

# REVELATION – SERMON 34

## ***THE TRIBULATION MARTYRS***

Revelation 6:9-11

### INTRODUCTION

- The chief goal of modern-day Christianity is to gain the world's favour
- The greatest sin, in their view, is to offend the world
- Instead of fearing *God*, too many professing Christians fear *man* instead
- This so-called Christianity bears no resemblance to that which we find in Scripture, and which we read of in the pages of history (Mark 8:38)
- True Christianity is one that denies self and takes up the cross to follow Christ; that opposes this wicked world, and joyfully receives hateful persecution from the world
- Their idea is that the relationship between the world and the Christian should be one of harmony, not hostility
- Yet Christ said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51)
- Throughout history, millions have laid down their lives for their allegiance to Jesus Christ
- Millions more will do so during the coming tribulation
- Despite there being no church, and despite the restraining work of the Holy Spirit being taken away, there will be multitudes saved during the tribulation
- "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9)
- Note that salvation will still be by grace through faith, as it always has been
- But there will be little to protect such believers against the satanic assault upon their lives (Matthew 24:9-10)
- The opening of the fifth seal marks something of a departure from the direct and immediate divine judgments upon earth of the first four
- Yet this seal does involve divine judgment – one that is precipitated by the petition of the martyrs, and promised to them by God

## I. THEIR GLORIOUS DEATH FOR THEIR REDEEMER (9)

### A. Under the altar

1. The earthly tabernacle was patterned after the heavenly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:5)
2. Elsewhere in Revelation, there is an *incense* altar (5:8; 8:3-5; 14:17-18), but this seems to depict an altar of *sacrifice*
3. As the priest would pour out the blood of the sacrifice at the bottom of the altar (Leviticus 4:18), so these sacrificed saints are located under the heavenly altar
4. Their sacrifice is not one of propitiation for sins, but of devotion to God (Romans 12:1; 2 Timothy 4:6)

### B. Their souls

1. This Greek word (*psychas*) can indicate “life”, as well as the “soul”, contrasted with the physical body (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
2. These tribulation martyrs await their bodily resurrection which will take place at the beginning of the millennium (Revelation 20:4)
3. This confirms that physical death is not a cessation of existence or consciousness, but is the separation of the soul from the body (James 2:26)
  - a. For the believer it is to be “absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23)
  - b. At death, the Christian enters paradise and the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43)
  - c. The account of the rich man and Lazarus shows the contrasting states of believers and unbelievers who have died and await the resurrection of the body (Luke 16:19-31)
  - d. This refutes the false doctrine of “soul sleep” taught by the SDA and JW cults

### C. Slain for the word of God and their testimony

1. The word for “slain” is the same use of the Lamb in 5:8
2. Some see them as being killed during the whole course of church history, but this is not correct
  - a. Those believers would have been resurrected by this point
  - b. Their words in v.10 indicate that their murderers are still dwelling on the earth

3. Revelation 20:4 indicates that beheading may be the preferred method of execution during the tribulation
4. They were killed because they believed God's word and testified to the world what it said (Revelation 1:2,9)
5. They maintained a consistent testimony of Christ – their lives matched their profession, and their works do follow them (Revelation 14:13)

## II. THEIR GROANING FOR DIVINE RETRIBUTION (10)

### A. The grounds of their prayer

1. Lord (*despotes*) acknowledges God as Master, and them as his servants over whom he has complete rule
2. God is holy (cf. 4:8), he hates sin and cannot look on it with approval
3. God is true – he is true to his promises and faithful to his people

### B. The imprecation of their prayer

1. This is similar to the many prayers in the psalms for God to judge the wicked (Psalm 94:1-4)
2. This did not come from a personal hatred of their enemies, but from a zeal for righteousness
3. They sought not to avenge themselves, but left vengeance to God (Romans 12:19)
4. This is not so much a prayer for vengeance itself, but for the *hastening* of it, seeing they knew that it was certain (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8)
5. Note that the term “them that dwell on the earth” is a technical term denoting unbelievers during this time who are decidedly hostile to God (3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2)
6. While we should desire and pray for the repentance and salvation of our enemies, there is nothing wrong with praying for righteousness and justice to prevail upon earth, and a necessary consequence of this is the removal of the wicked (cf. 2 Timothy 4:14)

### C. The answer to their prayer

1. At the destruction of Babylon (ch.18) and the second coming of Christ (ch.19), these martyrs see their prayers fulfilled
2. Their petition becomes praise in 19:1-3

### III. THEIR GRACIOUS DRESS AND REASSURANCE (11)

#### A. The robes of salvation

1. White represents purity, holiness, righteousness
2. The white robe is the garment of the “overcomer”, the true believer in Jesus (Revelation 3:4-5)
3. The white robe of righteousness that makes a sinner fit for heaven cannot be earned or merited, it must be *given* (Romans 3:21-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9)
4. These robes are “made white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9,13-14)

#### B. The words of consolation

1. Rest for a season
  - a. Death is “rest” for the believer (Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 14:13)
  - b. They were to wait for God’s perfect timing
2. Till the number of martyrs is complete
  - a. As is the case now, God’s delay in establishing his kingdom on earth serves to give time for more sinners to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
  - b. “should be fulfilled” indicates a definite number – God foreknows the precise number and names of those who will be saved

### CONCLUSION

1. The purpose of our being, and all that we do, is the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)
2. We are also to glorify God in death (John 21:19)
3. We cannot hope to glorify the Lord in death if we do not glorify him in life
4. Death is nothing to the Christian, for he is already dead – dead to sin, the world and the flesh (Colossians 3:3)
5. If allegiance to Jesus Christ, and a public testimony of such was a criminal offence, would the authorities have enough evidence to convict you?
6. White garments are essential for those who would dwell in heaven with God
7. Those who do not have Christ’s righteousness imputed to them will be cast into the outer darkness of hell for ever (Matthew 22:1-14)
8. Christ counsels us to come to him “thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear” (Revelation 3:18)