

Revelation 6: 10 and 11; "How long O Lord?", Sermon # 60
in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness",
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on June 17th, 2007 in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We have now completed our brief study of the 10 persecuting Emperors of the Roman Empire. It was because of their terrible sins against Christ's Church and against many others in their Empire that God determined to bring such awful judgments upon them, and the Empire, in those days from 97 A.D. to 323 A.D. We have seen that the 10th persecution was the worst of all of the persecutions; that of Diocletian and his co-Emperors. Christianity did triumph over Paganism in the Roman Empire, but at what great cost is scarcely to be taken in. Gilles says this of that time when Galerius and Maximian Severus reigned, "It is indeed impossible for us to conceive, much more to express, the cruelties of that time." "Eusebius who was an eye-witness to them, tells us, that they were innumerable, and exceeded all relation: what a multitude of men, says he, had their right eyes bored out, and cauterized with a red hot iron, had their left legs burnt, and were condemned to the mines; all which they endured with the most admirable patience." "They despised the threatenings and barbarities of their enemies, and received the fatal sentence with a smile." "When persuaded to be tender of their lives, and to compassionate the case of the wives and children, they bore up against the temptation with manly courage, or rather with a soul truly pious and devoted to God, so as neither fears nor charms could take hold on them through the mighty power of God." He goes on further to say, "The Christians, condemning death, undervalued the Tyranny of the Emperor." "Men endured fire, sword, crucifixion, cruel beasts, drowning in the sea, the amputation and burning of the members of their body, the boring of their eyes, famine, chains; and in fine, all torments, rather than forsake the worship of God, and embrace that of idols." "Women also, as well as men, by the doctrine of the Word of God were made so courageous as to suffer the same torments." "Monsieur Godeau reckons, that in this persecution there was no fewer than seventeen thousand martyrs killed in one month's space." "And he observes, that, during the continuance of it, there were, in the province of Egypt alone, no less than one hundred forty-four thousand persons who died by the violence of their persecutors, and seven hundred thousand who died through the fatigues of banishment, or of the public works to which they

were condemned." Gilles concludes by saying, "The Emperors thought that they had finished their work, and the world, as in some ancient inscriptions found at Clunia in Spain, that they had utterly destroyed the name and superstition of the Christians, and had restored and propagated the worship of the Gods." "But they were far deceived in their vain boastings: Christianity was not destroyed, but rather further propagated; and where they had done their utmost to ruin it, even there it had a glorious resurrection, and Paganism hastened to its ruin."

These dear Christians who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held, are pictured here under the 5th seal as "crying out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth." So we want to look this afternoon at the subject of the cry of God's martyred saints for their blood to be avenged.

1st of all- We want to look at the question these martyred saints bring to the Lord.

"How long" is the beginning of this question. Now it ought to be obvious to us, from all that I have related to you; that from what these martyrs had experienced, they could not ascertain how long these persecutions would continue in the Roman Empire. They had triumphed over their persecutors, but the shedding of their blood and all the mistreatments and tortures that they had suffered were something which demanded that justice be served in judgments which the Lord would bring upon the "earth"; that is, the satanically inspired system of persecuting Emperors, which had attempted to exterminate them from the earth. They are not thinking primarily about the final and last judgment at the end of time where vengeance will be meted out by God against all sinners from all generations in all time. They are thinking of their own particular time and how Christ would deal with this great enemy of His Church which had wreaked such destruction upon His people as caused the persecutors to think that they had triumphed. The blood of these martyrs cries to God. And it has a voice asking "How long, O Lord?" It will not be long.

Then the next part of the question is, "until you judge and avenge our blood." There is a sense in which all the martyrs of all the generations have had this same cry. They have all died for the same testimony. It is the testimony of the true worship of God taking its stand against the false and wicked testimony of evil men. Turn back with me to Genesis 4. You remember the story of Cain and Abel and how they both brought offerings to the Lord. Abel's offering of the first-born of his flock and of their fat, was respected by the Lord. Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground was not

respected by the Lord. It was because his offering was not respected by the Lord that he became very angry and killed his brother. Verse 9 says, "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?'" "He said, 'I do not know.'" "Am I my brother's keeper?" "And God said, 'What have you done?'" "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." Abel's soul was resting safely in God's immediate presence at the time that God said this to Cain. God knew full well what had happened and that Cain was guilty of this awful sin of killing Abel. But part of God's vengeance, his repaying the sinner who murders his saints, is to begin their punishments while they are still here upon the earth. Verse 12 says, "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you." "A fugitive and vagabond you shall be on the earth." Abel was being avenged even before the last judgment. He was being avenged by God Himself in the curse that God placed upon Cain. Cain felt that it would be unbearable at that time, but this was just the beginning of his everlasting sorrows. "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" he says to the Lord. He fears falling into the hands of other men who will kill him, but God assures him that this will not happen. The Lord says to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold." "And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. This is actually a part of God judging and avenging the blood of His servant Able. There would always be for Cain, "the terrifying expectation of the Judgment of the last day in all of his cursed wanderings and in the barrenness of what the earth would produce for him. These were judgments placed upon him which rested upon him all the days of his life. And there were other judgments that were going to come upon him eternally.

