the seals being on the edge of the scroll, one could be broken and it could be unrolled to the point where the next seal was. Every time He unrolls one, another sequence of judgment action is made visible.

This seal reveals these souls under the altar. How did they get there? Verse 9 says they were killed. So it's safe to say these are martyrs. So after you have false peace and war and famine and natural pestilence that results in widespread death of the quarter of the population of the world, you have persecution resulting in martyrdom. Now again this fits perfectly the teaching of our Lord in Matthew 24. We want to go back to that because I want you to have this whole picture in mind. Go back to Matthew 24 and you'll see the flow is the same there.

In Matthew 24 verse 3, they ask the question, "When is the sign of Your coming at the end of the age?" I mean, when does all this stuff end, when is the wrap up, when is everlasting righteousness coming, when is sin going to be destroyed? And Jesus says, "See to it that no one misleads you."

Many will come in My name saying I am the Christ and mislead many," and that's an allusion to the opening false peace with all the false messiahs who set up a fabricated, concocted world of peace and prosperity that doesn't last very long. And then verse 6, "You'll be hearing following that immediately about the wars, the red horse comes right after the white one, rumors of wars, nation...verse 7...rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, various places following there will be famines." And then He adds the earthquake which could include the natural disasters referred to as pestilences in the book of Revelation. And He says all of these are the beginning of the birth pangs. Then come to verse 9, "Then they'll deliver you to tribulation and kill you." See how that parallels in Revelation chapter 6. The souls under the altar and the fifth seal are there because they were killed. That's precisely what follows. What follows the natural disasters and the pestilences that end life for a fourth of the earth is persecution. It says you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.

So immediately following the fourth seal is coming the fifth one which is widespread persecution. By the way, you can read the same thing in Mark chapter 13 verses 9 to 13, and in Luke chapter 21 verses 12 to 19. The persecution begins, and I think it's important to note this, and it's hard, you're not going to feel the difficulty of it because I hope it's clear by the time it gets to you, but it's very hard to study all the passages and pull out the chronology of all of this. I hope I can make it clear to you. This persecution begins in the first three and half years. How do we know that? Because we've already got it started in verse 9 and the abomination of desolation doesn't come until verse 15 and Daniel 9:27 says that happens at the midpoint. So we're still in the first half, the beginning of the birth pains.

Why is that important? Because Jesus says this is only the beginning of the pain, the real pain comes later. And you say if that's the only beginning...if that's only the beginning and it takes a fourth of the population of the world, boy, what is the rest going to be like? That's right, that's the question and we'll answer that. During the beginning of the birth pains there will be initiated persecution. It is not going to be a wholesale massacre, it will be a beginning persecution and they will deliver you to tribulation, verse 9, and they will kill you and you'll be hated by all nations on account of My name. Here's where it starts.

There's a certain inevitability that will happen at that time. Persecution will be official, it will be government-led. You'll be hated by all nations on account of My name. All over the world, I believe, there will be government-led and religiously-inspired persecution. I think the courts will get involved in it. The governors will get involved in it. The synagogues and the churches will get involved in it. It will be the kind of persecution that is handled officially. The whole worldwide ecumenical religious system will get involved in it and religion will become the persecutor of the true believers. Read Revelation 17:6, the false harlot church will become drunk with the blood of martyrs.

The persecution reflects worldwide hatred for God and Christ. It starts, as I said, even before the Antichrist is revealed. He doesn't get revealed till the midpoint when he desecrates the temple in Jerusalem. Up to that point he's the world's savior, he's the world's deliverer. He's a very important world power who is involved, first in the peace and then in the war, trying to consolidate his world power. He really isn't revealed until the midpoint.

But even before the revelation of Antichrist to the world, this persecution will begin. And remember now, the restrainer, according to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 7, who is the Holy Spirit, has been restraining sin. He's doing it now, holding it back, but during this period of time the restrainer let's go and sin runs amuck. The Holy Spirit pulls back His restraint and lets Antiod, Antichrist attitudes go unchecked. And as this begins, some will die. Then comes the inevitability in verse 10.

