

## REVELATION 6:9-11

### GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE: HOW LONG?

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”<sup>1</sup>

Almost twenty years ago, Washington Post reporter Michael Weisskopf dismissed Evangelical Christians as “largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command.”<sup>2</sup> In many respects, antipathy to the Faith has hardened since that time. What was at that time a push back against anything that appeared to express the Faith of Christ the Lord has grown into a frontal assault on all that is righteous and holy. It is indisputable that the modern world is awash with prejudice and discrimination against the Faith once delivered to the saints. However, I hesitate to say that we are experiencing persecution—yet.

How bad are things? And how should we who are Christians respond? Undoubtedly, there is more opposition to the Faith today than there was twenty years ago. Undoubtedly, supposedly knowledgeable people feel free to ridicule the faithful and to dismiss the Faith. Without question, people feel free to mount judicial attacks against any expression of the Faith. However, we need to keep things in perspective. We will do well to take to heart the admonition of the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians, “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” [HEBREWS 12:4].

When I consider the cost of being a Christian in modern Iran, or in Syria, or in Cambodia or in any of a number of countries where speaking of faith in Christ the Lord will bring imprisonment, or even ensure the death of the one speaking of the Master, I am ashamed that professing Christians here would even dare speak of persecution. When families with one member who profess Christ in North Korea will be placed in prison camps for three generations, we should never speak of our pressure as persecution. Believers in China, Sudan, Burma and Nigeria can speak with first-hand knowledge of persecution because of the Faith—we can’t.

We have been spared the suffering our brothers and sisters are experiencing around the world today. Peter, writing to people who knew something of persecution, urged believers, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” Then, he appended this notation, “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” [1 PETER 5:8-10].

Note how Peter transitions to an appropriate response to real persecution; he instructs those who are persecuted to fix their eyes on the Master who permits us to experience such trials. We look to Him in full confidence that in His time He will personally “restore, confirm, strengthen and establish” us. Any suffering we now experience will be for but a short while.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Weisskopf, Washington Post, February 1, 1993

I've studied history for many years now. One observation that appears to hold sway universally is that cultures in decline go through a period when they jettison the "old faith" that made them what they were. Our western world became powerful because of the Christian Faith; it was principles that grew out of the Christian Faith that underpinned our system of laws, the advance of modern science and even the manner in which western society conducts itself. However, this old faith must be discarded for that which is new. The tragedy is that contemporary people now embrace any weird, wild and wonderful belief—except the Jewish and Christian Faiths that that been central to the rise and dominance of the west. This has become for modern man an ABC moment—*anything but Christianity*.

What we as Christians must not do is respond as victims to the opposition we are now experiencing and which we will continue to experience in increasing measure until the Master returns. We are not victims; we are victors. We are not a small, persecuted minority; we are part of a great number of followers of the Christ, even in these dark hours. We are appointed to stand firm in the darkest hour, knowing that He who conquered death is still on Heaven's Throne. Jesus Himself has charged all who would follow Him, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" [LUKE 9:23].

Again, the one who would follow the Master is challenged, "Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" [MATTHEW 10:38].

We need to hear again the earlier commission the Master issued to His disciples. "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

And when we have heeded this command, we must realise the truth of the words that follow, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household" [MATTHEW 10:16-36].

Modern Christians need to recall the words written to spiritual forebears who did suffer. “The bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” [HEBREWS 13:11-14]. Let’s determine that we will take up our crosses, go outside the camp and follow our Master. No more whining, no more complaining; rather, let us joyfully and in full confidence follow Him.

**THINGS WILL GROW WORSE** — You’ve heard the story of the man who tried to encourage a friend when she was experiencing great problems. “Cheer up,” he said, “things could be worse.” So the woman who was experiencing great problems did cheer up. Sure enough, things got worse. I confess that I am an optimistic pessimist; I am optimistic about what God is doing, and I am pessimistic about mankind. The greater man’s hostility to Christ and the greater his opposition to all that is holy, the greater the chaos growing out of his effort to make things better.

