

## **Blessed Are the Dead**

Revelation 14:12-13

66-52

Well we have a special privilege tonight in our ongoing study of the book of Revelation, that book which Michelle found so difficult to understand. And we're trying to help you to understand it.

We come to chapter 14 and we could take a really a large section, even the second-half of the chapter, but I can't bring myself to do that because what is in verse 12 and 13 is in and of itself so very, very important. So let's look at Revelation chapter 14 verses 12 and 13, we'll read these words from the Lord to us and then endeavor to understand them.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow with them.'"

It struck me as I read those two verses that the idea of "blessed are the dead" is a bit unique. It sounds like a sermon Dr. Jack Kevorkian might preach. He has had, I'm sure you know, a long time morbid fascination with death, that is the death of other people and wants to medically assist those who believe death is preferable to life. Frankly, even in our jaded culture we find that an abhorrent perspective, and we consider him to be a fanatic, a maniac, a criminal or all of the above.

Our culture wants to avoid death. In fact, our motto might be, "Cursed are the dead." But hardly could we hold up a flag for "blessed are the dead" and expect to start much of a movement. But the text of Scripture says, "Blessed are the dead, happy are the dead." That reality sounds exactly opposite what people would commonly believe. Blessed are the living sounds more reasonable and more appealing.

Now the word "blessed," very common word in the New Testament, makarios means happy. It refers to religious joy or spiritual joy, bliss, deep down fulfillment, satisfaction. It refers to an inner joy that is the fulfillment of every longing, a serene, untouchable, unassailable contentment and peace. And there are many, many times in Scripture when the word blessed is used to describe many different conditions.

For example, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers," Psalm 1:1. Or, Psalm 2:12, "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him," that is in God's Son. Or, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity," Psalm 32. And it's, of course, repeated in Romans chapter 4 verses 7 and 8. Psalm 40 and verse 4 says, "Blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust." Psalm 41:1 says, "Blessed is he who considers the helpless, the Lord will deliver him in the day of trouble." Psalm 65 verse 4 says, "Blessed is the one Thou dost

choose and bring near to Thee to dwell in Thy courts." Psalm 84:4 says, "Blessed are those who dwell in Thy house, they are ever praising Thee." The next verse says, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee." Psalm 106 verse 3 says, "Blessed are those who keep justice, who practice righteousness at all times." The psalmist says in Psalm 112, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord and who greatly delights in His commandments." Psalm 119 in the second verse, the psalmist wrote, "Blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart."

The writer of Proverbs says that very familiar statement, Proverbs 8:34, "Blessed is the man who listens to Me." Verse 32 of the same chapter of Proverbs says, "Blessed are they who keep My ways."

And when you come into the New Testament, there are many more blessings, many more of these benedictions, or beatitudes. You remember these in Matthew 5? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me."

And there are other beatitudes scattered around the Matthew and Luke and John. James writes in chapter 1 verse 12, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." So there are a number of uses of this word that basically design a life of happiness, deep down abiding contentment, joy, tranquility, peace, satisfaction, fulfillment.

There are seven such beatitudes in the book of Revelation. Seven of them. The first one was in chapter 1. And you remember it, verse 3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it for the time is near." Then in chapter 14 we come to the second blessing here in the book of Revelation, which we just read, "Blessed are the dead." And there are five more to come, and we'll see them unfolding in chapter 16, 19, 20 and chapter 22. And what they do compositely is define for us a happy life, a contented life, a satisfied and fulfilled and blissful life.

But the most startling one of all, the one that might raise eyebrows above all the rest is this one here in chapter 14. "Blessed are the dead." And the question immediately comes, "Why is it such a blessing to be dead?" Two reasons are given in this text. First reason, because of how they lived. And second reason, because of how they died.

Verse 12 discusses how they live, and verse 13 discusses how they died. They live with perseverance and they die with promise. Let's look, first of all, and I don't know how far we'll get because there's so much in this discussion just in verse 12 that I want to share with you. Blessed are the dead because of how they lived. Verse 12, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."