"At that time many will fall away and deliver up one another and hate one another, many false prophets will arise and mislead many and because lawlessness has increased, most people's love will grow cold." Up to that point I believe there will be certain people who will attach themselves to Christianity, there will be people saved early in this period. Remember now, the church has been raptured out before this begins. There will be conversions occurring early on in this period of time, and we'll mention that in a moment. People will be saved and people will attach themselves, as they always have, to the church. They won't be the true wheat, they'll be tares. But once the persecution starts, they're going to fall away, they're going to follow false prophets, they're going to become cold in their love toward the Lord. They're going to show themselves to be false. They will defect, false believers.

Then in verse 13 he says, "The ones who endure to the end will be saved." Genuine Christians always persevere through any kind of trials, even persecution and martyrdom. Then in verse 14 he says, "In spite of all of this hostility, this is wonderful, in spite of this massacring of Christians that's causing defection everywhere, the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end will come." So while the persecution starts, the beginning of it in the first three and a half years, and it goes on, it will go all the way to the end, by the way, it will go all the way to the end. And we'll see that in a moment. It starts early and it begins to escalate until at the end it just, for all intents and purposes, is an effort to massacre any believer and every believer on the face of the earth. But while this is going on and certain people are defecting, verse 14 says, "The gospel will continue to be preached." That lets me know that it's going to be preached through this whole period of time. The gospel of how to enter the Kingdom, by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will be preached.

Who's going to preach it? Well according to Revelation 7:1 through 8 and Revelation 14:1 through 5, there's going to be 144 thousand Jews, 12,000 from every tribe, who are going to preach. According to Revelation chapter 11 there's going to be two witnesses, two witnesses who are going to do miracles and are going to preach the gospel. According to Revelation 14, and this is really wonderful,

according to Revelation chapter 14 there's going to be an angel, there's going to be some kind of angel flying around in the sky preaching. Revelation 14, I need to read this to you, "I saw another angel flying in mid heaven having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, and he said with a loud voice, `Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.'" There's going to be an angel flying through space preaching.

Now some people have said, "This is the TBN satellite." Don't believe it! Such exegesis is faulty.

There will be 144 thousand Jews, there will be two witnesses, and there will be some kind of powerful angel making a proclamation that will be infinitely beyond anybody's satellite. Right to the very end there will be people preaching, there will be Jewish believers and Gentile believers. We read in chapter 7 there are so many people who come to Christ that they can't even be counted.

So the persecution starts. The gospel is being preached. It keeps being preached. Some defect. The true Christians stay on, either till they die or to the very end when they go into the Kingdom because the Lord has protected them from death.

Then the event, back to Matthew 24, the event that hits the midpoint, that one in verse 15 comes, we're just flowing through the text. The gospel is being preached and then...boom, comes the abomination of desolation. That's the desecration of the temple. The Antichrist goes into the temple in the holy place in Jerusalem, blasphemes the true God, sets up an idol of himself, demands that the whole world worship him as God. He's got a false prophet who points to him and demands the same thing, his henchman, and the whole world is to worship Antichrist, he takes charge. That happens at the midpoint, up to that point he's subtle, now his subtlety is gone.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 it describes him in verse 4, it says, "When the man of lawlessness is revealed," this man called the son of destruction, "he opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship. He takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." He's not a political leader anymore, he's not a world deliverer, he's not a politician, he's not a savior, he's not a great leader, he now announces to the world that he is God. He is God. Verse 9 says, "He will come in accord with the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders and all the deception of wickedness. He's deceived all those people who perish because they didn't receive the love of the truth as to be saved." What happens is, the world buys it. The world buys it. Remember, we examined Daniel 8 which described something about his rise to power. We described last week Daniel 11 which also follows up on the same thing. And we could safely say at this point, Antichrist is in control.

