

Ger-12 Martyrdom

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the profound implications of martyrdom for the church, emphasizing its role as a witness to God's power in the face of persecution and suffering.

Duration: 50:40

Scripture: Daniel 7:21, Daniel 7:25, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 13:6-7

Topics: "Martyrdom"

Description

In this sermon, Arthur Katz discusses the power of the cross and the victory of God. He emphasizes the importance of demonstrating the self-sacrificing nature of Jesus Christ, who offered himself without spot by the eternal spirit. Katz shares the story of a woman who endured persecution and imprisonment without complaint, showing the power of God in her life. He challenges listeners to be willing witnesses for God, offering themselves freely for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose through the church. Katz concludes by urging listeners to stand and identify themselves with the pilgrims, strangers, exiles, and sojourners of every generation.

Transcript

■ Dear listeners, this is Arthur Katz speaking on the subject Are you ready? You are listening to a recording from October 4th, 1989. Martyrdom, not because it's an object of a little quaint curiosity. But what if that is the very definition of what true church is? But what if that is the very definition of what true church is? I just want to take a few moments to sketch a little scenario for the end that is given in the two apocalyptic books, Daniel and Revelation.

I just want to take a few moments to sketch a little scenario for the end that is given in the two apocalyptic books, Daniel and Revelation. And we can only go through this quickly just to touch a few significant statements. And we can only go through this quickly just to touch a few significant statements.

Chapter 7, verse 21. I want you to read that, I was watching and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them. I want you to read that, I was watching and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them.

Verse 25, He shall speak pompous words against the Most High and shall persecute the saints of the Most High. And the saints shall be given into his hands, you can read that. Revelation, chapter 13, referring to the same phenomenon at the end of the age, when the powers of darkness are unveiled and

are operating in their full fury in the earth.

And verse 6 of chapter 13, go ahead. And verse 7, this is already a suggesting of things for which we are not prepared. And seem to contradict what we have understood overcoming to mean.

That we have been taught to expect that we would overcome Satan and to put him down. And that this would be the victory. And that by this we would overcome him.

But it seems here that it is we who are to be overcome. And yet to be overcome in such a way as to win. To win as it were by losing.

Not by a demonstration of superior strength, but a yieldedness in weakness. The phenomenon of martyrdom has characterized the church from the beginning. We went today and saw the sites of martyrdom right here in Zurich.

Jesus was himself the true witness. And said, and you shall be witnesses unto me. The Greek word of which means martyrs.

That somehow whatever martyrdom is, it constitutes an ultimate witness of the Lord. Who himself gave his own life by the eternal spirit. So the only thing that changes at the end of the age is not that tribulation or martyrdom is new, but it's made more intense.

So much so that the great hall at Babylon is described as being drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs. And of the martyrs. In another place in Revelation it talks about the blood of the saints and of the martyrs.

It talks about those who have been martyred, whose blood cries up from under the altar. And are told to be patient and to wait for their brethren who shall also die in like manner as themselves. I don't know when I've heard this preached last.

It does not make for a popular message. But I think that the scriptures will bear out a very clear picture that at the end of the age the saints are allowed to be overcome by the whole beast system. It was granted to him to make war against the saints and to overcome them.

God himself allowed it. That his own saints should be overcome. How shall we bear that final death if we are called to it? Will we shriek with fear and with trembling? How we bear the death to which we are called is the whole issue of what a martyr is.

What is demonstrated in that extremity in that final hour is what we in fact are in God. I learned in school that crisis reveals. An absolute crisis reveals absolutely.

It's not what we are under comfortable circumstances that reveals what our place is in God. But what will be revealed in a final extremity in an ultimate pressure when our very life is required is the issue of martyrdom. I read the report of the 16 saints who died in Zimbabwe almost two years ago now.

The very place that Gary and I will be visiting in November in the second anniversary of their death. The murderers have received a political amnesty have been absolved of all guilt and responsibility and I understand they're even squatting presently on the land. We can almost ask the question that the disciples asked about the woman who came with the alabaster box.