You see that phrase "the perseverance of the saints," that is a classical theological phrase. That is a phrase that finds its way into the most common expression of reformed theology. The perseverance

of the saints is the classic doctrine that provides assurance and hope and joy to every true believer in Jesus Christ and it brings to an end fear and doubt because the perseverance of the saints is that great doctrinal truth that says, "The elect and the called and the justified will never lose their faith, they will persevere in faith unto death." That's why their death is blessed, because they live never abandoning their faith. He says in verse 12, "They keep the commandments of God and they keep their faith in Christ."

The point is, those who have saving faith never lose it. Those who believe will never stop believing. Their faith and their salvation will endure, no matter what assaults may come against it. Some call this eternal...what?...security. Have you heard that phrase? Or a more perhaps a mundane definition of it, once saved, always saved. While those are true statements, they do not express this reality as well as this biblical phrase, "the perseverance of the saints." Because what it emphasizes is the reality that regenerated people will continue in their faith to the very end, no matter what may come against them. The character of true faith is enduring. And this undying perseverance is never...listen to this...never ever more clearly and powerfully seen than in the context of this passage. If you want to know whether true faith perseveres, this is the best place in the Bible to see it. Why? Because the persecution against believers is greater than any other time in human history, right? It is the worst of times because we're looking in the book of Revelation at the future. We're looking at a time called the Tribulation, a latter part of that seven-year period called the Great Tribulation. We're looking at Satan running rampant over the earth, Antichrist, the false prophet, demons, sin, the judgment of God falling, wickedness on the earth that would exceed the accumulated wickedness of all prior human history, the worst of times.

And so, if you want to prove the perseverance of the saints, then watch the saints who are in the worst of times, right? That becomes the greatest evidence. And so again I say, the character of saving faith, the undying perseverance is never more clearly and powerfully seen than in the context of this passage.

Now we already know, because we've been going through the book of Revelation, that saints are being massacred, right? Gentile Christians are being slaughtered. Jewish Christians are being killed. The fury of Satan is unleashed in a level never before known in human experience. Those who name the name of Jesus Christ are living under the worst assaults of Satan in all of human history. The deadly persecution of demons, the deadly persecution of men under the power of Antichrist, and no group of Christians has ever or will ever have their faith assaulted more drastically than this group. In fact, in Matthew chapter 24, you remember verses 21 to 22, "There will be a Great Tribulation," Jesus said, "such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." It's the worst of times. "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved but for the sake of the elect, those days shall be cut short."

What that is saying is that the Lord has to shorten those days or even the elect would be devastated. It is so severe that it has to be shortened or the elect would be overwhelmed and defect. But they won't. Why? Because God is always faithful who will never allow you to be tempted above that you are...what?...able and always with the temptation will make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it, even then.

It is the classic evidence of persevering faith in the worst of times. So here we have this beautiful little respite in verse 12 which introduces us to the most tested believers in history, under the most powerful assaults of hell's host during the most troubled and wicked time ever. Satan's last effort to

destroy the work of Christ, and you know what? No matter what he gives them, no matter how strong it is, they persevere. Is that encouraging? That's the nature of saving faith, you can't kill it. Satan couldn't kill it in Job no matter what he did, right? You can't kill it. That's the perseverance of the saints.

Now you know what came just before verse 12, remember? It talked about those who worshiped the beast having to drink of the wine of the wrath of God in verse 10. A cup of His anger being tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night. The horrible damning torment of the ungodly.

Down in verse 14 we're going to see some more of it as it runs all the way to the end of the chapter. You see the angel in verse 19 swinging a sickle to the earth. The great winepress of the wrath of God, blood comes out from the winepress up to the horses' bridles for a distance of two hundred miles, as God comes in great judgment and destroys the ungodly and the wicked of the earth. The whole world is going to take the mark of the beast, as we've seen. They're going to identify with this false world ruler called the Antichrist. But the saved in the middle of all this disaster will remain true and loyal to Christ, even to a terrifying martyrdom. Those who truly belong to Christ will remain loyal. They will not fall prey to the lies and deceptions of Satan's forces. And they will be the blessed dead because of how they lived. Their faith never died, they lived believing to the end.

