***Justice for the Martyrs

RV125-02***

We are studying the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11. This is segment number 9.

**The Tribulation**

During the seven-year tribulation period on earth, following the rapture of the church, there will be a bloody persecution of born-again people everywhere. Many of these martyrs will be people indeed who have had opportunity to receive Jesus Christ as Savior before the tribulation period began. Now, suddenly, when the tribulation period begins, they see indeed this vast number of human beings, who compose the community of believers (the Christians – the church), removed. Now they recall the things they have heard. They recall the preaching they heard on television. They recall the things they have heard on tapes. They recall the things they've read. And they do realize that indeed the prediction about the rapture was true. The fact that God is going to bring tremendous judgment upon the earth during a period of seven years following the removal of the church is beginning to take place before their very eyes. And suddenly, they realize that they have made a tremendous mistake.

Many of these people, at that point, will turn in faith to Jesus Christ. They will have lost the privilege of being part of the body of Christ, the church. They will not have the unique position that you and I will hold in eternity. They will be back on Old Testament ground. They will be born-again, and they will be saved. But instead of escaping the tribulation judgments, they will suffer great pain, and many of them death itself. The tribulation saints, therefore, do go to heaven, but they go via persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. Satan has always been a murderer, and he now engages in a frenzy of slaughter of God's people as he himself, as a student of the Word of God, realizes that God has allotted him seven years to make it, and then it's going to be all over. This is his last hurrah, so he goes all out.

**Martyrs**

The believers who are slain in the tribulation are martyrs because their deaths are the result of their biblical testimony to their murderers. You become a martyr only when you are killed *because* of your faith in Jesus Christ, and a testimony to that faith. A society which exalts man as the supreme source of values has a bitter hatred for those exalting God and the Bible. Mankind today has little regard for the Bible, so man's law is placed above God's law.

The tribulation martyrs are going to learn the hard way what the consequences of that is. They will learn the hard way what happens when rulers' law is set above peoples' law? They will discover how that always leads to tyranny, and to the loss of freedom, not the least of which will be the loss of the freedom of conscience – to believe what their conscience leads them to believe concerning God on the basis of Scripture. That will be denied them. Their insistence on that faith will cost them their lives.

So, these tribulation martyrs become very good students of Scripture in a hurry, and they will hold firmly to what the Bible teaches. Probably the greatest antagonism will be raised against the tribulation saints when they point out to the antichrist's world that the sufferings which have come upon mankind (which we have studied in the first four seals) are the direct judgments of God against the unbelievers. That will not set well with that society at all, when these people say: "What is happening today is exactly what the Bible said would happen. You can go ahead and read it right here if you want to. God's judgment is upon you. You are wrong. Turn from your evil, and turn to God.

They will be a bunch of Noahs going around sounding for a warning, but few will listen to them. The tribulation saints will know that they are right, and they will therefore be uncompromising in their condemnation of the antichrist and his followers. The zealous, concerned, and loving pleas of these tribulation believers will be rewarded with painful death.

So, John sees these tribulation martyrs in heaven as disembodied souls inquiring when their murderers will be avenged by God: How long before justice is executed?

So, coming to Revelation 6:11, we read, "And white robes were given unto every one of them." Immediately, we have to be aware of the fact that the souls of these martyrs are visible to John's eyes. Their bodies are not there, but their souls are in heaven, and they are visible. They are capable, furthermore, of expressing emotions, as we have seen, as they call upon God for justice to be executed. And they are capable of speaking intelligibly and understandably. The bodies of these same souls will have been destroyed. They will be buried, or they will have been burned while on the earth.

These souls, furthermore, can be clothed so that they are not just spirits. They have something in the form of an intermediary body – something that stands between the time a person dies and goes to heaven, and leaves his body behind; and, the time of the resurrection when his soul and spirit are reunited with the body. They are not just spirits, because a spirit has no physical, bodily form. God is a spirit, but God does not have a body form. We speak about the eyes of God; the ears of God; and, the hands of God, but those are just ways of humanly describing Him so that we can understand what God does. But spirit beings are not so constructed. But a soul does have a shape compatible to that of a physical human body.

**Robes**

To these souls, therefore, without the bodies, there are given these robes. The word for "robe" here in the Greek Bible looks like this. It's the Greek word "stole." You can see immediately that from this word we get the English word "stole," which is a long-scarf like garment that the person (usually a lady) wears around the neck, and drapes over the shoulders. In the Greek, this word refers to a robe in the form of a long garment reaching to the feet, and sometimes with a train behind it.