To what purpose was this waste? What an extravagant waste. A really literate and trained, qualified, precious band of white believers there in Zimbabwe. Multilingual and cultured.

And at great sacrifice having blessed the native villages around helping them with the improvement in their economy and their life a really powerful presence in that area and building dams and waterworks in an area that had suffered severe drought that was promising a reclamation of the entire economy a model for the nation of the kingdom way not only in economy but in relationship between races but like the Anabaptists of old who lived in this very city they refused to bear arms they trusted God for their safety and at four o'clock in the morning of a certain November day a band of these black militant Marxist insurgents came upon them they were called capitalists and all of the filthy Marxist slogans that such men will speak white imperialists a complete contradiction to what in fact

they were but they did not speak a word in their own defense or protest this came upon them suddenly and unexpectedly and their hands were bound behind their back with barbed wire and so that the sound of shots should not be heard they were hacked to death with an axe one at a time walked into a building and before the axe fell on them they could see the butchered remains of brothers, sisters, their own children, husbands or wives I think the elder of that body was the last one to be slain to see his whole spiritual family dismembered in death before his own execution and here's the remarkable thing a young black man who witnessed the entire massacre said that there was not one sound, one plea, one cry for their own defense they went to their deaths as lambs to the slaughter to what

purpose was this waste? why would God allow at the end of the age his saints to be overcome? because he himself has first overcome death and therefore freed men who were all their lives in bondage because of their fear of death to be free in Christ is to be free indeed and the final demonstration to the principalities and the powers of the air whose wisdom is violence, fury, power, anger, murder, threat is a people who are not afraid who will suffer what they must bear as Jesus himself gave his own life who through the eternal spirit offered himself to God without spot don't confuse the martyrdom of saints with the martyrdom of radicals who would give their lives for human causes we're not talking about some exercise of human heroism some taking of a deep breath that enables you to get by

a final moment if Jesus himself required the power of the eternal spirit to offer himself by what means shall we offer ourselves? but by that same spirit and the eternal spirit is the spirit of God it is God who himself is the true witness and the powers cannot bear that demonstration because every time the issue of the cross is repeated when there is a true act of self-denial when any saint will bear his cross in the forfeiting of his life by the power of the eternal spirit what is revealed and manifested is God himself Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you? what will be revealed in an hour of final extremity? will we shriek and cry out for our physical life? will we be astonished and wonder where God is? and how does he allow this? or will we have a sublime confidence and faith

in his power and his sovereignty? it was granted to the Antichrist to make war against the saints and to overcome them it was granted you could do nothing against me, Jesus said, except it be given you from above we have stood today on holy ground we went by the Limmat river and saw where the first martyr Felix Manz was drowned there is no plaque to commemorate the site there is no plaque to commemorate the site I went to Bern and I went to the Tower of the Prisoners it's called, in the heart of the downtown area my Mennonite guidebook said that this is where numbers of Anabaptists were imprisoned and tortured but the woman in charge says she knows nothing about that she doesn't even believe that it ever happened there is no visible record or testimony that can be seen in the modern city

of Bern there is no visible record or testimony that can be seen in the modern city of Bern the world wants to bury the evidence dissolve the memory but I'm assured that it's recorded in heaven Paul speaks of a suffering that remains that must be filled up in the body for Christ's sake Paul speaks of a suffering that must be filled up in the body for Christ's sake what is this power that is usurping place in the heavenlies what is this power that is usurping place in the heavenlies I think it's something that will take place on the earth that completely nullifies their power and authority the demonstration of a martyr church that does not hold its life as dear unto itself the martyrs are told to wait until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who

would be killed as they themselves have been the martyrs are told to wait until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who would be killed as they themselves have been there is a mystery there is a completion there is something required that must be fulfilled through the body, the church the remnant church, the true church, the suffering church, the martyr church the remnant church, the true church, the suffering church, the martyr church this has always been its character and its distinction in every generation shall it not be so at the last I read the account of a Russian girl who was brought to trial in her town in the Soviet Union she had committed only a minor offence the fact of the matter is she had committed no offence at all she was accused of

a minor offence and instead of being tried in the locality where she lived she was taken to another city and there she received a five year prison term in Siberia and there she received a five year prison term in Siberia she was at the time only 21 years of age an age in which one has everything to live for and has a right to expect and to deserve a husband and a family, and not that the best years of her youth should be wasted in some cold and dark and remote place.