What is the source of prejudice against the Christian Faith? What reasons are given to justify the present rage against Christianity? I believe there are three sources of prejudice.<sup>3</sup> There is *a reaction to the evils and excesses of Christendom*. It is of no consequence to the modern mind that the Christian Faith has inspired the greatest reforms in history. Infanticide and the gladiatorial games were banned because of growth of the Christian Faith in the ancient Roman Empire. The abolition of slavery in the British Empire and ultimately in the United States resulted from the spread of the Faith. In more recent centuries, the movement for women’s rights and the advance of civil rights was born out of the Christian Faith. However, if you mention the lasting influence of the Faith, the dark spectre of the Inquisition, the Crusades and the various wars of religion will be given as reasons to ridicule the Faith.

Another source of prejudice against the Faith from within our contemporary world is *repudiation of the Enlightenment*. The greatest thinkers of the West have been men and women passionately in love with Jesus the Son of God—Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, Newton, Edwards, Watts, Copernicus, Bruno, Descartes and Robert Boyle. And in the past two centuries, great minds submit to Christ—scientists such Heisenberg, Polanyi, Richard Smalley and Giberson; social reformers such as Martin Luther King and Charles Colson; and political leaders and thinkers such as David Lloyd George, Stephen Carter and Dinesh D’Souza. Post-Enlightenment thinking, however, dismisses the Faith as irrational, anti-intellectual and reactionary. For a Christian to openly stand for the Faith in contemporary life is to be dismissed as incapable of thinking, regardless of how great the contributions that believer may have made to society.

A third and final source of prejudice against the Faith arises from *the erosion of faith in the modern world*. Though the Christian Faith is the primary force behind the rise of modern culture, the Faith is dismissed as “harmlessly innocuous and dangerously extremist.” While that description sounds contradictory, it grows out of the view that the Faith is harmless when it is privatised. Of course, most of contemporary social thought pushes to keep the Faith private, despite being silent about Islam being open and vocal. At the same time, modern thought sees the Faith as dangerous when it is politicised; and such thinking envisions believers who live out their faith as useful idiots held captive to an ideology. Consequently, much of modern Christendom promotes this strange doctrine of private Faith organised as a political entity.

---

<sup>3</sup> I am deeply indebted for this insight to Os Guinness, “Carrying the Cross without Complaining,” <http://www.kairosjournal.org/InsightDetail.aspx?InsightID=79&L=1>, accessed 31 December 2012

At one and the same time, modern thought wants to dismiss the Faith as irrelevant. Unfortunately for that point of view, the assault against the Faith puts the lie to that concept. If the Faith of Christ the Lord is irrelevant, than why be so concerned as to assail it? The very fact that the Faith disturbs this dying world is evidence of the power of this holy Faith. Therefore, we who are followers of Christ Jesus the Lord must be evangelical and unashamed! This means we who follow Christ are responsible to know what we believe and to know why we believe it. Knowledge is worthless, however, if we fail to employ it.

Because we serve the King of kings, we are responsible to be gracious in responding to the attacks arising from those living for this dying world. We must not demonise our assailants. When people write hateful things concerning this holy Faith in comment sections of the various forums and news sites, we must not respond in kind. We are taught throughout the Word of God to respond to insult and persecution in a gracious and winsome manner. The Lord has taught us, "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" [MATTHEW 5:44].

You may recall how Jesus expanded this teaching when instructing His disciples. Jesus said, "I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" [LUKE 6:27-36].

Similarly, Paul urged believers to do good to all people, especially emphasising this responsibility when writing the Galatian Christians, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone" [GALATIANS 6:10]. At about this same time, he also wrote the Thessalonian saints, providing instructions that need to be heard again within the churches of our Lord. "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" [1 THESSALONIANS 5:15-22].

I've said these things because I believe open expressions of hostility toward the Faith will grow increasingly commonplace as the time of Christ's return nears. In fact, I am increasingly certain that we may well be watching events unfold that presage the return of the Son of God. Our responsibility as followers of the Master is to live in such a way that we are prepared to greet the Master's return momentarily, at the same time living as though that return is in the distant future. Because calumny and vituperation will intensify as the age moves inexorably to a conclusion, some insecure individuals will be emboldened to attack the faithful; and the attacks may well progress from verbal and judicial attacks to physical attacks.