The Jewish scribes used to love to wear this type of garment because it looks so classy, and it gave them an air of importance and dignity in the eyes of people. So, they used to wear the "stole" just to show off. In Luke 20:46, we're told exactly that. Jesus says, "Beware of the scribes who desire to walk in long robes, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief places at feasts. The Lord says, "Don't be conned by the scribes who walk around in this robe-like garments that awe you as they come by. They just love you to clasp your hands and bow as they come by, and say, 'Good day, your excellency.'"

Now, that, of course, is really a fitting thing to do as you leave church on Sunday morning and are greeting the minister at the door, even though he is not wearing his "stole." Now, there are some ministers at some churches who do wear the "stole." Where did they get the idea? Right here, folks – out of the old scribe system, they wear the long robes, and the decorations, and even the "stole" around it, which is kind of a little scarf they wear. And you just do want to buy down and say, "Good morning, your excellency," or something appropriate. So, the scribes caught on to this a long time ago, and they went big for this type of garment.

It is a garment, however, which also has a dignified use, for we are told that this is exactly the way the angel, that was found in the Lord's tomb after He was resurrected, was dressed. Mark 16:5: "And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man (who was really an angel) sitting on the right side clothed in a long white garment, and they were amazed." What was he wearing? He was wearing the "stole." If you walked into that sepulcher where Jesus had been buried, and from which He was now resurrected, and you saw this angel who looks like a young man dressed in this dramatic white garment, that's an impressive sight. It's this very thing that John sees on these martyred saints in heaven.

It is also a sign of a kind of a robe that you put on a person to express a personal emotion toward the person – a sense of wanting to honor the person. This was true in the case of the prodigal son when he finally decided to come home. Luke 15:22 tells us that the father put a "stole" upon him: "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe (the best 'stole') and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet,'" and so on. Here again, to honor the son, he put this kind of a garment on him.

**White in Color**

Furthermore, these garments are described as being white in color. In the Bible, the word "white" stands for righteousness. These white garments symbolize God's absolute righteousness which has been imputed to these martyrs who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, these martyrs are clearly portrayed as possessing eternal life – as being qualified to be in heaven, in the presence of a holy God. They don't have everything that is coming to them as yet, but they have arrived at the first stage of comfort after an enormously terrible time upon the earth. Some of them are dying, undoubtedly, under great torture and under great pain.

However what their future holds for us is described a little later in Revelation 7:13: "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, 'Who are these who are arrayed in white robes, and from where did they come?'" He is speaking about the same people that John sees arrayed in these white robes: "And he said unto him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are they who are come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;'" that is, these are people who enter the tribulation as unbelievers (lost, and condemned to hell), who, for one reason or another, remembered something or heard the gospel from the 144,000 evangelists. However they have believed the gospel, they have been born again.

**Justification**

Verse 15: "Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He that sits on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." This is a very comforting picture for these who have suffered so much. So, the white robes that John sees upon these martyred saints indicate their justification.

**A Free Gift**

Furthermore, these robes are not something that they have earned. John says, "They are given to them." This is our old Greek word "didomi." "Didomi" means "to provide something." These martyrs receive the white robe from God. It is grammatically in that aorist tense, which indicates that it is the point, when a person is born again by trusting in Jesus Christ as personal Savior, that he receives this garment of absolute righteousness. Interestingly and properly, it is in the passive voice, which tells us that they received this as a gift. If it were active, it would mean that they had earned it – they had done something to get this robe themselves. But it indicates very clearly in the Bible that you can't get this white robe by anything you do. It has to be a gift from God rather than something that you put on as the result of your good works. It's a statement of divine truth.

**None is Excluded**

Furthermore, none is excluded Verse 9 says, "And white robes were given to every one of them." We have this very definitive Greek word "hekastos," indicating that no born-again person fails to receive the white robe of justification. No salvation loss is possible. These people were given the robes as a result of trusting in Christ. They experienced the new birth. You cannot reverse birth. You cannot reverse your physical birth, as Nicodemus observed, and you cannot reverse spiritual birth either. That's why God used the analogy of birth.