She was stunned by the verdict. It was so out of proportion to the thing for which she was accused.

Five years in Siberia, would she even survive the experience? What advantage of her would be taken by these filthy guards and prison keepers? What much might she be required to do in order to just survive? She never so much as raised her voice or expressed any kind of astonishment or disappointment. She received this as coming from the hand of the Lord, serving purposes of his own, and for which she did not require an explanation. She says that the KGB watched her carefully, how she would conduct herself in the camp.

They wanted to study her very thoughts. There's a satanic fury and a spite that wants to contradict the testimony of the saints, to show that our faith and our confidence is false, that when the pressure comes on we'll act like anyone else, because the unspoken and true premise of life is self-survival. They aggravated the conditions of her life to break her spirit, but it did not break.

They asked if she had any complaints, and she said no, not one. Because had she acknowledged a complaint about any condition that she experienced, she would have really been accusing God. She had no complaint, because a complaint would have nullified God's sovereignty, and would have attributed the conditions that she suffered to men rather than to God, as if it were beyond his control.

You shall be witnesses unto me. When she got out, even Christians said to her, how did you feel about wasting such precious years of your life? Years that will never be given back to you again. Your health might be permanently marred, or your beauty or attractiveness.

She said, I didn't count it a waste at all. She said, what is five years in the light of eternity? If she had been willing to compromise, she could have been released much earlier. But it never occurred to her to compromise.

She says, the Lord gave me such peace and joy. I acquired precious heavenly treasure. They overcame him by the word of their testimony, the blood of the lamb, and they did not love their life unto death.

I'm trying so carefully not in any way to be melodramatic. As if this is some remote possibility that might come upon us. I think it would be far more sound that it should be our expectation as saints as being normative Christianity.

That the issue of our death, the issue of martyrdom is not what we do in a final moment, but how we live until that moment. We're called to a martyr life that does not hold its own. That does not hold its life as dear unto itself.

If it's not dear unto ourselves, to whom then is it dear? For him who gave it. And who shall require it when he will? If it's not dear unto ourselves, to whom then is it dear? For him who gave it. And who shall require it when he will? Satan will be cast down because of this demonstration from the church.

They will overcome him, not by some muscular heroism. But by not loving their lives unto death. By dying in a way that will reveal Christ.

Till the number of those who give their blood will have been fulfilled. Then shall the Lord come to avenge his saints. To be released from heaven.

To come in the fury and the wrath of the Lamb of God. To require the blood of his saints that have been spilled in the earth. And whose cry has gone up to heaven.

We had a very interesting moment today at the... Which church was that? The great reformed church? A young man who was part of our group was a little bit irritated that we were exalting the martyrs and he thought that we were denigrating the reformed leaders. He thought we should have a more balanced view. And he apologized to me privately a little bit later for his remark.

I said brother you need to understand that we don't have anything personally against Zwingli and Bullinger. But I think that we have an obligation as saints at the end of the age to understand why it is that the innocent and the weak were persecuted unto death by those who purport to be Christians. Because I think we are going to experience the same at the end.

All who live godly lives in Christ shall suffer persecution. All who live godly lives in Christ shall suffer persecution. You cannot enter the kingdom without much tribulation.

The Lord is not saying these things that we should stiffen and lose the value of all that he has spoken and done in these days. Because he has already called us to a place apart. He has already opened the heavens and bid us to enter boldly.

That we might abide with him within the veil. Gary has been crying out tonight that we should believe the word of God. That our faith be made actual.

That we occupy this place in fact. Already abiding in the eternal place in the heavenlies. And only such a people can say death where is thy sting? Grave where is thy terror? For the Lord has defeated death and

hell.

