

“THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEALS.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 6:9-17

Introduction

After writing the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, John hears a voice that sounded like a trumpet saying:

Revelation 4:1-2 “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.

Then in chapter five he sees a Lion-Lamb who takes a scroll with seven seals. In chapter six he sees the first six seals opened. We got through the first four last week.

When the fifth seal is broken there is a surprising and startling shift. No more living creatures, no more colored horses with riders. The entire vision now shifts from the earth back to heaven. We have seen the visions revealing a succession of judgments visited on the earth through conquest, war, famine and death.

What will come of all the saints on earth with all these calamities? This seal with its vision of the martyrs gives a partial answer.

The Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs, vss. 9-11

No more is there a cry from a living creature saying, “come.” Instead we hear a great cry come from under the altar and see there the countless gathered souls of the martyrs, “of those slain for the Word of God and for their witness.”

This is the church in its present persecuted condition. Remember the Christians in the seven churches being persecuted. Remember John,

Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos *on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*.

Many more times in Revelation we will hear the saints referred to as those who held to the Word of God and gave a faithful testimony concerning Jesus.

Revelation 12:11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Revelation 12:17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

They are not crying out for their own sake, nor are they crying out for revenge or to get even. The martyrs are crying out to the God of justice for justice and for compassion and mercy for the long suffering church, it's a cry for deliverance and triumph.

God is holy and His justice must be carried out, evil must be answered and avenged and eliminated.

The *inhabitants of the earth* refer to those who oppose God and His Word and His people, who hate the truth and deny Jesus.

There are four comforting and encouraging parts in this vision.

First, they are under the altar, safe from further harm and close to God's throne.

Second, they receive the white robes of purity, holiness, victory and bliss; the sign of their acceptance.

Third, they are assured they are not alone, but have many brothers and sisters on earth who are faithful and are prepared to make the same sacrifice.

Fourth, they are told to wait patiently until their roll is complete.

John paints a picture that is meant to be a great source of encouragement and courage to all the saints on earth who face a similar fate.

What a comforting vision, to see the Father's care for the saints in heaven. Those who suffered and died for the faith will be welcomed into the Father's presence and His everlasting rest and unbroken happiness.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, and precious in His sight is their shed blood.

The Blood of the innocence.

I want to say a word about blood. Christianity is unique in asserting that the blood is not silent and that God hears the cry of innocent blood.

Genesis 4:10-11 And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

The greatest threat to our planet is not greenhouse gases or global warming or carbon footprint, the greatest threat to our planet is the wrath of a holy and just God.

The horror of a great judgment hangs over our nation, as the blood of over 55 million children killed in abortion cries out, the blood of over one billion in the whole world cries out.

All over the world the blood of God’s faithful children being martyred for their testimony cry out for justice and justice will be done. How many souls are gathered under the altar of God?

Over 70 million martyrs. Over 45 million in last century. Over 160,000 every year since 1990. Those 21 Egyptian Christians have joined the souls under the altar.

God is Just.

God will avenge all the persecutors of Christ, of His bride the Church, and of His Gospel and the Word of Truth.

Luke 18:7-8 Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

With God there is a limit, a time and a day when enough is enough, when sin will be full and judgment will come. There is an end to God’s patience. When the blood of the last martyr flows out onto the ground, the great consummation will begin.

If you have wondered why Jesus is taking so long to return here is part of the answer.

We know that the Gospel must be preached in all the earth and then Christ will come. But it is equally true that the full measure of the blood of the martyrs must flow and then Christ will come.

How long? It is a short season compared to the eternal glory to come.

This scene is for all of us, to strengthen our faith and our faithfulness, that we love God more than life. This vision is here to prepare all Christians for possible martyrdom.

The church’s history on earth is a time of suffering and conflict, it is a time of martyrdom, when the blood of saints will flow.

The path of church history is a red path, a path stained by blood, a Via Dolorosa, a way of suffering. Love for God is bloody, truth is bloody, faithfulness is bloody.

God is advancing His kingdom and building His church one martyr death at a time. He is conquering through death and by death. What was meant for evil, God is using and turning for good.

What should we do if we are persecuted and called to suffer for the sake of Christ?

Matthew 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Weep with those who weep.

Pray for those who suffer.

Pray for our enemies.

Wait patiently for God's justice and deliverance.

The Sixth Seal: The Second Coming, vss. 12-17

The fifth seal answers the question, what about all the saints and righteous and martyrs caught up in the evil brought about by the four horsemen. The sixth seal answers the question, what about all the wicked of the earth.

With the opening of the sixth seal comes the long awaited and long prayed for great and final and awful judgment of God on earth. Is there a more fearful and dreaded word in all the Scripture?

This is the first of what will be seven descriptions in Revelation of the final judgment and second coming of Jesus.

Matthew 24:29-30 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Notice the universal scale, heavenly, cosmic, and earthly disturbances. This is nothing like the huge earthquakes we read about in Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The entire universe is thrown into destructive convulsions. A *universal earthquake* swallows up the mountains. Mountains are brought down and valleys heaved up. All the heavenly lights fall and the sky itself disappears.

This judgment will affect all of humanity from the greatest to the least, no one will be spared. Seven kinds of humanity are mentioned symbolizing how complete this judgment will be. They represent every social class. From the greatest to the least, from the highest to the lowest, from the kings to the slaves, all will be paralyzed with terror, they will melt away. Status and wealth and power are nothing before the wrath of God.

The change of the sun and the moon is seen in the OT as symbol of the judgment of nations.

All the human systems will fall, every institution, every social structure. This is the universal ruin of every human power and every opposing force that has tried to raise up against God.

As I said before the greatest threat facing the planet earth is not greenhouse gases or global warming or burning fossil fuels or loss of biodiversity or Ebola or nuclear war or asteroids or the zombie apocalypse. The greatest threat facing planet earth is the wrath of a holy and righteous and just God.

There will be utter terror and horror. Who can stand? Like Adam and Eve in the garden, people will try to flee and hide to avoid the righteous wrath of a holy God. They will try to hide to avoid punishment rather than repent, but there will be no hiding.

So fearful is the judgment they would rather be crushed to death than face the wrath of the living God and *the wrath of the Lamb*. The thing that the unrighteous fear the most is not death but the presence of the living God.

If the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world is your enemy then all hope is lost. To whom can you turn?

Application and conclusion.

The only place to escape a great prairie fire is where the fire has already burned. The only place to escape the fiery wrath of God is where the fire of God has already burned. The cross of Christ where God's wrath already burned hottest in the sacrifice of Christ.

To escape the fire, flee to the fire, in repentance and faith.

The Christian community is the most honest in facing what is wrong in our world. And the Christian community is the least despairing or cynical about it. We call evil by its real name and honestly call sin sin. We confess what is really wrong with our world and we are the most hopeful about the future.

Everything on earth is moving toward that day and advancing it. Every martyr, every suffering, every conversion, every prayer hastening the coming of that day.

With this seal all opposition on earth is finished. There is opposition in the heavenlies, the principalities and powers that must be dealt with. And there is the matter of the church. What about the saints, where is the kingdom of God? It remains to be revealed what God's purpose is for His church and that will begin to be revealed in chapter seven.

The opening of the seventh seal is delayed to reveal God's purposes for His people.

And God is on the throne and the Lamb has the scroll firmly in His hand and the saints are being safely gathered in.