**Consciousness**

Now, the physically did are obviously not in a state of unconsciousness or nonexistence. These people are very much alive. They have a lot of emotion; they have a lot of thought; they have a lot of memory; and, they have a lot of desires that they are expressing to God. Because they have been stripped of their sin nature (because they left that behind with their physical bodies in the grave, or whatever happened to those bodies), they are free of that evil. Therefore, their every emotion and every thought is in perfect conformity to the mind of God. They act in complete and perfect holiness. The tribulation martyrs are conscious, obviously, here in heaven, and that indicates that there is some kind of an intermediate state between physical death and the resurrection. You are not unconscious; oblivious; or, out of it.

**Continued Existence**

There are several biblical examples of this, and it is a comfort to go through the Bible, and to verify and confirm that this is what happens. When Mrs. Danish and I visited in northern Minnesota, we went by the Bagley Cemetery to visit the grave site where her parents were buried. When we got to Chicago, we went by the cemetery and visited the grave site where my parents are buried. As I look out across that vast array of tombstones in that cemetery, I was impressed with the fact that all of these represent human beings who are in existence. Every one of them was dead as a doornail, and some of them have been dead so long that you could see how the grave has sunk because they have been well on their way toward returning to dust, and everything that they were buried in along with it. But they're not out of existence. As you look across a cemetery, you wonder, "Where are these people? What does happen?" It is a very natural thought that, sooner or later, we face: What is going to happen when, in some moment, all of a sudden, death comes? We cannot stop it. We cannot resist it. We cannot hold it off. Sometimes we don't even have any notice that is going to happen. It just happens. Sometimes we have some preparation for it. But in any case, when your eyes close in physical death, what next?

**Physical Death**

In Matthew 10:28, we have a very clear indication of what is next: "And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but, rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," or "Gehenna" is the actual word, which was the word that the Jews used to refer to hell. Now, if a soul dies when the body dies, as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim, then whoever kills the body would also kill the soul. But this Scripture says, "The one who kills the body cannot kill the soul. Jesus says, "Don't be so concerned about the one who can take your physical life. What you should be concerned with is about the God who can take your physical body, with its life, and your soul, with its life, and, in effect, destroy it by putting you into the lake of fire for all eternity, separated from God, which is described as death. The word "death" always means "separation," and in the case of eternal death, that it is separation from the presence of God.

So, this verse very clearly says that there is a conscious life of the soul which the death of the body does not affect. You do not go into unconsciousness when you die. Only God has the power, of course, to destroy both the soul and the body in hell in terms of separation from Him forever.

So, while we are concerned for the physical body, and while these martyrs, who will be under the threat of a society that hates them, and will be under the concern of physical death, we are all reminded that our concern should not be so much for the fact that we may be physically done in, but that our souls should be prepared for what is out there ahead, because the soul does not die. It is not killed.

Luke 20:37: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush when he called the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; for He is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all are alive unto Him. Here the Lord Jesus points out that God is not the God of those who are dead. He is not the God of those who do not exist. He is only a God of those who are alive. When Moses was at the bush, he called God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even though these patriarchs were long dead physically. How could he call God the God of Abraham if Abraham was no longer in existence; or, Jacob or Isaac, if they were no longer in existence? Well, the truth of the matter is that since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still existed as souls, fully alive and fully conscious, God was still their God. And it further indicated that the covenant which God had made with them in behalf of the Jews was still in force.

When you make a contract with a person, if that person dies, then that contract is at an end. He cannot fulfill his part, and you're free from anything that you've committed to him, unless there's somebody else coming along behind him in the form of an heir to take it up. But a contract is terminated upon death. Now, God has made a contract with Israel. To Abraham, God said, "I'm going to make the Jews the leading nation of the world. Someday they will rule the whole world. I will send you a Messiah Savior King who will rule over the whole earth from the city of Jerusalem. You will be my chosen special people in that kingdom." All of these promises are still in effect, even though Abraham is long dead; and Isaac, to whom the promises were transferred, is long dead; and, Jacob, to whom they were passed, is also dead.

**Physical Resurrection**

Furthermore, the physical resurrection, of these patriarchs was necessary, as this Scripture indicates, because the terms of the covenant, in order to be fulfilled, required them to be physically alive. How can David rule over the Jewish people under Jesus Christ unless David be physically raised? How can Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoy the Millennial Kingdom, and have their place in it, unless they are physically alive? That is how they are going to enjoy it. So, here again, this Scripture makes it very clear that when a person dies, he is indeed in his soul very much alive.