And has freed them who have all their lives been in bondage unto that fear of death. He has destroyed the works of the devil. We need to make an identification tonight.

With whom do we see ourselves in connection? The conventional religionists throughout the ages. With whom do we see ourselves in connection? The conventional religionists throughout the ages. Who have served God in a fashion and have been responsible and religious.

With those whose places of suffering and death we visited today. We actually went into their cave where they fled and had their meetings. What a dark and cold and inhospitable place.

And yet what a heavenly presence of the Lord must have been there. With whom do we choose to identify? The invisible cloud of witnesses that are among us. About us tonight.

Who are not yet complete without us. We shall fulfill that for which they suffered and died. Very likely by our own sufferings and death.

For it was granted him to make war against the saints and to overcome them. And he shall persecute the saints of the Most High. Then the saints shall be given into his hand.

This is the end of the account, Daniel says in verse 28. This is not the scenario we expect. This is not the scenario we expect.

We expect some kind of miraculous deliverance or rapture. Not such a climax. That requires a dying.

But the victory of God is won in that moment. Truly this was the Son of God, the Roman centurion said. For a man who did not shriek out for his own physical life.

But yielded it up. And forgave those who were taking it. Truly.

He offered himself without spot by the Eternal Spirit. And wherever that demonstration is made. Wherever the cross is again demonstrated.

Wherever that requirement is borne by the Eternal Spirit of God. God is demonstrated. In his self-sacrificing nature.

Which the powers of the air cannot abide. Jesus we know. And Paul we know.

Because he was of the same spirit and life. And wherever he is demonstrated. It makes an open spoil of the enemy, a spectacle.

It defeats them. If I sense what God is saying in the prophets. And in the book of Apocalypse.

But I don't think that it's something that shall be obligatory for every Christian. He freely offered himself. And so also must the saints.

Who will be granted a crown. That might be laid at his feet. And who will rule and reign with him for a thousand years.

Will you be in that company? I want to give you an invitation tonight. To join that people of whom the world is not worthy. Who were sawn asunder, pursued, hunted.

Burned at the stake, drowned. Who hid themselves in holes and caves of the rocks. Women who refused to receive their husbands back from the dead.

They were waiting for a better resurrection. The true remnant people of God. Who have suffered in every generation.

And will truly at the last. Will you identify with them? And choose this crown. This is the final defeat of the powers.

What power will they have after this? If they cannot intimidate through fear of death. What is their power? They are finally and utterly defeated. And the creation that has been under their bondage is released.

Because there's been a demonstration in the earth. A witness. Of the kind that the first witness himself made, Jesus Christ.

Who offered himself. Without spite. By the eternal spirit.

This is the concluding word of these days. I just want to ask you to bow before the Lord. And choose.

This is not a grim martyrdom. It's a suffering with joy. At midnight, the darkest hour.

Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God. Can you imagine counting martyrdom as a privilege? Can you imagine counting martyrdom as a privilege? Lord in Jesus' name. I ask you to transact with those whom you've called tonight.

And with whom you've been speaking and dealing and blessing in these days. Who will choose to be overcomers. Not in the sense that that means that they avoid suffering.

That by some kind of discipleship or heroism can meet it. But receive it. With patience.

With grace. Having mercy upon those who are oppressing them. And the sublime confidence in the God who is allowing the suffering.

The demonstration that indeed he's a living God. Who is granting this ability to be persecuted. It was granted him to make war against the saints and to overcome them.

And we are willing. And we need no explanation. My God put this in our hearts.

Not only that we might die properly. That we might live properly. Free from fear of any kind.

At any time. In the name of Jesus. And in the concluding moment of these days of meeting.

I would ask you by the spirit of the Lord. Who will offer themselves freely. To be a witness unto him.

That the eternal purpose of God through the church might be fulfilled. A demonstration of another wisdom. That does not love its life unto death.

To the powers of the air. In this age and in the ages to come. Who will freely offer themselves.

For a modest crown. And identify yourself with the pilgrims. The strangers, the exiles and the sojourners of every generation.

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