

# "How Long, O Lord?" – " Until."

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"And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."—Rev 6: 10.

## I. Submission

HOW many of God's saints look up and say, How long, O Lord? Do we always add, "holy and true?" Whether we do or not makes all the difference.

There is no objection to our saying "How long " except when it is the expression of discontent, rebellion, or despair. So long as we retain the sense, defending it against all assaults, that the God who has permitted our lot is "holy and true," the "how long "is justified.

For the moment, we wish to detach the foregoing utterance from its surroundings, and to see what application it may have to ourselves. Its special reference is to those who have been slain on account of their faithful testimony. We are not all called upon to be martyrs, in the fullest and strictest meaning of that word, *i.e.*, we are not called actually to lay down our lives as witnesses, and yet not a few, at times, have to endure living martyrdom, and the long drawn out agony requires as much fortitude and faith as is demanded when life itself has actually to be forfeited.

From how many, at the present time, there is ascending to God the cry, "How long?" Circumstances may seem to be entirely contrary to us, all our hopes are disappointed; or events may be of such a nature as to be almost insupportable, as if the last ounce had been laid upon us; or our position may be one of supreme difficulty or even of danger, and the cry goes up " How long, O Lord, how long? "

What is of supreme moment is, can we at all times, and under all circumstances, think of God as " holy and true? " In the incident before us, whatever the trial had been, however severe the loss, no matter what the keenness of the anguish, though life itself was sacrificed, God is acknowledged to be "holy and true." And this is in perfect harmony with the whole tenor of Scripture. Whatever utterances of unbelief may be allowed to appear, whatever sayings of ignorant and foolish men be recorded, yet one prevailing feature of Scripture is this vindication of the character of God. Job may question and Jonah object, but the ways of God are seen to be right. And the passage we are considering does but afford further confirmation of this truth, and *the* appeal to God from those who sacrificed their lives for Him, though it calls upon God to avenge their blood, does not question His ways. He is addressed as " holy and true."

## II. Guarantee of Deliverance

But, secondly, the fact that they address God as "holy and true" is not merely a reason for their submission, and a sign of their saintship, it is also a guarantee of their deliverance. They vindicate God, and He will vindicate them. As surely as He is holy and true He will in due time "judge and avenge their blood on them that dwell on the earth."

And it may be noticed in passing that such a prayer is perfectly in keeping with God's ways at that time. We are not in the Christian dispensation here, but in a later period, when God is no longer acting in grace, but in judgment, and it is to this time that the so-called Imprecatory Psalms belong, when their contents will become the appropriate language of God's people. For God's people whenever they are in harmony with His mind always adopt His attitude. Is it one of grace, as in the present dispensation? their conduct towards men is to be regulated accordingly; on the other hand, is it one of judgment? then it is appropriate for them to pray for judgment to overwhelm His and their enemies. If this principle were recognised, the Imprecatory Psalms would not be so often misunderstood and criticised. The Bible is " written for the generation to come " as well as for that which now is.

"Holy and true." Are we assured of this as we pass through the deep waters of affliction? Can we repeat it to ourselves as the dark clouds gather over us and around us. As we stand by the grave of some one dearer than life, or look upon the wasting frame of a loved one, can we still say it? "Holy and true," "holy and true," can we murmur it to ourselves until its music transmutes our discontent into acquiescence, and our murmuring into worship?

Yes, what character do we give God? As we said at the beginning, this will make all the difference. If we think Him hard—"an austere man"—taking from us what He might so well have left us—be it health, happiness, comforts, friends—then we shall grow hard too, and our very features will become contracted. But if, while we look up and say, How long, O Lord? (even though it be with wounded and bleeding hearts, and amid the wreckage of much that we cherished and longed to keep),—we can and do add "holy and true"—"So that amidst our sadness a joyful song we raise"—then we may also accept it as a fact that the very holiness and truth of God, which faith enables us amid our suffering to acknowledge, is also the guarantee that in the end He will manifest Himself on our behalf and in some way make up to us for our loss. And it will be found true that our "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Have we ever paid sufficient attention to the wonderful conclusion of the 107th Psalm? All through it we have set before us the varied experiences of men, their ups and downs, and manifold distresses —solitariness, hunger, and thirst, "affliction and iron," "none to help," 'darkness and the shadow of death,' the "soul melted because of trouble," and yet ever and again we are called upon to "praise the Lord for His goodness," because of His deliverances; and the sum of the whole matter is this: " Whoso is wise, *and will observe these things*, even they shall understand the *loving kindness* of the Lord." God's otherwise mysterious dealings become the revelation of His love to those who take sufficient pains to understand them.