So it is with our text in Revelation. These words of what the souls under the altar are crying for, are not meant to represent a real state of dissatisfaction with the state that they were presently in, in heaven. The souls which are really there, who were martyrs at that awful time that we described, do long for justice to be served, by the Holy and true God, upon all of their persecutors. Their cry represents also their holy longings for Christ's kingdom and cause to triumph by the overthrow of this persecuting system. It is representative of the state of every Christian's heart who remained alive in that time and the collective voice of the martyrs who had died during that time of the Pagan Roman Empire. They cried for God to act and to bring to a stop these unjust persecutions and bring His judgments against them avenge them speedily.

In Luke 18: 1-8 we get an idea of how much this is God's desire, as well, and why we His people ought always to pray and not to faint under

their persecutions for Jesus' sake. "There was a certain judge in who did not fear God nor regard man." Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'" "And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" "Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said.'" "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" You see from this that the words of the martyrs here in Revelation are representative of what those who are still living, and who are still experiencing persecution, also long for. They should continually cry to God. They may be uncertain as to how long all the persecution is going to continue, but its time is fixed by God and He will not let it go unavenged long, even upon the earth.

2ndly-We want to look at the answer that the Lord gives to these martyrs who are seeking justice.

They must wait and "rest for a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were was completed. The persecution of this time period of Pagan Rome seemed to go on and on. Those who were already victorious must rest awhile longer. But when would it end? How would God deal with the persecutors? We could spend many hours speaking of what happened to the persecuting Emperors of those days, but it will suffice if we speak of Galerius Caesar as representative of the rest. There came a time when each of these wicked men fell into the hands of the Almighty God. But Galerius' end seems particularly befitting. His treatment of Christians seems intolerable even to relate. The more complete accounts are found in Eusebius and Lactantius' writings. I could give you whole pages of the horrors of his tortures of Christians, and of many other Roman citizens as well, but I will not. It is truly too sickening and sorrowful to recount them. It is enough to know that the vast majority of Christians suffered bravely and they triumphed gloriously in their sufferings. But listen to what Lactantius says about his end.

"And now, when Galerius was in the eighteenth year of his reign, God struck him with an incurable plague." "A malignant ulcer formed itself low down in his secret parts, and spread by degrees." "The physicians attempted to eradicate it, and healed up the place affected." "But the sore, after having been skinned over, broke out again; a vein burst, and blood flowed in such quantity as to endanger his life." "The blood, however, was

stopped, although with difficulty" "The physicians had to undertake their operations anew, and at length they cicatrized (to heal and induce the formation of new tissue) the wound." "In consequence of some light motion of body, Galerius received a hurt, and the blood streamed more abundantly than before." "He grew emaciated, pallid, and feeble, and the bleeding then stanch'd." "The ulcer began to be insensible to the remedies applied, and a gangrene seized all the neighboring parts." "It diffused itself the wider the more the corrupted flesh was cut away, and everything employed as the means of cure served but to aggravate the disease." "Then famous physicians were brought in from all quarters; but no human means had any success." "Apollo and AEsculapius were besought repeatedly for remedies: Apollo did prescribe, and the distemper augmented. (It increased and spread) "Already approaching to its deadly crisis, it had occupied the lower regions of his body: his bowels came out and his whole seat putrefied." "The luckless physicians, although without hope of overcoming the malady, ceased not to apply fomentations and administer medicines." "The humors having been repelled, the distemper attacked his intestines, and worms were generated in his body." "The stench was so foul as to pervade not only the palace, but even the whole city; and no wonder, for by that time the passages from his bladder and bowels having been devoured by the worms, became indiscriminate, and his body with intolerable anguish, was dissolved into one mass of corruption." "They applied warm flesh of animals to the chief seat of the disease, that the warmth might draw out those minute worms; and accordingly when the dressings were removed, there issued forth an innumerable swarm; nevertheless the prolific disease had hatched swarms much more abundant to prey upon and consume his intestines." "Already, through a complication of distemper, the different parts of his body had lost their natural form: the superior part was dry, meager, and haggard, and his ghastly-looking skin had settled itself deep amongst his bones; while the inferior, distended like bladders, retained no appearance of joints." "These things happened in the course of a complete year; and at length, overcome by calamities, he was obliged to acknowledge God, and cried aloud, in the intervals of raging pain, that he would re-edify the Church which he had demolished, and make atonement for his misdeeds; and when he was near his end he published an edict "permitting the Christians again to be Christians, and to establish the places of their religious assemblies; yet so as that they offend not against good order." "Wherefore it will be the duty of Christians, in consequence of this our toleration, to pray to their God for our welfare, and for that of the public, and for their own; that the

commonweal may continue safe in every quarter, and that they themselves may live securely in their habitations." Lactantius says, "This edict was promulgated at Nicomedia on the day preceding the Kalends of May, in the eighth consulship of Galerius, and the second of the Maximin Daia." Lactantius now mentions his personal friends. "Then the prison-gates having been thrown open, you, my best beloved Donatus, together with the other confessors for the faith, were set at liberty from a jail, which been your residence for 6 years." "Galerius however, did not, by the publication of this edict, obtain the divine forgiveness." "In a few days after he was consumed by the horrible disease that had brought on a universal putrefaction." Thus ended the life of one of the most wicked rulers of history. This was only a small part of the avenging of the blood of the martyrs of that time which will go on and on throughout eternity upon the souls and bodies of those who persecuted God's saints. The Lord arose and speedily executed judgment upon them and the empire. The next time that I speak to you it will be concerning the 6th seal, the great earthquake signifying a great change in the Roman Empire. There would be great judgments coming, but great relief for a time to God's people. We shall see the wrath of the Lamb come upon the Roman Empire.