Luke 16:19-31 is a very dramatic example of that very fact. This is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. You're well acquainted with it. The departed rich man and Lazarus, we find, are both in Hades. Now, their bodies are back in the graves, but they are consciously alive as souls. As disembodied souls, they know exactly what's going on. They're both aware of their surroundings. They have retained the memory of their lives before death. The rich man, as a soul, speaks to Abraham, who is in his soul state. He relates his concern for his five brothers who are still physically alive on the earth. Thus, both the lost and the saved have a conscious soul life after physical death, and in some kind of an intermediary body that they are existing in. The rich man was lost, but his soul was conscious, and he had some kind of a temporary body. Lazarus was saved. He was in the Paradise part of Hades. He had consciousness, and he had a memory. He was fully aware of what was going on.

**Hades: Paradise and Torments**

Luke 23:43 is another example. Jesus was speaking to the thief on the cross who believed in him: "Jesus said unto him, 'Verily, I say unto you, today you shall be with me in paradise. Jesus promises the believing thief, here on the cross, that he will join the Lord in the happiness of paradise in Hades that day. You remember that Hades, before the resurrection, was divided into two compartments. Everybody went to Hades. It had one compartment that was called Paradise for those who were saved, such as Lazarus and Abraham went to. It had another compartment for those who were the lost, such as the rich man went into, called Torments. All three of the men on the cross, after they died, while their bodies still hung on the cross in death – all three of them, as disembodied souls, went into Hades. Two of them went into Paradise: Jesus; and, the believing thief. One of them, the unbelieving thief, went into Torments. They were fully conscious of what was happening.

**Purgatory**

Jesus said to the believing thief, "This day, you will be with Me in Paradise." The implication very clearly is, "You will know it. I will be there. You will be with me." This condition, furthermore, is stressed as being immediate. It is "this day." There is no purgatory way station. Every Roman Catholic who dies, dies with the tragic hope of making it out of purgatory in one way or another. He never expects to go to heaven. I am shocked when people wonder that we do not consider Roman Catholicism a Christian system. It is a pagan system to the core. It promises nothing more than the Babylonian mystery religion promised to its adherents – that they would someday, upon death, enter purgatory, whereupon a certain cleansing process, and certain things done by the living in their behalf, they would eventually enter a place of paradise. That's where the whole idea of purgatory came from in the first place – from that pagan system. Any system that contradicts what the Bible teaches – that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, is not a Christian system.

So, this is what these martyrs in Revelation have discovered. Being absent from their physical bodies did not mean oblivion, but it meant, as souls, fully conscious, in the presence of the Lord.

**Paul**

We have one more example from the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21. It gives us an insight from the teachings of Paul concerning what happens after death: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Now, Paul's life on earth was lived in maximum fellowship with Jesus Christ, in maximum joy, and in maximum blessing. Here was a man who had that tremendous walk with God that he was deeply conscious of. He knew what he was doing. He knew what God wanted him to do. He even was conscious when he was moving in the direction that the Lord said, "No, that's not what I want to do. I want you to do this." He was fully conscious of that. He was sensitive to it, and he changed direction. Now that is a great walk with the Lord.

He was not perfect. There are times when Paul made serious mistakes. For example, there was the time that he went to Jerusalem, and took a Jewish vow, and went through Jewish rituals to try to appease the Jewish opponents who were teaching him that he was against the laws of Moses, and against the righteousness of God. Instead of proclaiming the truth of Scripture, he was going to show them by compromising with the legalism of the old system that was dead. The result of which was that a riot began; the Roman soldiers came along; they took him into protective custody; they had to have a court trial; and, it was four years before he was released from that act of foolishness on his part. He was not acting under the direction of God.

He finally had to ask to be transferred from Caesarea, after two years of cooling his heels there, to Rome for a personal trial before the emperor. And it was two more years before his case finally came up, and at which time he was indeed declared innocent, and freed. But that was a lot of time that he had lost in terms of freedom. Out of it, of course, came the great prison epistles, of which Philippians is one, and it was not a total loss. But it was very clear that Paul was a man who knew what he was walking with God, and when he was out of step. Yet, in spite of that, this man says, "To die is even greater gain." How could it be greater gain, for a man who walks so closely with the living God, to die and then to go into oblivion – for his soul to be completely unconscious? There's no gain to that. That could only be considered a very great loss.