These are the ones, remember, who were saved because they heard the preaching of the two witnesses. In chapter 11 they are described for us. They heard the preaching of a hundred and forty-four thousand evangelists. They heard the preaching of an angel in the sky preaching the eternal gospel. And they believed, both Jew and Gentile. And it's a massive number of people. Go back to chapter 7 for a moment, verse 9. "After these things I looked and behold, 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. And they cry out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" Here is this massive group of people who are in heaven.

Who are they? Verse 13, "One of the elders saying to me, who are clothed in white robes, who are they and from where have they come?" And he said, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the Great Tribulation and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat for the Lamb is in the center of the throne shall be their Shepherd and shall guide them to springs of the water of life and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."

They are the blessed dead because of how they lived. Their faith persevered. Their faith endured. So there you have in chapter 7 depicted in heaven a huge congregation of martyred Gentile Christians, converts, believers, who are in the presence of God who have come out of the Tribulation having been massacred by Satan and the Antichrist.

Then over in chapter 12 we see they'll not just be Gentiles but Jews. We see how the Jews will be protected by God, the end of chapter 12. The dragon was enraged with the women, referring to Israel. Went off to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and

hold to the testimony of Jesus. Here you've got faithful Jews who remain obedient and who remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

These are the martyrs, by the way, first seen in chapter 6 under the altar, slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony they maintained. These are the saints in this text. These are the saints who persevere.

This is just a tremendous truth. If ever you have true saving faith, you will always have it. Oh there may be times when you're tempted to doubt, times when you struggle with questions, times when Satan assaults you and tries to create doubt. But your true faith will never die, not even in the worst of times. And it's because of that, it's because you can never lose your saving faith that you will die and be blessed.

The perseverance of the saints is such a powerful doctrine. Actually there aren't many places in the book of Revelation where you can sort of deal with a doctrine. Most of this apocalyptic vision focuses on the future and the glory of God and Christ and all of that. Let me just take a few moments and expand your understanding of this great doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Just a few points.

The perseverance of the saints, first of all, is based on the fact that God promises it...God promises it. God promises that the faith that saves lasts. Listen to Psalm 37, starting in verse 23, "The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and he delights in His way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong because the Lord is the one who holds his hand. I have been young, and now I'm old, yet I have not seen the righteous...what?...forsaken, ever. All day long...verse 26 says...He is gracious." Verse 27, "Depart from evil and do good, so that you will abide forever for the Lord loves justice and does not forsake His godly ones, they are preserved forever. But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off, the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever." Verse 31, "The law of his God is in his heart, his steps do not slip." Verse 33, "The Lord will not leave him in his hand or let him be condemned when he's judged." "Wait for the Lord, keep His way, He will exalt you to inherit the land."

The psalmist is saying God holds on to His own. He sustains their faith all the way to the end, even to death. Listen to Isaiah 43, and here also is this same kind of promise. "But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, do not fear, don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched nor will the flames burn you, for I am the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, your Savior. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place, since you are precious in My sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place, and other peoples in exchange for your life. Do not fear for I am with you, I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, give them up. And to the south, do not hold them back. Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone who is called by My name and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

All that is simply saying God holds on to His own.

A number of times Isaiah celebrates this great truth. Isaiah 45:17, "Israel has been saved by the Lord

with an everlasting salvation and you will not be put to shame or humiliated through all eternity," he says. What a tremendous and wonderful promise.

Isaiah 49, "But Zion said, The Lord, has forsaken Me, the Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands." God will never forget His own, always be faithful.

Isaiah 51 says the same thing, verse 6, "My salvation shall be forever." That's how it is. That's God's promise that establishes the perseverance of the saints. God's promise establishes it.