To see something else about his power, look at Revelation chapter 13, there's a good insight into it there that ties in at this point. In Revelation chapter 13 verse 3b, second half of the verse, "The whole

earth was amazed and followed after the beast and they worshiped the dragon," that is Satan, "because he gave his authority to the beast," so Satan gives authority to this Antichrist, "and they worshiped this beast. They said, `Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war with him?'" See, in this whole war thing he has been the conquering hero. He has been the protector of Israel to the midpoint, then he goes after them to kill them, as he does all other people, Christian people, the Jews and believers in Christ are the ones he's after. But by that time he's established his military might, as Daniel 8 and Daniel 11 describe it. Now he takes his place. "He has a mouth like no other, speaking...verse 5...arrogant words and blasphemies and has authority to act for forty-two months," that's three and a half years, that's the second half. So he launches his career at the midpoint and he carries it through to the end of the seven-year period. He opens his mouth in blasphemies against God, blasphemes God's name, God's tabernacle, that is those who dwell in heaven. He blasphemes believers.

Now verse 7, "And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him and all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." Now all this starts at the midpoint. Now let's go back to Matthew 24 and I want you to keep this flow in mind because this is so crucial to understanding this time period.

So what happened? The first four things came, seal one, seal two, seal three, seal four, then came seal five, the persecution began. People were slain. We see them in our text of Revelation 6 already under the altar because they've been killed, they're already in heaven there. The slaying begins. It's coming from all over the world.

You say, "What is precipitating it?" Well it wouldn't be too hard to figure out because Christians all over the world are going to be saying..."Hey, folks, do you know what's happening in the world? This is in the Bible."

It's not going to be too hard to figure out. When they see peace, worldwide global peace followed immediately by worldwide war followed immediately by worldwide famine followed immediately by a fourth of the earth perishing in terrible tragic pestilence, Christians are going to say, "Look, this exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 24 was going to happen. This is exactly what is recorded in the vision of John in Revelation 6, we're telling you, folks, God is going to judge the world and you are seeing the beginning of the birth pains." And their response is, "Shut those people up. Kill them, we don't want to hear this."

And once the Antichrist sets himself up as God and the whole world buys it, then whatever Christians say becomes blasphemy against the only true god who is Antichrist. And then Antichrist's own religious system becomes the persecutor and the persecution really escalates, and it's against Israel

and against the believers.

To see the escalation of it, all you have to do is go to the next verse, verse 16, "When that thing in the midpoint happens and Antichrist sets up his career, if you're in Judea you better run for the mountains, if you're on the housetop, you better not go down to get anything out of your house. If you're in the field, don't go back to get your coat you left in your bedroom. And woe to those poor folks who are with child. Why? Because pregnant ladies don't run very fast. And woe to those poor ladies who have to nurse a baby and they're carrying it in their arms and they've got to stop and feed it. And you better pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath, so you wind up not being able to break some silly law and you're stuck in one spot." Why? "Because then there will be great tribulation," the second half, "such as never occurred since the beginning of the world until now. Unless those days had been short, no life would have been saved."

Boy, then the persecution really fires up. All over the place false christs, false prophets, showing all their false signs and wonders, trying to mislead everybody. And many are going to be killed. Jews are going to be killed, as many as two thirds, Scripture says, God will allow to die as rebels who have been purged out, unbelievers. Christians are going to be killed. And we see some of them under the altar in our text.

In Revelation 9:21 it says, later on, that people didn't repent of their murders...of their murders. That's interesting. There's going to be murder all over the world. Now what you've got in Antichrist's world is not government organized killings, not like Jesus said in John 16 when He said they'll take you into the synagogues and try you and kill you and you'll go before courts and judges." Now it's just worldwide free-for-all kill Christians, kill Jews. And everybody becomes a murderer, as they're all under the power of Satan.

Now many are going to be killed. The slaughter is going to be massive. Look at chapter 7 verse 9, you get a little bit of a feeling of how many are going to get killed. John says, "After these things I looked and what did I see? I saw a great multitude which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches were in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and they worshiped God. And they were saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever, amen.' And one of the elders answered saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they?'" What is he talking about? He's talking about that innumerable multitude you can't even count from every nation. Who are they? Verse 14, John said, "My lord, you know who they are. He said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the Great Tribulation.'" How did they get out of the Tribulation? They got killed. "They washed their robes, they've made them white in the blood of the

Lamb and now they're before the throne of God and they'll hunger no more, and they'll thirst anymore, neither will the sun beat on them, nor any heat." Which gives you some kind of an idea of the life they had to live as they were trying to escape the slaughter.