Jesus cautioned His disciples with terse words. Listen to one passage which you know very well. "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

He continued the dark teaching as He said, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Then, in what could easily be a news item torn from today’s headlines, Jesus warned, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near” [LUKE 21:8-20]. There follows this enigmatic statement that we should not ignore, pretending it is somehow related only to some hyper-dispensational event that has no meaning to our own lives. The Master spoke to His disciples, saying, “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:28].

Jesus, the Son of God is coming again, just as He promised; and when He comes, His people will be gathered to Himself. We read, “This we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17].

When the people of God have been removed from this earth, what will happen? First, after the people of God are removed, the Great Tribulation will be unleashed on this earth. The first judgement results in the man of lawlessness being revealed. In the final days of this age, there will have been a general apostasy as the professed churches of our Lord turn from righteousness to a pragmatic religion. The religion of that day will be defined by “DO” rather than by “BE.” When the man of lawlessness, the man known as the antichrist, is revealed, he will explain away the absence of God’s holy people. Here is Paul’s presentation of these things.

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12].

These events, happening with breathtaking suddenness, will usher in the Great Tribulation as God begins to judge the world and all who live solely for this world. In the first series of judgements unleashed on the world, antichrist is to be revealed; and following in his train are war, famine and plague. All this is foretold in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse.

Antichrist will be welcomed as a problem solver, a brilliant individual able to cut the Gordian Knot of Middle Eastern conflict; he will bring Jew and Arab together. However, he will unleash incredible persecution against those coming to faith during those days. You see, one of the matters that is not often discussed in the context of the Tribulation is God's grace. In the midst of divine judgement, God will extend mercy to those dwelling on the earth. Though the Spirit of God will have been withdrawn along with the people of God who are raptured out of the earth, there will be people on the earth during those days turning to faith. Realising that they have squandered the opportunity to believe and to be saved before the Rapture, many will at last look to the coming of Jesus. They will do so, however, at great cost to themselves.

On the earth, those who worship antichrist, receiving the mark that He imposes on all mankind, will be allowed live in relative peace as they continue commercial actions, buying and selling [see **REVELATION 13:11-18**]. However, many people will respond to the preaching of a divinely appointed coterie of Jewish evangelists pointing to Yeshua Ha-Mashiach as God's salvation [see **REVELATION 14:1-5**]. These souls will refuse to worship antichrist, and they will refuse to receive his mark; but they shall be hounded mercilessly to their death. These tormented souls are seen under the altar as the fifth seal is broken, according to what John has written.

Listen once more to John's description of what he saw as the fifth seal judgement was initiated. "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been" [**REVELATION 6:9-11**].

**CHRIST KNOWS WHAT IS HAPPENING** — When the world is turned upside down, when it seems as if the inmates are running the asylum, it is easy to despair. It becomes easy to ask whether the Master is concerned, whether He is a God that is remote and uninvolved, whether he is able to deliver His child. If you have ever questioned God, wondering why He didn't intervene when you felt your greatest need, you are not the first of His people to do so.

You may remember an incident that is recorded in Mark's Gospel. Jesus had ministered to crowds all day. He and the disciples entered into a boat, and other boats were accompanying them. Exhausted from ministry, Jesus fell asleep. It was while He was sleeping that a fierce windstorm broke over the little boat. Now, listen to the Word as Peter, through Mark, relates what happened. Jesus "was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?'" [**MARK 4:38-40**].

Perhaps you have had the experience of being pressed down by demands on your time, and it seemed as if no one was prepared to help you. Perhaps it was a work day at the church, and there weren't all that many people helping. Consequently, you felt as though you had been dumped on. Or perhaps it was setting up for a church meal, and you were left to do the bulk of the work alone. Here is an account of someone who felt just as you have felt.

Here is an account of a time when Jesus and His disciples “entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her’” [LUKE 10:38-42].

In the press of life, and especially when it seems as if we are facing the adversary alone, we question the Master. We wonder if He knows where we are and what we are facing. May I remind you of some of the rich promises of God. The Psalmist has spoken of God’s protection.

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,  
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,  
and I am saved from my enemies.”