Let me give you a second point, God's purpose assures it. And I don't want to get too deeply into this because we've shared it on other occasions. God's purpose assures it. Look at John 6 for just a moment, and I think it's important for us to at least touch this chapter and maybe one other. In John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Why? "For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me, and this is the will of Him who sent Me that of all that He has given Me, I lose none." In other words, there's not only the promise of God that He will sustain His own, but there is the plan of God or the purpose of God to call out a redeemed humanity elected before the world began, and Jesus is saying I will bring that to pass.

Verse 44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him, and I will raise him up on the last day." Nobody is going to fall through the cracks. "I am the living bread," says verse 51, "that came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." Once you eat, you live...how long? Forever.

Romans 8 follows that up, absolutely incredible portion of Scripture and you know it well. It says in verse 28, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God has a purpose in electing, a purpose in saving, to bring His own to glory and He will make everything that happens in life work together for that good purpose. Whoever He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son and that's what's going to happen. Whom He predestined, He called. Whom He called, He justified. Whom He justified, He will also...what?...glorify. God is for us, who can be against us? Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ. Romans 11:29 says, "The gifts and callings of God, the purposes of God are without repentance. God does not change His mind." Paul said to the Corinthians that the Lord will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son. The God who called you into fellowship will sustain you there. That's His purpose. God's promised...God's promise establishes perseverance. God's purpose assures it.

Thirdly, and God's power guarantees it. God's power guarantees it. So many Scriptures I could give you on this, but do you remember these familiar words of Jesus in John 10? John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of My hand...why?...My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all." The power of God will see to it that anyone who believes will always believe. God's power sustains it. When you were saved you became a new creation. The power of God is expressed in that new creation. It is a keeping power, a sustaining power that cannot be broken. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Paul writing to the Thessalonians in 2

Thessalonians 3:3 says, "The Lord is faithful and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." He will do it. He has the power to do it. He will not fail you. What a tremendous and wonderful promise.

And then Jude 24, just a last verse along this line. You remember this one? "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." He has the power to guarantee your continuing salvation, that's part of His purpose and that's His promise.

All of this, of course, is provided by grace, is it not? All of it is provided by grace. We don't earn it. We didn't earn it in the first place so we can't keep it by earning it. It's all of grace. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit, soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." How is that going to happen? Verse 24, "Faithful is He who calls you, He also will bring it to pass." He'll keep you. There's no such thing as having saving faith and losing it. That violates God's promise, God's purpose, God's power and God's grace.

But along with all of that which is God's side, there is our side. And that's why it's called the perseverance of the saints. Throughout the Scripture believers are exhorted to endure, to persevere. And you see that all throughout the New Testament. It's the human side of this. We cooperate in this wonderful work of God.

Listen to Matthew 10:22, "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." We have to endure. Matthew 24, and Jesus preaching about His Second Coming in verse 13 says the same thing, "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved."

So there is plenty of exhortation throughout the New Testament to us. Look at Colossians 1 for a moment, and we'll skip some verses there, many of them. Colossians 1:21, he says, "You were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." That's talking about salvation, He saved you. Then verse 23, "If indeed you continue in the faith firmly."

Here is one of these wonderful and mysterious apparent paradoxes in Scripture where we are kept by the power of God and yet at the same time we are exhorted over and over and over again to endure. We have a part. Hebrews 3:14, "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance, firm until the end." We have a part to play.

All throughout Revelation 2 and Revelation 3 there is a common designation of a Christian, it's the word "overcomer." Remember that? The true Christian is the one who overcomes. And 1 John 5:4 and 5 says, "What is it that overcomes? It is our faith." We overcome by faith, by trusting God no matter what's going on.

We overcome even by fear. That's a healthy kind of fear. Jeremiah had that in mind in Jeremiah chapter 32 and verse 40. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them and I will not turn away from them to do them good, and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so they will not turn away from

Me." God gives us the faith and He gives us the fear to hold on. And then He gives us the love. Love also holds us to the Lord, it holds us to Christ. The Apostle Paul talks about the fact that God grants us love that holds on. He says to the Thessalonians, "I didn't need to teach you how to love, you're taught of God to love." The Lord teaches us to obey. John 8:31, "If you continue in My Word you're My real disciple."