So the multitude that are going to come out of the time of Tribulation are going to be innumerable. There will be a mass of humanity saved. The fact that chapter 7 begins with the description of the 144 thousand witnesses, and concludes with these who have been converted, is reason to believe the 144 thousand are the key evangelists in bringing about the presentation of the gospel which elicited faith in the hearts of this innumerable multitude. So here they are in heaven, which means they've been killed. Now some of them may have died a natural death, but the majority of them will have been a part of the massacre that started before the midpoint and escalated in the time called The Great Tribulation. These in heaven are those who came out of the Great Tribulation.

So the fifth seal then deals with the slaughters of Christians that starts with persecution in the first half and becomes wholesale massacre after the midpoint and they keep killing Christians as long as they can until the very end.

But having said all of that, the issue here is not martyrdom, some people say this seal is martyrdom, some say this seal is persecution. It is not. I waffle between two things. Sometimes I say that the seal is persecution...pardon me, vengeance, and sometimes I think it's prayer. And so I would just like to put a slash and it's a prayer for vengeance, or prayer/vengeance.

Now let's look specifically at verse 9. "I saw underneath the altar." What altar? I don't know what altar. Why do people ask questions like that? I mean, I can read fifteen pages on people discussing what altar it is and when I'm done I'm saying I don't know what altar it is, if the Lord wanted you to know what altar it was He would have said what altar it was. But there's an altar in heaven, this is an altar up there. There's a throne up there. People say, "Well it has to be the altar that's the equivalent of the altar in the temple of the Old Testament." Why? There was no throne in the temple of the Old Testament. There's a throne in the scene that John sees here. So this is heaven and it has its own accoutrements and its own architecture and certainly it has its own furnishings. There's some kind of an altar up there. If I were to choose, there were two altars in the tabernacle and two in the temple, one was the altar of burnt offering where sacrifices were made, that was in the outer part. The other was the altar of incense where prayers were offered and it was right next to the sanctuary or the holy place.

If I were to choose between the two I would lean toward choosing the altar of incense where incense pictured ascending prayer. You read about that in Exodus chapter 40 and verse 5. But it's an altar in heaven and in this particular case it may well be emblematic of the altar of incense in the Old Testament because that's where prayer was symbolized in incense, and what you have here is people under this altar praying. The altar...the burnt offering altar, people weren't under it, sacrifices

didn't get under that altar, they got on top of it. So it would seem to be that these people were under the altar praying. Their prayers could be symbolized in ancient times by the incense rising from the top of the altar. It's important, at least, to recognize this altar cause it's going to show up again in this particular book of Revelation as we have already seen it. Do you remember that back in chapter 5 verse 8 there were golden bowls full of incense which were the prayers of the saints. They may well have been coming off that same altar. The incense may have been there and picked up from there and put into their bowls which symbolized their prayers. Incense, as I said before, symbolizing prayer.

Chapter 8 verse 3, "Another angel came and stood at the altar holding a golden censure, much incense was given to him that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne and the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand." I think that's kind of the clincher. It probably was like the altar of incense, very near the throne of God, very near the sanctuary where God dwelt. The burnt offering altar was out farther away and there would be no reason for any sacrifice in heaven but this particular indication that the prayers of the saints still have a place seems more reasonable to attach it to the altar of incense, and that's the description in chapter 8 that we have there.

So here is a heavenly altar close to the altar of incense in the Old Testament, but unique to heaven, near the place where God has His throne. The next question, now that we know where, is who? Who is here at this altar? It says, "The souls of those who had been slain." Now I've already told you who they are, those souls who were martyrs of the Great Tribulation. They're described for us in verse 9 of chapter 7 which we read.