Paul expected his death, instead, to usher him into the very presence of the Lord. So, it would heighten what he had enjoyed in walking with the Lord Jesus here on this earth. Paul would surely not have looked forward to the end of his life; to the end of his mission; and, to physical death if it meant oblivion of soul for him. But as he said, absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

So, it is very clear, as we research Scripture, that what John sees is indeed confirmed by the Word of God throughout – that when a person loses his body, he remains conscious in his soul, and he knows exactly what is going on. He knows exactly what is surrounding him, and what is taking place with him. And John hears the souls who are in some kind of intermediate bodies who have died during the tribulation as martyrs. The period that John views is a time of severe divine judgments upon humanism.

**Justice and Vengeance**

So, the saints call for justice and for vengeance. This is a legitimate thing for them to do – to call for this kind of justice to be executed upon their murderers. God hears their cry, and He comes to comfort them and to reassure them of His faithfulness toward them. The first thing he does is that he gives each martyred believer this celestial white robe to wear as he awaits the resurrection of his body. Now, he must have, as we said, an intermediate body as a soul in order to put this garment on. These white robes confirm clearly that they are justified people. Their eternal destiny is in heaven after the resurrection. It is a comforting proof.

**Rest for a Little Season**

Then God answers their question: "And it was said to them that they should rest yet for a little season." The word "said" is the Greek word "eipon," which is a divine declaration to them at this point. When they ask this question, they receive this message: "They are told that." The word "that" is the Greek word "hina." This word introduces God's plan for them. What does he want them to do? He says, "I want you to rest ('anapauo').” "Anapauo" means "to release from labor; to refresh yourself; or, just to lean back and take it easy."

This word was not an uncommon word in New Testament Times. We find it recorded in the statement in Luke 12:19, where the man who had become enormously rich but was without spiritual discernment, and so he was a rich fool, decided that he had it made, and that he would take his "anapauo." So, Luke 12:19, says, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years. Take your ease (and there we have the word). Eat, drink, and be merry:" Just enjoy life; just indulge yourself; and, just move along through life totally dedicated to material pleasures and pursuits. He's telling this to his soul. Now, his soul isn't about to be able to do this, because in the next verse: "God says unto him, 'You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you (I'm going to jerk it right out of your body). Then whose shall those things be which you have provided?"

Your soul cannot take these things to heaven. Your soul cannot enjoy these earthly material things. You can only enter into those things in your physical body. Instead of sending these things ahead as treasures in heaven, his soul had to leave them all behind. That's why he was a fool. He wasn't a fool because he was so clever in earning money. He wasn't a fool because he had been such an entrepreneur and become wealthy. He wasn't a fool even because he enjoyed some of the things that God had prospered him with. He was a fool because he didn't put ahead into eternity, through investment in God's work, under the leading of the Spirit of God, that which his soul could indeed have enjoyed for all eternity, as rewards. But the thing he wanted to do was this very same thing that the Lord tells these martyred saints to do: "Just lean back and relax."

The Lord Jesus used this word in a couple of places. We have it in Mark 6:31: "He said to them (speaking to his disciples), come aside into a desert place and rest a while (there is the word 'rest'), for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." He said to his disciples, "Come aside. We're going to take a break. We're going to go out here to a desert place. We're going to have a little retreat by ourselves to get away from the crowds. They have pressed upon us. The ministry has been so burdensome that we haven't even had time to stop and eat on a regular basis." So, the Lord calls for some R-and-R (some rest and recreation) for His troops. He uses this very word, "come aside, and relax."

The Lord also uses it in Matthew 26:45. He's in the Garden of Gethsemane praying: "Then He came to His disciples, and said unto them, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man has betrayed Him to the hands of sinners." And he uses this word: "Now go ahead, and fall asleep, and relax." So, it's very clear that what the Lord is calling upon these people to do is to find a moment of peace and quiet. In the New Testament world, this word "anapauo" was used on tombstones under which would be placed the person's date of death. So, you'd have some expression on the tombstones like: "Rest," or "Rest in Peace," and then the date of the person's death.

This "rest" is in the aorist tense when God speaks to them. It's in the middle voice, which tells us that the rest will be to their benefit. Middle tells us that it returns to their benefit. And this is the subjunctive mood, which means it is a potential. It is a time of rest after suffering.