So by those means of faith and fear and love and obedience, we continue in the faith. This is the great truth of the perseverance of the saints. They survive to the end because God gives them the faith, he gives them the fear, he gives them the love, he gives them the obedience. And yet at the same time exhorts them to manifest all of that. That's the incredible mystery of how we cooperate in the purposes of God.

But, beloved, every true Christian will survive with his faith intact to the end. And the greatest evidence of that is in the book of Revelation, in the worst of times they survived.

The only thing in terms of a section of Scripture that can come close to the power of that one verse in Revelation 14 is Hebrews 11. Turn to it for a just a moment. Hebrews chapter 11. This is just a marvelous chapter. And it talks about sustained faith, faith that endures. Verse 13, Hebrews 11, "All these died...what?...in faith." Now listen, the reason death is so blessed for believers is they die in faith, right to the end. Their faith never dies. They all die in faith.

Go down to verse 31. "By faith...well you can see by faith all the way through the chapter...By faith Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and so forth...and you come down to verse 31...By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient after she had welcomed the spies in peace. What more shall I say? Time would fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets." Their faith never died. By faith they conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Nothing could kill their faith. They overcame death. They endured torture. They outlasted imprisonment. They defeated lions. They conquered chains. They withstood fierce temptation. They underwent martyrdom and they survived with their faith intact to the very end.

Verse 37...verse 36 says, "Some of them experienced mockings and scourgings and chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, sawn in two, were tempted, put to death with the sword, went about in sheepskins, goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill treated, men of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." Their faith never died. You can't kill it. That is the message of this great chapter. And chapter 12 verse 1 says, "We have this great cloud of witnesses who show us the character of faith." It can endure anything, absolutely anything. True faith can't be killed. That's the message of Hebrews 11. True faith is relentless. It endures anything and everything.

You say, "Well, you know, if I ever got in a deal where I was threatened with death or somebody is going to burn me at the stake or chop off my hands or run a spear in my side, I don't know what I'd do." I can tell you what you do, you'd endure, you'd endure in faith in fear, that is in reverence, in love to Christ you'd endure because you can't kill true faith. The promise of God guarantees it, the purposes of God guarantee it, the power of God guarantees it. That's so wonderfully encouraging.

Now listen to this. This doctrine does not say that believers will be eternally saved regardless of their belief or behavior, it doesn't say that. It says believers will be eternally saved because their faith will continue. You say, "What about those people who once named the name of Christ and don't anymore? What about those people who said they were Christians and bailed out? What about those people who made a confession of Christ...of faith in Christ at some point and now they don't?" Remember the words of Jesus, Mark 4:5, "Some seed fell on the rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, immediately sprang up because it had no depth of soil. After the sun had risen it was scorched and because it had no root it withered away." You know what that was? Jesus described that. They're just temporary. And when affliction or persecution arises, verse 17, they fall away. And what does that prove? They never were saved, right? First John 2:19, "They went out from us because they were not of us, if they had been of us they would have continued with us, they went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not of us." That's the key.

I can tell you that no matter what may come in the world, if you're a true Christian your faith will persevere by God's grace. Go back to Revelation 14 and that is the promise of this verse and it's such a bright spot in the midst of this darkness in this section, cause, you know, we're getting into this thing of Antichrist and demons all over the place and hell belching out all its powers and the sky collapsing and the earth disintegrating and massacres going on all over the face of the earth and the horrors of this period of time. And the question that's going to come is, "Well what is going to happen to Christians? Are they going to be able to survive this?" And the answer is...what?...yes because of the perseverance of the saints.

The Tribulation saints will take all that the beast can give and they will hupomone, they will remain under it and endure it with patience, sustained, persistent faithfulness under the most relentless and vicious persecution and martyrdom. And they will die painful deaths, but blessed are the dead because of how they lived. And how did they live? Verse 12, "Who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." That's how they lived. They keep the commandments of God.