Now note that they have not yet received their bodies. They have not yet received their bodies, they're just souls because their bodily resurrection has not yet occurred. And it will not occur until a future time, the time of the coming of Jesus Christ when Old Testament saints' bodies along with Tribulation saints' bodies will be resurrected according to Daniel chapter 12. So they're just souls there and they're under the altar and they are praying. They have been slaughtered in the persecution and the hostility of a satanic Antichrist-led world attack on believers has taken a toll on them, in one sense, in another it has elevated them to glory. These are the firstfruits, then, of the 144 thousand and the gospel preaching that will go on clear to the end. And may I add, please, for you, that there certainly are Jews here and probably those Jews would constitute the beginning of the fulfillment of Romans 11:26 to 29 which describes the time when all Israel will be saved. That really happens culminating at the very end when they look on Him whom they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son, but certainly there would be some beginnings of that even here. Certainly the 144 thousand are redeemed, they are not killed because the Lord seals them so they can't kill them. They must have led some other Jews to Christ who would be included in every nation, all tribes, peoples and tongues. So Romans 11:26, the future salvation of Israel is beginning even then to happen...which as I said, according to Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1 culminates at the end of this

tribulation time.

The next question, we see where they were, we see who they were, the next question that hits us is why were they slain? Why were they killed? Because of the Word of God. And I already told you what the scenario must have been like. I mean, these believers would be pointing to the Bible and saying...Look, the Word of God explains what's going on in the world. They could rightly interpret the beginning of the birth pains, they could rightly interpret the judgment of God that is leading to the day of the Lord and the wrath and vengeance of Almighty God. And the world says we want them silent. We don't want to hear what they say. So the killing starts. The world is not going to tolerate the preachers, not going to tolerate the Christian testimony. It seems to me in some parts of the world, and maybe even in our own country, we're moving fairly fast in that direction, aren't we? Right in the middle of all this blood and slaughter that's going on, Christians are going to say it's God's judgment...it's God's judgment...it's God's judgment. They're going to try to kill 144 thousand, they can't be killed, they're going to be sealed and they can't be harmed. They're going to try to kill the two witnesses, according to Revelation 11, they kill them in the middle of the city of Jerusalem, and they lay dead in the street and they don't move their bodies, cause they want the whole world to see them. So they put them on TV, there they are, they're dead, aren't you glad? These two witnesses that plagued the earth. Then on the third day while everybody's watching, they rise from the dead, start preaching again. And that's going to be a very interesting instant replay.

With the restraining of the Holy Spirit gone, as I noted for you, merciless men will kill those who speak God's truth. Secondly, "Because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained." They will kill to silence their intimidating proclamation of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they maintained. What testimony? What does that mean?

Go back to chapter 1 verse 2, this is a common phrase in Revelation and you can see it and it will interpret for you what he means. Revelation 1:2 says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bondservants," verse 1, then in verse 2, "who bore witness," speaking of John, "who bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ." Verse 9, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom perseverance which are in Jesus, I was on the island called Patmos," he was persecuted, put in exile, "because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Now go over to chapter 6 and you now know what the testimony means...the Word of God and the testimony which they had maintained...namely the testimony of Jesus. They were not only saying what's happening is in the Bible, they were also saying Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the deliverer, Jesus is the Redeemer, Jesus is coming. They had maintained faithfully the testimony concerning Jesus Christ. They will be preaching then for proclaiming God's Word and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had maintained that as a part of their uncompromising commitment. And they will do it all the way to death, without compromising.

It says in Revelation chapter 12, "The dragon...that is Satan...was enraged with the woman...that is Israel...went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, went off to kill the Christians who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." There's the same phrase again. They're committed to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Go to Revelation chapter 20 and verse 4. "I saw thrones and they sat on them and judgment was given to them, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded." Why were they beheaded? "Because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God and they didn't worship the beast or his image and they didn't take the mark in their forehead and on their hand and they came to life and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years." That's their resurrection, when they get their bodies.

All those Scriptures tell us that the reason they were killed is because they stuck faithfully to living and preaching the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cause of their martyrdom then is faithfulness, to live and speak God's Word and Christ's gospel.

So we meet the people. Now let's get their petition in verse 10, very quickly. "They cried out with a loud voice, and their cry is a cry for vengeance, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" It's an amazing thing that prayer plays a vital role in final judgment. Prayer is a force. The force here is prayer for vengeance. What brings about the vengeance? Prayer, isn't that amazing? I think most of us assume that prayer doesn't have much effect, prayer is one of the seals that brings about vengeance. Prayer is really the force influencing the holocaust yet to come in the wrath of God and the day of the Lord. Don't underestimate the importance of prayer, prayer moves God's judgment.