"Holy and true." Holy—that is, He hates evil and loves the good and makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. He can never be unjust, nor can He do wrong. True—He can never be other than He is. He is all that He professes to be. With Him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. He is the Father of lights from Whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.

### III. A present reward

In the third place, we notice that until the full answer is given there is a present reward. 'White

*robes iverere given unto every one of them.*" We have represented here an unfailing principle of God's ways. Our prayers and cries are never left altogether unanswered, even though the complete response to our request may be delayed. These souls under the altar, "slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held," were not forgotten, though the opposite might seem to be the case. And in answer to their cry they receive recognition at once, and the recognition takes the form of God's approval. "*White robes were given unto every one of them.*" Could anything be sweeter than such a mark of God's esteem?

Does this not remind us of an incident which happened when our Lord was on earth, and happened too in connection with one who was afterwards slain for the word of God? We refer to John the Baptist. He is in prison, and he is evidently expecting deliverance. He waits, but waits in vain, until he begins to wonder whether Jesus really is, after all, the Messiah. How often he must have repeated the words, or similar ones, as he paced his prison cell, How long, O Lord, how long?" At last he sends a message by two of his disciples, and they bring back an answer —the very answer calculated to reassure his heart. And then what happens? We are permitted to listen to Christ's praise of John. Was he a reed shaken with the wind? No. (Though his recent action might have appeared to betoken that character). Was he a lover of ease and given up to self indulgence? Just the contrary. Was he a prophet? "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." He was Jehovah's messenger sent before the face of His anointed—the greatest among them that are born of women. Such was the commendation of Christ. John had not been forgotten nor had His service failed. Yes, "white robes are given to every one of them." Here was the white robe for John.

Is there anything sweeter, again we say, than such a remembrance? anything sweeter than God's approval? As a company of men hold some important pose, amid dangers and difficulties of every kind, find their greatest encouragement in receiving some token of remembrance, or some word of approval from their commander, so does God deal with those who suffer according to His will. "White robes were given unto every one of them."

## IV. An answer given

Notice, an answer is given to the prayer, How long? In addition to the white robes there is a message:—

"It was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

These souls under the altar not only obtain a mark of God's approval, but receive an explanation of His dealings. There is an immediate answer to their cry. Yes, in the waiting time God will not be silent to us. He will give some answer to our cry; and by the message He sends we can discern the purpose of the trial we are called upon to endure, and reap a present benefit from it.

## "UNTIL."

The lesson for us in all our trials, as for them, is that we are only called upon to endure—until

...God has an end in view. His dealings with us are not aimless or without definite intent, nor are they interminable. So here, they were to "rest ... until." "Rest for a little season." That is what God asks of us. He has a purpose to accomplish. Let us then put aside all impatience, all fretfulness, all rebellion of spirit, all unbelief and hardness of heart, and quietly rest ... until ... Let us draw encouragement to do so from the fact that God is holy and true, from the sense He gives us of His approval, and also from the fact that the waiting time is all according to plan, and to bring about a far grander purpose than otherwise could be accomplished.

In the case before us they were to "rest yet for a little season, *until their* fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." God has a reason for all He does, and even for all He calls upon us to suffer. How gracious of Him to communicate His reason! How little these waiting souls knew of the reason, but there it was all the same! And how little we know, at times, why we are kept waiting! Yet there *is* a reason, as much in our case as in theirs. And God will reveal it to us in due time as He did to them. In their case the explanation of the delay was that the requisite number was not made up—that noble army of martyrs was to be joined by a few more companies, and then it would be complete. And no doubt God could give to every one of His tried and long-suffering saints just as plain and good a reason why their deliverance is delayed.

We are often ready to exclaim, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, *dost Thou not?*"... Why dost Thou not relieve me of this pain? or cure me of this disease? Why dost Thou not remove the cause of all this sorrow? Why dost Thou not take away this burden which seems more than I can bear? And God's answer is "rest ... until ...". Until the moment comes when deliverance will bring *Me* the greatest glory and you the greatest good; until the pruning knife has removed what hinders growth and the fiery furnace cleared away the dross; *until* the lesson has been learned which all My dealings with you are designed to teach: *until* I can achieve all I desire and intend; *until* the utmost blessing is made possible to yourself and others; *until* the *gain* can all be garnered. These are some of God's "*untils.*" May He enable us to wait for their realisation, and may some mark of His favour be granted to us meanwhile!!

"How long, O Lord, holy and true?" And the answer is "rest ... until ...". Those souls under the altar had to wait "for a little season" longer, but how precious the compensation in the meanwhile. The white robes assured them that their faithful testimony was remembered—however men may have hated them God approved—and they were bidden to rest in the sure and certain hope of a blissful consummation. Everyone added to that martyr throng would help, presently, to swell the joy and triumph of all the rest.

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*Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 146*