

INTRODUCTION

1. In our last message, I introduced the subject of suffering and persecution.
2. This morning, as we consider the 5th seal in Revelation 6:9-11, we will look at the subject of martyrdom for Christ.
3. Please take God's Word and turn with me to Revelation chapter 6.
4. Read Revelation 6:9-11.
5. We have already seen the first 4 seals in verses 1-8.

6. Seal 1 was peace, seal 2 was war, seal 3 was famine, and seal 4 is martyrs.
7. There has been martyrs since the time of Adam and Eve.
8. In fact, the first martyr was Abel and that occurred at the hands of his brother Cain.
9. Genesis 4 records the account.

Moses tells us that “Genesis 4:3-8 (NASB), that “Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at

the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

8 Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”

10. According to Hebrews 11:4, Abel was murdered by his brother because he “offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.”
11. That is the definition of a martyr.
12. He died for being “righteous” and “through faith,” he “offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain.”
13. 1 John 3:11-12 says, “11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him?”

Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.”

14. A martyr is “any person slain for bearing witness to the word of God.”
15. The word comes from the Greek word *martus*.
16. It means a “witness.”
17. “The term was originally used of the Apostles as witnesses of Christ’s life and resurrection (e.g. Acts 1:8, 1:22), but with the spread of persecution it was reserved to those who had undergone hardships for the faith, and finally it was restricted to those who had suffered death.” (Cross, F. L., and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds. [*The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*](#) 2005 : 1052. Print.).

18. Martyrdom is present in both the Old and New Testament, and in history through today.
19. In the Old Testament, we see not just Abel being murdered for his faith, but we also see others like:
20. Zechariah the Priest, who Jesus said in Luke 11:51 (NASB) “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’
20. 2 Chronicles 24:17-22 records Zechariah’s martyrdom.
21. 2 Chronicles 24:17-22 (NASB) 17 But after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and bowed down to the king, and the king listened to them. 18 They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols; so wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt. 19 Yet

He sent prophets to them to bring them back to the LORD; though they testified against them, they would not listen. 20 Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, “Thus God has said, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.’” 21 So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which his father Jehoiada had shown him, but he murdered his son. And as he died he said, “May the LORD see and avenge!”

22. Uriah the prophet was another prophet that was martyred.

23. Jeremiah 26:20-24 records the events:

24. It says, “Jeremiah 26:20-24 (NASB) 20 Indeed, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD,

Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land words similar to all those of Jeremiah. 21 When King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, then the king sought to put him to death; but Uriah heard it, and he was afraid and fled and went to Egypt. 22 Then King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him went into Egypt. 23 And they brought Uriah from Egypt and led him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with a sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people. 24 But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that he was not given into the hands of the people to put him to death.”

25. There were martyrs in the New Testament:
26. Matthew 14:1-12 records John the Baptist’s martyrdom.
27. Verse 10 says he was “beheaded in prison” because King Herod’s wife, Herodias, who was actually the wife of his

brother Philip, and was called out by John the Baptist saying “It is not lawful for you to have her” (v.4), requested the head of John the Baptist be brought to her on a platter after her daughter danced before the king on his birthday and pleased him. Herold granted her anything up to half of his kingdom. He was martyred because he preached the Word of God to them and they didn’t like it, so they had him killed.

28. Acts 7:54-60 tells us about the martyrdom of Stephen, who had confronted the Sanhedrin for their refusal to hear the prophets.
29. He told them in verses 51-53, “51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”
30. Verse 54 tells us they were “cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.”
31. Verse 57 says they “cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.”

32. They drove him out of the city and then verse 58 says “they began stoning him.”
33. Verse 60 says, after he prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” ...He fell asleep.
34. Stephen obeyed God and paid for it with his life.
35. Acts 9:1 (NASB) Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
36. Acts 12:1-3 (NASB) 1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. 2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.
37. The book of Acts ends with Paul imprisoned in Rome for two years in his own rented quarters but many believe he was beheaded there.
38. Ignatius, probably around 110, writes that Paul was martyred.

39. Christian tradition holds that Paul was [beheaded](#) in Rome during the reign of Nero around the mid-60s at *Tre Fontane Abbey* (English: Three Fountains Abbey).[86]
40. Foxe's Book of Martyrs says, "Paul also suffered under this persecution when Nero sent two of his esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring him to his execution. They found Paul instructing the people and asked him to pray for them so they might believe. Receiving Paul's assurance that they would soon be baptized, the two men led him out of the city to the place of execution, where Paul was beheaded. (Foxe, John. [Foxe's Christian Martyrs: The Powerful Classic, Abridged and Updated](#). Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Books, 2014. Print.).
41. Foxe's Book of Martyrs tells us how each apostle suffered martyrdom:
42. Thomas was killed.
43. Simon, the brother of Jude and James the Less, was crucified.
44. Simon Peter was crucified upside down.
45. Mark was burned to death.
46. Bartholomew was beaten, crucified, and beheaded.