So, he says, "Rest, yet." The word "yet" is "eti," which means "still;" that is, "for a little while." He uses the word "little" which is "mikros," and he says for a little "season:" "chronos." The word here means "a duration of time." He tells these martyrs just to standby, at ease, for a short period of time before seeing God's vengeance exercised, which they are asking Him about. They have been in a state of blessed repose up to this time. They're awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. They are not wandering restless ghosts. They are well-cared for. The Lord says to them, "Just relax for a little while longer." Well, the "little while longer" is to whatever is left of the seven-year tribulation period.

Then he gives them the reason for it. He says, "I want you to do this until." The word "until" is the adverb "hos." This is a word that indicates a terminal point. We would have the word "number" understood. We would translate this: "Until the number of," and he refers to a group that he calls first their fellow servants (their "sundoulos"). The "sundoulos" is literally your fellow slaves of Jesus Christ. This refers to the tribulation era believers who are still alive on the earth; people who are still witnessing to the doctrines of Scripture; who are still proclaiming the Word of God; and, to people that he calls, not only their fellow slaves, but their brethren (their "adelphos"). This word refers to those saved people who are related by the new birth to the martyrs in heaven.

God, in every era of human history has his remnant of believers who form his family. During the tribulation, some of that family is in heaven as disembodied souls. Some of them are on earth still witnessing. To those who are in heaven, he says, "I want you to rest a little while until those who are your fellow slaves of Jesus Christ (those who are your brothers in the family of God) should be (or "are about to be") killed. The word "should be" is the word "mello." It means "about to be." This is present tense. It is their constant status. They're on the very edge. They're walking the very edge of having their lives snuffed out. It's active. It's their personal condition. And it's a spiritual principle which is stated here.

**They're about to be Killed**

What they are about to be is "killed" ("apokteino"). It means "to terminate life." It is present tense. The constant destiny of the tribulation believers is that they're about to be killed. It's passive. This is done to them by the antichrist and his people. The Christians are not suicides. The tribulation unbelievers, as we will find in time, actually call upon the mountains to fall on them, and they seek to destroy themselves. They are driven to suicide by the horrors that they see and what is taking place. But the Christians who are taking the suffering (the believers who are taking this suffering), they do not commit suicide. This killing is done to them.

It is infinitive in the mood, which means that this tells us that this is God's purpose for these saints. God sometimes takes his people, and He makes martyrs of them. In this case, He has a certain number that he is allotted for martyrdom, and He tells those who are in heaven that that number is not yet complete. God's people in the tribulation are going to experience the worst persecution and suffering in the history of mankind. The tribulation society of Satan will slaughter these believers without mercy. They will do it because these believers will not succumb to the worship of the antichrist. Revelation 13:15 points that out: "And he had power to give life unto the image, the false prophet of the beast, that the image of the beast both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." And that's why many of these people in the tribulation will be killed.

Today, there are many Christians who have the mistaken notion that the world has become enlightened, broadminded, and civilized, so that they would not brutalize any group of people, but they are quite wrong. The world today is being prepared, as a matter of fact, to hate those who declare that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God to which society must submit. If you want to get people to ire up, you just sound off the fact that the Bible is a book without mistakes; that it is from God; that it is a supernatural book; and, what it says, we are subject to. You will get such howls of protest, and you will get such antagonism against you from the ERA; from the abortionists; from the social welfare office; and, from everybody down the line who is functioning on anti-biblical principles. From those who hate the fact of male leadership in positions of authority – they will be ready to crucify you, if you say that the Bible is God's inerrant, no-mistake book, and it condemns what you are planning to do. I assure you that the world is being prepared to execute those who become believers during the tribulation after we, the church, have been removed. No believer will be left behind in the rapture. Some of you probably deserve to be, but you're all going to go in willy-nilly, whether-or-no.

So, the tribulation is an era of unrestrained indulgence of the lusts of the sin nature, and those who object will be ridiculed and silenced. We see the same thing today. More and more, we're hearing the ridicule of the fundamentalists, and we're hearing the calls to silence those people, and to prevent them from having any access to the levers of power.