In Luke 18:6, Jesus said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said, 'Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night?' Will not God judge when His elect cry out to Him?" This intercession, then, beloved, in the fifth seal activates the tortures to come in the sixth and seventh seals, which include the trumpet and bowl judgments. And they cry out, it says, with a loud voice, *krazo*, it's a word that means urgency, fervency, very strong word there, really exercised. They're very impassioned, they're crying out. Just as the glorified twenty-four elders and the four living creatures and all the rest of the angels in chapters 4 and 5 were loudly praising, these are loudly petitioning. And what are they saying? "How long, O Lord, holy and true." How long, *o* despotes, the word that means master and sovereign ruler, stronger word than *kurios* meaning lord. The world that holds the thought of might and power and majesty and authority. "How long, You're holy, that means You've got to deal with sin, You're true, You have to be faithful to Your promise. You who are separate from evil, You who are faithful to Your Word, how long before You act against evil and keep Your word?"

By the way, Jesus in chapter 3 verse 7 is called holy and true, another indication that Jesus and God are the same. They know that both attributes demand that God act in vengeance. He must end sin's dominance and He must fulfill His promise of judgment. So it is a strong and an urgent and a loud cry and the question is...how long? They know it will come, but how long do we have to wait? How long are You going to refrain from judging? How long until grace and mercy is exhausted and justice and punishment come?

These prayers are not personal vendettas, they're not thirst for personal revenge. They're wholly desire is for the end of iniquity. They're wholly desire is for the destruction of Satan. They're wholly desire is for the devastation of Antichrist and the false prophet and all who followed him. Iniquity has reached its height in the slaughter, how long until You avenge our blood on...then this phrase, "Those who dwell on the earth?" That is a technical term for unregenerate pagans throughout the book of Revelation. It's in 3:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8 and 12, 17:2 and 8. Wherever you see that little phrase, "those who dwell on the earth," it means the ungodly. How long until You're going to avenge our blood? What do they mean by that? How long until You're going to kill them? How long until You kill the killers? The ground cries out blood, as Genesis 4:10 said about the blood of Abel. Their hearts are set on consummation. Their hearts are set on vindication. Grace is nearing its end. It doesn't sound like Christ on the cross anymore, doesn't sound like Stephen under the stones, doesn't sound like Paul, doesn't sound like Peter. It's time of prayers of vengeance.

The third component in this seal is promise. And in this promise here there are two things, a gift from God and a word from God. And both indicate promise. "There was given to each of them a white robe and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been should be completed also."

First they got a gift, first God acted, then God spoke. "There was given to each of them a white robe." What does a white robe mean? Well, you say, well how could they put on a white robe, they're spirits? Well angels are spirits, too, but they're seen as being clothed in white, it's a sign of purity. It's a sign of righteousness, a sign of blessedness, a sign of the beauty of holiness. The Greek term is a dazzling white robe of dignity and honor, reaches to the ground, stole from which we get the word stole. It's mentioned in chapter 3 verse 5. Well what it tells us is the Lord gave them honor and dignity and righteousness and purity to clothe them. Their souls are pure and righteous. As soon as they arrived I believe they had that. By the way, they're arriving all the time here. More of them are accumulating under the altar as more of them are being killed. And when they arrive, I believe they receive this honor and dignity and righteousness and purity and holiness...to each one of them is given upon their arrival a white robe, symbolizing the perfection that they have now entered into.

And then it says God not only gave them something, but He said something. They were told they should rest for a little while longer. You might say, "Well they're being impatient." No, they're not

being impatient because they're perfect and perfect people aren't impatient. They're in heaven. Don't be concerned that they're impatient, that's not impatience.

You say, "Well they're bugging God." No, no, they're not bugging God. Perfect people don't bug God either. He's just saying it's coming, but you rest a while. Rest has the idea of heavenly rest, bliss. You don't be concerned about it, it's not quite here yet, you just enjoy the bliss of heaven. You're perfectly holy, you're not out of control, you're not impatient, you're not bugging Me, you just enjoy your rest, a little time yet, a little time yet...you've got to wait a little while longer.