47. Andrew was crucified.
48. Matthew was killed with a spear.
49. James the brother of Jesus was thrown off the temple by the Scribes and Pharisees but he didn't die until someone struck him on the head.
50. There have been countless believers martyred for their faith throughout history.
51. From Abel to now.
52. From the Reformers like William Tyndale, John Huss, John Wycliffe and Martin Luther to Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCulley, Roger Youderian and Pete Fleming.
52. There were martyrs then and there are martyrs today.
53. On VOM's prisoner alert website it says, "In more than 40 nations around the world today Christians are being persecuted for their faith. In some of these nations it is illegal to own a Bible, to share your faith Christ, change your faith or teach your children about Jesus. Those who boldly follow Christ—in spite of government edict or radical opposition—can face harassment, arrest, torture and even death."
54. Now as we open the 5th seal, what do we see?

LESSON

- I. The First Seal - False Peace (vv.1-2)
- II. The Second Seal - War (vv.3-4)
- III. The Third Seal - Famine (vv.5-6)
- IV. The Fourth Seal - Death (vv.7-8)
- V. The Fifth Seal - Christian Martyrs (vv.9-11)

A. Its Opening (v.9)

Now that the horsemen have ridden forth, the scene changes” (Mounce) the Lamb opens the fifth seal and reveals its contents.

“The fifth seal reflects the death toll caused by Antichrist’s persecution” (Van Kampen). It is the seal of martyrdom.

In Matthew 24:9 when it says “they will deliver you to tribulation [seal 4], in seal 5 they “kill you...because of My name.”

B. Its Contents (vv.9-11)

1. John sees “under the altar the souls of those who had been slain”
 - a) “under the altar” – this was the place of the offering.

Fritz Rienecker says they are seen under the altar “because in the Levitical rite the blood was poured out at the foot of the altar” (The Linguistic Key to the Greek NT, p.827).

- b) “slain” Gr.sphazo, means “to slay, slaughter, to put to death by violence” (Strong) or by “murder” (UBS). This indicates that their death was by murder or execution.
 - c) It’s not clear how John could see the souls of those martyrs since a soul is the immaterial part of a person. But John has up to this point has already seen things that are not humanly possible.
2. John tells us why they were “slain” – “because of the word of God, and of the testimony which they had maintained” (v.9).
- a) They were obedient to the word of God
 - b) They did not deny their testimony
 - c) This phrase “because of the word of God, and of the testimony” is the same reason John was on the island of Patmos (1:9).
 - d) As we have said many times there is a cost

involved in following Jesus

- (1) Mat.5:11 says, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”
- (2) Luke 6:22 (parallel passage) says, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.”
- (3) John 16:2 says, “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.”
- (4) Seal 5 is a fulfillment of all of this – this is the persecution of the Antichrist who is used by Satan to pour his wrath on the saints
 - (a) Rev.12:12 says that “the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”
 - (b) Rev.13:7 says, “It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.”

3. The “souls of those who had been slain...cried out with a loud voice” in verse 10, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Verse 11 says, “And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”

“Those martyred saints know full well that their martyrdom was not at the hands of God (i.e., the wrath of God), as their testimony attests. What they want to know is when God will retaliate with His divine wrath against those who have put them to death—the very message contained in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians” (Robert Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered*, pp.150-151).

Read 2 Thess.1:3-8

So “It is critical that the reader understands that at this point in the narration God has not begun to judge and avenge. The verb to avenge will appear

again in Revelation 19:2, which depicts the end of God's wrath. No clue has yet surfaced to indicate that the wrath of God has begun through Revelation 6:10" (The Revelation Commentary).

These martyred saints are seen with the raptured saints in 7:9 "clothed in white robes; and palm branches were in their hands."

"White garments are clearly the proper attire of those in the presence of God. Notice it will be the attire of: The overcomers, (Rev 3:4-5, 18), The Elders, (Rev 4:4), The martyrs, (Rev 6:11), The universally innumerable multitude, (Rev 7:9), The armies of heaven, (Rev 19:14)" (The Revelation Commentary).

CONCLUSION

1. As I said last week the church is not ready to suffer.
2. They are counting on a view that says they will not be here.
3. I would rather be ready than caught by surprise.
4. Jesus said in John 15:18-21 (NASB) 18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own;

but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

5. Revelation 12:11 (NASB) And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.
6. Do you believe in Jesus today?
7. That confession will be tested to find out if it is true.
8. If you have not repented and believed the Gospel, I urge you to do so right now as we pray.
9. Let's pray.