Well, the Lord says, "These people, your brethren, and fellow slaves of Jesus Christ, are about to be killed as "hos," indicating the manner as the tribulation saints in heaven have been killed. The idea is they're going to be killed just as you have been killed, until such time as they will fill up the number of those whom God has allotted for martyrdom. They are to be killed just as they were (those who already are in heaven), until the number should be fulfilled. The word is "pleroo." The word means to be completed. It is aorist tense – at the point when God's ordained number of martyrs has been reached. It is passive. This number of martyrs is the result of action against the believers by others. It is subjunctive. This is potential death of martyrs awaiting the saints.

**We are Potential Martyrs too**

The same potential is true for you and me. Do not think that is not possible that you and I too may be called upon to be martyrs. The world can change just like that overnight with the proper people in positions of authority who are steeped in human viewpoint. That's all it takes. Once they are in control, there will be no turning back. That has happened in the history of the world again and again. The martyrs in heaven are reminded that God's time of opportunity for repentance is not yet over. That's what the Lord is saying: "Enjoy your white garment. Enjoy all that it signifies. Sit back; stand at ease; and, enjoy some relaxation after what you've been through. There are other believers that I'm going to bring into heaven through martyrdom. They are still there testifying. I am still giving the world of the antichrist an opportunity to turn back.

God always gives grace before He brings judgment. God always appeals to you and me as Christians to stop the evil that we're engaged in; to stop the mental attitude sins that we're pursuing; to stop the stupid directions we've taken; and, to turn around and come back to sanity spiritually. If we don't do it after a certain point, He disciplines, and He starts tearing us to shreds. If we turn around and come back, He then blesses and begins prospering again.

So, while the voice of those in heaven has been silenced, others on the earth have taken up the cause. For the martyrs in heaven, the suffering was over, but God still had others who would enter His heaven through martyrdom. The martyrs were ultimately, of course, the winners. And soon, God would resurrect their bodies, and lead them in reigning over the very earth during the millennium that had treated them, and had abused them so terribly.

Revelation 20:4 says of these people: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them. And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus (these people that John sees as martyrs), and for the Word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their right hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ 1,000 years."

It's going to be a tough time, but when it's over, they're going to be number one. They're going to be way up there, number one, in God's dealings. And those terrible memories will soon be behind them as they enter the era of being the rulers of the whole earth. Can you imagine what scorn and what ridicule will have been thrust against these believers who, in their preaching and in their proclaiming, would have told people, "Someday, if you turn to Jesus Christ, you will reign over this earth that is now dominated by the antichrist; his New Age thinkers; and, all of the humanism upon which he has structured this world." Soon, for these people, Psalm 37:35-36 will become a reality, where the Psalmist says, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

That's what's going to happen to all the arrogant, sophisticated people who run this world today. They look good now. They look powerful. But the time is coming when they're going to be all gone, and God will have removed and destroyed every one of them.

So, the saints in heaven hold on to the same blessed hope as you and I hold on to today – that which Titus 2:13-14 enunciates for us: "Looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people of His own, zealous of good works."

We too now long for the day when God's Word will rule mankind, so that peace and prosperity can come to all. Our robes of absolute righteousness are already ours. They're securely ours. But what a grand day it will be in the future when we put on those sinless immortal bodies to accompany those robes. The tribulation martyrs are simply reiterating the plea in the sample prayer that the Lord gave, which we have in Matthew 6:10, when the Lord said, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." That is the thing that these martyrs are calling for. In the meantime, you and I have to be prepared for the fact that, while we are winners, and while the world is doomed, the world is going to continue in its blind, heedless way. But we keep telling them, and we keep warning. Here and there, somebody listens.

However, it's going to be, to the very end, the way Luke 17:26, describes the final days: "And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man." Nobody would listen to him: "They did eat; they drank; they married wives; and, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."

That's going to be the end for those who will not listen to the voices of we who know what God has said: "As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat; they drank; they bought; they sold; they planted; and, they built. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed;" that is, when He returns.

So, we take comfort as the Lord comforted these tribulation saints. We're going to keep keeping on; we're going to keep our testimony going; we're going to keep sounding forth; and, we're going to expect people to turn their backs on us more and more; to be indifferent; to refuse to listen; and, to refuse to be benefited, but our job is to be faithful in season (when it is convenient) and to be just as faithful when the going gets tough out of season. For many of our believers (many of our brethren) are already up there in their rest. Well, those of us who are here now, we're still in the angelic conflict, and we're going to keep fighting until the Lord says, "Your job is through," and He takes us into His presence.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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