That's the first evidence of true salvation, isn't it? John 8:31. "If you continue in My Word then are you My real disciple." John 14, an absolutely crucial verse, verse 21 of John 14, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." You see, it's the obedient who demonstrate true salvation. First John 5:3, "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments." That's characteristic of true believers.

So you see what he's saying here, the perseverance of the saints is demonstrated in, first of all, obedience...obedience. They keep the commandments. Secondly, it's demonstrated in trust. Look back at verse 12 again. They not only keep the commandments of God but they keep their faith in Jesus. Trust, loyalty to Christ, loyalty to Jesus even under the deadly reign of Antichrist who demands loyalty to himself and kills those who refuse. The true believer continues to believe, he continues to trust in Jesus through it all. That's the only kind of faith the Lord would give us anyway, what in the world would be the point of God giving us a faith that couldn't endure? After all, whatever faith we have comes from Him, doesn't it? And why would He want to give us a faith that didn't endure? That's absolutely inconsistent with His promise, His eternal purpose in electing, His power which is able to keep us. People in Hebrews 11 never lost their faith. They endure to the end, believing and obeying.

You look at that time in the future and maybe you say, "Boy, I wouldn't want to be alive at that time, I

don't know whether I could survive." If your faith is real, you would, you would. Why are these dead blessed? Because they lived life most purely, most nobly, most purposefully, most fully, most richly, most joyously, most happily, most exemplary. Why? Because they lived life the best it can be lived, they lived it in faith in Christ and obedience to God. That's the best of life. If there was no heaven, that's the best of life.

The righteous life is the best life if there was no heaven. And blessed are the dead if there's nothing beyond the grave because of how they lived life in obedience to the commandments of God and trust, and they are the happy and the blessed. But there's more.

They're also blessed not only because of how they live, but look at verse 13...how they died. They lived with perseverance, they died with promise. This is tremendous. Verse 13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying," four times earlier in the book of Revelation there is such a heavenly voice...twice in chapter 10, once in chapter 11 and then back in verse 2 of chapter 14. It could be Christ, as the voice in chapter 1 verses 11 and 19. It could be God. There are two more voices from heaven, one is in chapter 18 verse 4, the other in chapter 21 verse 3, and they are obviously God. So it's very likely a word from the Lord rather than an angel. And you know, there are so many angels mentioned in this chapter as we pointed out last time, lots of angels. Starting in verse 6 you have three angels, starting down in verse 15 you have several more angels. The fact that it doesn't say this was an angel indicates it probably wasn't. Very likely a word from the Lord and the word is this, "Write." John is told to write. And it sort of may be a way of saying, "John, I know this is very fascinating stuff, but could you concentrate on what you're supposed to be doing?" John is under divine mandate to record the word from God. And here's what I want you to write, "Blessed are the dead. Blessed are the martyrs like Antipas in chapter 2 verse 13, blessed are the martyrs under the altar in chapter 6 verses 9 to 11, blessed is that innumerable congregation in chapter 7 who are in heaven who have come out of the Tribulation, not only because they lived life to the fullest in obedience and trust because they die in the Lord."

No wonder Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." No wonder the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 said, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" Death doesn't frighten the believer at all. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, who die with a relationship to the living God through Jesus Christ. Not only because they lived life to the fullest in obedience and trust, but because they will experience in death the fullest reward and promise.

See the little phrase at the end of the statement "write." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." What does that mean? Through the rest of the Great Tribulation, to the very end when Jesus Christ returns to destroy the wicked and set up His Kingdom. You don't have to fear. You don't have to worry. You're going to be blessed right on out to the end.