That phrase, "a little while longer," is used in chapter 10 verse 6 at the seventh trumpet. It's even used in chapter 12 verse 12 to speak about Satan's time, he's going to work a little while longer...just a little while...well, we're already moving toward that midpoint, so it's just a little while longer.

Well what are we waiting for? "Until the number of your fellow servants and your brethren who also are to be killed even as you have been should be completed also." There's a predetermined prescribed number that are going to be killed and you're just going to have to enjoy the bliss of heaven until that predetermined number who are scheduled for death is reached.

Satan, the Antichrist and the ungodly aren't through with the slaughter. It won't end right...just right until Christ comes, so you just rest. Vengeance is coming.

The world is headed in this direction. You can't even think about this without a certain frightening feeling. On the one hand we long for the salvation of the ungodly. On the other hand, we long for the vindication of righteousness. On the one hand we love sinners, on the other hand we hate their sin. On the one hand we wish that all could come into the bliss of heaven, on the other hand we cry for the destruction of sinners who have shaken their fists in the face of Jesus Christ, spit on Him and crucified Him, as it were.

So our smiles of anticipation are mingled with tears of sorrow. For us in this day we can at least say today is the day of salvation, can't we? The day of vengeance hasn't come yet.

Another thought comes to mind as we close. It seems to me today discipleship is somewhat ignored and Christianity is fairly cheap, but it may be getting more costly all the time. In that day thousands and thousands will seal their testimony with their own blood. Thousands of believers are going to be true to the Word of God and true to Christ and it's going to cost them their lives. Some people think that that will be the church because they don't believe the church will be raptured before the Tribulation. Certainly that's a possibility and those people can amass a good argument. In either case, whether it's church as we know it, people who are alive then, or whether it's new believers who are alive then, they will pay dearly for their faith. They will stand the acid test of being faithful unto death.

I'd like to...I'd like to be able to stand with them in eternity and not feel embarrassed, wouldn't you? Boy, you look at the news today and you imagine that man is so sophisticated. He thinks that his evolution has brought him so high. I mean, he's got to be long pass the days of massacring people. No, man is a wicked wretched animal and it's only the restraining power of the Holy Spirit that holds him back.

The world is not too enlightened, it's not too humane, it's not too civilized, it's not too pervaded with reason and education to repeat the atrocities of past history, it's going to enter into atrocities that men haven't even conceived of, slaughter and massacre unheard of. Why? Because it will be turned over to Satan, unrestrained. And we will have a worldwide Manson family.

So these saints are said to be under the altar praying for the day when righteousness is vindicated. And the Lord says I give you righteousness now, in promise of a future righteousness for all in the Kingdom. In the eternal state as well I give you the reminder. There's a little time, enjoy the bliss of heaven.

For us there's still a lot of time. Well, what is a lot? Some time, we're still in the age of grace, aren't we? When we have to show mercy and compassion to those around us and bring them the saving gospel which alone can keep them from this. Can we be as faithful as these dear folks will be to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus? I hope so.

Father, thank You for our time in Your Word tonight as again we are brought face to face with divine revelation. We are overwhelmed by it. We are in awe of it. It is stunning, it is shocking, it is frightening and at the same time it is cause for rejoicing. Help us to live, Lord, in this time, in this age of grace when salvation is being offered to all who will hear and believe, help us to so live that we may lead many to righteousness so that they can escape this inevitable hour. And I pray for those who are with us in this service who do not know Christ, who do not have the forgiveness of sin, who have not confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in their hearts that You raised Him from the dead. I pray for them that they might not enter into Your vengeance, but that they might be delivered, that You might grant them faith, faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life for them, who died for their sins, paying their penalty and rose to walk in them and through them in newness of life. And we pray, Father, for the salvation of many who hear this word and the encouragement of Christians to be so faithful in our preaching that we can some day stand beside those who will give their life for their faithfulness and not be embarrassed. Thank You, Father, for Your Word and the power with which it speaks, in Christ's name. Amen.

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