

Rev. 6:10-11. the Recompense of Martyrdom

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the significance of martyrdom, the honor and rest of the martyrs, and the hope of the first resurrection.

Scripture: Revelation 6:10

Topics: "Hope in Suffering", "Martyrdom"

Description

Horatius Bonar preaches on Revelation 6:10-11, emphasizing the cry of the martyrs for justice and the assurance of their honor and rest in Christ. He explains that while earthly rulers may persecute the Church, they are ultimately accountable to Christ, who is the true Judge and King. The martyrs, depicted as receiving white robes, symbolize the honor and eternal joy that await those who suffer for their faith. Bonar encourages believers to hold onto the hope of future glory and to live in a manner worthy of their calling, despite the trials they may face. The sermon calls for a recognition of Christ's supremacy over all nations and the importance of perseverance in faith.

Transcript

They called loudly to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge the people who belong to this world for what they have done to us? When will you avenge our blood against these people?" Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of the servants of Jesus had been martyred.--Revelation 6:10-11.

The chief symbols in this chapter are horses--expressing the external, visible human (or earthly) agencies employed in the scenes and events predicted. Here it is not angelic forces that are at work, but human. In like manner, it is not angels who open the seals, but he Lamb. Angels blow the trumpets, and pour out the vials; but everything relating to the seals belongs directly to the Lamb--the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This chapter, then, is peculiarly connected with Him; it begins with His opening of the seals, and it ends with His infliction of wrath. The Son of God has much to do with earth and its nations, even though seated at the Father's right hand. 'His eyes behold the nations--let not the rebellious exalt themselves' (Psalm 66:7). He is Judge and King of earth; the holder of the golden scepter, and the wielder of the iron rod.

We speak of 'Providence' when we should speak of Christ. As He walks among the seven golden candlesticks, so does He go to and fro among the thrones of earth; for the kings of the earth are as responsible to Him for service in their appointed spheres as are the ministers of the churches. Because this is the day of the fourth Gentile empire, the dispensation of election and of the Church's pilgrim state,

therefore some strangely conclude that the responsibility of kings and nations to serve the Son of God does not exist! As if, because Scripture foretells the persecution of the Church, therefore kings do not sin in persecuting her, but rather fulfill God's will! As if, because the church's state in this dispensation is that of being trodden down, therefore it is the duty and vocation of earthly rulers to tread her down! 'We will not have this man to reign over us' is the wild shout of earth's nations and kings; for they know that He claims supremacy, and that supremacy they hate. Christ's supremacy in the State is as true and real a thing as His supremacy in the Church. The full development of that supremacy over kingdoms man resents and resists; and many Christians seem to think it a carnal doctrine, unworthy of men who believe in the church's heavenly calling. Yet is the full development of that supremacy that is to make earth a holy, peaceful, glorious kingdom; and it is for that development that we pray, 'Your kingdom come.'

This, no doubt, is the day of the Church's tribulation and persecution. Hence we find in our text reference to the martyrs--their death and testimony. But in their death they testify to Christ as Prince of the kings of the earth, the avenger of their blood upon those rulers that had slain them. Their 'souls'--even when separate from the body--are seen under the altar, as if all gathered there, as one by one they passed from the fire, or the sword, or the torture. The place of 'martyr gathering', is the altar of God. The place of ashes and of blood, is the place where they lay.

I. The martyr cry. It is the widow's cry, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' It is the cry which we so often find in the Old Testament (especially the Psalms), and because of which some Christians have harshly concluded that the old saints were much more imperfect than we, and had a lower standard of morality and spirituality; forgetful that the Psalms objected to, are the words of the Son of God Himself; forgetful also of such a passage as that of our text, containing the feeling, not only of New Testament saints, but of the 'spirits of the just made perfect.' The arguments used by some in arguing against 'the revengefulness of the Old Testament saints,' are such as would, if true, condemn the verdict of the Judge, 'Depart, you cursed ones,' and make the doctrine of future punishments inconsistent with Christianity--a relic of patriarchal barbarism or Jewish bloodthirstiness.

They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" This has been that long and bitter cry of the ages--not loud, indeed, but deep; the cry of the injured; the cry, not of mere personal feeling, but of righteousness trampled on, and all holy government subverted by the slaughter of the saints. It may seem 'narrow,' or worse than 'narrow'--it may be called 'bigotry,' or worse than bigotry--to sympathize with such sentiments; but there the words stand. Let modern sentimentalists tell us what they mean, or else boldly proclaim them false and cruel. The day is at hand when such sentimentalism shall be valued at what it is worth, and the great truths of a righteous law, and a righteous scepter, and a righteous Judge, and a righteous recompense, shall be acknowledged as at once the basis and the cornerstone of a happy universe.

II. The martyr HONOR. 'White robes were given them.' Each of these martyrs, as they passed from the persecution of earth, entered the holy presence with the cry, 'How long?' and as the immediate answer to this, and the pledge of yet brighter things, white robes were given. White robes--the pledge of triumph and splendor--the pledge of eternal joy and song--the pledge of the festal and bridal day. What a contrast to the poverty of their clothing here, as they came out of prison--to the bloodstains and filth upon their earthly apparel! White robes! This is God's immediate response to the beloved and honored band. They cry, 'How long?' and He speaks to His angels, saying, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on them.' Such is the martyr honor and blessedness even now!

III. The martyr REST. They get immediate rest as well as honor. The apostle Paul says, 'And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted.' (2 Thessalonians 1:7). The fullness of the rest, (Hebrews 4:9) is in reserve for the Lord's revelation from heaven; but rest, meanwhile, is theirs. Rest, how sweet after the torture and toil of earth! It may be that there is peculiar rest for the martyr band; and yet there is rest for all who are the Lord's, even though they may not have passed to it through the flames. 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth--Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them' (Revelation 14:13). They sleep in Jesus; not the sleep of unconsciousness or death, but the sleep of blessedness--the 'sleep of the beloved'--the 'rest' of paradise--with Him who has 'rested' from His toils and sufferings, and who bids them come and share His rest.

IV. The martyr HOPE. It is not expressly mentioned here. It is something which shall be given when the whole band is gathered--the whole martyr-band from the beginning. The seven epistles reveal that hope; and the three closing chapters of this book unfold it more fully. It is the hope of the first resurrection; of reigning with Christ; of entry into the celestial city; of the crown of life; of the inheritance of all things!

Prospects like these sustain, and comfort, and purify. We are to look into the future, that we may realize the details of this hope, as God has made them known. We may not be called to martyrdom; but we are all called to labor and suffering, to self-denial and self-sacrifice. The bright future of the Church, both between death and resurrection and after resurrection, throughout the everlasting ages, is meant to impact upon us here. With such a future, can we be worldly, or pleasure loving, or self-pleasing? Shall we live here--unworthy of our hope, unworthy of our place hereafter in the kingdom? Shall we turn aside from the path which the Master trod? Or shall we shrink from the crown of thorns--even if there were to be no crown of glory? Shall not the love of Christ constrain us to serve, at whatever cost, Him who bought us with His blood, and who has bought for us such a glory as that which shall so soon be ours?

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