And then, I just love this response. "Yes," says the Spirit. That's almost the vernacular today, isn't it? I mean, when people want to punctuate something they like, they say YES! That's the Holy Spirit saying that. By the way, the Holy Spirit only speaks here and in chapter 22 verse 17. This is affirmation. This is the Holy Spirit saying, "Yes! I want them dead, I want them out of that." You say, "Why?" Well He's got all the work of sustaining them. He loves them. And He wants to see them out of all of that pain and He adores His own. He has sustained the saints and strengthened the saints who have suffered all the way to martyrdom. He's on their side and He's excited about their pain being over. And He's excited about their tears and sorrows being wiped away. And so He says,

"Yes!"

And they are blessed for two reasons. Because of how they die, first one...rest. "Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors." The Holy Spirit loves believers perfectly. He longs for them to enter their eternal rest. He longs for them to be delivered from their labors. That word is very interesting. The...the term can mean to tire oneself, to wear oneself out, to make a great effort or a great exertion. It can mean to beat the breast or to lament. The noun form can have the sense of troubles and often is translated that way, or fatigue. Life for these dear saints during the time of the Tribulation will be filled with the worst trouble, the deepest sorrow as those they love are killed...children, parents, spouses. They will have to demonstrate the greatest exertion of strength to survive. They'll have no ability to buy or sell in that economy. They'll be on the brink of starvation. They'll be hunted to death. But when they die, they'll rest.

Like the worn mariner, wearied with his long and painful endurance of the tempest and dangers of the sea enters a calm port, home. Like a wounded soldier mutilated, scarred and sick from the miseries of deadly battle comes back from the fields of blood to lie in the peace and safety of his own house. So ten thousand times more do these rest when they go home to glory and the Spirit says Yes, let them rest.

Does that give you the sense that the Spirit of God loves us and longs for us to enjoy the best? The damned never ever forever will rest, that's what it says in verse 11. Their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest. But Christians rest.

There's a second reason why they are blessed by how they die, not just rest but reward, the end of verse 13. "For their deeds follow with them." Deeds, erga, work, it means their service to the Lord. Well what do you mean? Well when you go to heaven, when these believers go to heaven, the things they've done for the Lord are going to follow right to heaven with them. What do you mean by that? Listen to this, here is another way to say the same thing. Hebrews 6:10, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." God's not going to forget your service. When you go to heaven the record of your service is going with you. You'll not only have rest, you'll have reward. You'll have reward. That's the promise. My, what a wonderful, glorious promise it is that the Lord some day will grant to us a crown of life, an incorruptible crown. He will grant to us a crown of rejoicing.

The Apostle Paul anticipated that, didn't he? In his last letter, the final letter of his wonderful life and ministry, 2 Timothy chapter 4, he said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me the crown. And the Lord, the righteous judge, will not only give it to me on that day, but to all who love, have loved His appearing." Our works will be tested and rewarded.

You remember what Revelation 20:12 says? I'm sure you remember it. "I saw the dead, the great and the small standing before the throne and books were opened and another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds." God not only has a book with a record of the sins of unbelievers, but He has a book with the record of the service of saints. And He will reward the righteous. He will test our works, 1 Corinthians 3 says, to see if they're gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble. What is wood, hay and stubble will just disappear, and what is left will be the basis of our reward.

So, blessed are the dead, not just any dead, those who live in obedience and trust, those who die in rest and reward. The rest are damned. How tragic. Certainly my prayer for you is that you're among the blessed and not the cursed.

Lord, again Your Word is so powerful and so direct. We thank You for the tremendous richness of this marvelous little passage. We thank You that You've given us an enduring faith. We thank You that we can say death is a blessing, death will be satisfying and fulfilling because of how we lived in obedience and trust and because in death we will go on to rest and reward. But, O God, how our hearts are broken over those who in death will face the reality that they did not obey Your commandments, they did not trust Your Son, for them there is no rest forever and no reward, only punishment. We thank You, Father, for the encouragement and the confidence that those of us who belong to You will always belong to You. Your purpose, Your promise, Your power guarantee that and we rejoice that You will keep us from stumbling and bring us faultless before Your throne, that You who have begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. We thank You for an eternal faith that never dies, what a gift. And we pray, Father, that many would receive that gift to Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).