[PSALM 18:2, 3]

The Thessalonian Christians were under severe pressure from those among whom they lived. The Apostle wrote to remind them of God’s mercy and protection. “The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:3].

We tend to focus on this present moment we call life, forgetting that we are promised something better than what is here. Refresh your memory by recalling the opening words of Peter’s First Letter. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” [1 PETER 1:3-9].

As Peter speaks of the Master’s care for His own people, he writes these comforting words. “You were going astray like sheep but now you have turned back to the shepherd and guardian of your souls” [1 PETER 2:23 NET BIBLE]. To be certain, the word that is translated “guardian” in this verse is the Greek term *epískopos* usually translated “Overseer” or “Bishop.”

Peter’s words are a reminder of God’s provision of overseers for His people. Recall Paul’s admonition to the elders of Ephesus. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears” [ACTS 20:28-31]. The elders (who were addressed here) are to be guardians (act as overseers), shepherding (caring for) the flock of God. Elders are overseers are pastors—all alike are God’s provision for His churches.

We who are saved by the power of the Living Christ are saved eternally and we are saved completely. The doxology with which Jude concludes his brief missive is worthy of remembering. “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” [JUDE 24, 25]. Our God will keep us from stumbling and yet present us before His glorious presence; He shall do so in such a manner that we shall be filled with joy. Indeed, to Him be glory, majesty, dominion and authority. Amen.

Permit me to push this point further still. The Apostle to the Gentiles has promised believers, “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” [2 CORINTHIANS 2:21, 22]. This is in keeping with the High Priestly prayer the Master Himself offered for His own people. “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” [JOHN 17:15-19].

This is in keeping with what is promised to all who believe. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” [JOHN 3:16-18].

When, during the days of the Great Tribulation, the persecuted saints cry out for relief, they echo the cries of multiplied saints throughout the long ages. “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth” [REVELATION 6:10]? Those who cry out in that day receive an immediate response. “They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been” [REVELATION 6:11]. Christ watches and He knows what is happening to His own beloved saints.

The American poet, James Russell Lowell, in the poem entitled “The Present Crisis,” spoke a truth that is essential that all who name the Name of Christ continue to hold dear.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record  
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word;  
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.<sup>4</sup>

Our God knows what is happening to His beloved child. He watches over His own; and though the wicked of this fallen world assail the children of the True and Living God, He will not permit them to be utterly cast down. As Christians, we say with the Apostle, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-10].

---

<sup>4</sup> James Russell Lowell, “The Present Crisis,” in Thomas R. Lounsbury, ed., Yale Book of American Verse (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 1912) 128

I have often drawn comfort from the words of the thirty-seventh Psalm.

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD,  
when he delights in his way;  
though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong,  
for the LORD upholds his hand.”

[PSALM 37:23, 24]

**CHRIST WILL SHORTLY ACT** — “They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been” [REVELATION 6:11]. I frequently heard my father say, “The wheels of God’s justice grind slowly; but they grind exceedingly fine.” God does not always immediately rush to deliver His child from the wicked. Neither does God immediately fulfil every promise. However, God does fulfil His promises; and God will deliver His children from the hand of the wicked. God promised Abram that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land, but not immediately, “for” said God, “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” [GENESIS 15:16]. Abram’s descendants would experience hardship and suffering for four hundred years; but in His time, God would fulfil the promise made to Abram.

You will undoubtedly remember the account of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, three Hebrew men taken captive by the Babylonians and forced into service to Nebuchadnezzar. You may be more familiar with the names they received from their captors: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You will recall that Nebuchadnezzar commanded the building of a great, golden image. All the inhabitants of the land were commanded to listen for music provided by a heavy metal band. Whenever they heard that music they were to unite in bowing before the image. The sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and a variety of discordant sounds were heard, and all the people fell down—except for the three young Hebrew men.

Accused by men who sought to do them harm, the men were brought before the king. The king was furious at their intransigence, and he commanded them to worship before his image. He warned that there were dire consequences in disobedience, challenging them to think carefully before they disobeyed, saying, “Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands” [DANIEL 3:15]? Think about that! The king, whether he realised it or not, was defying the Living God. He sounds suspiciously like some politicians in this day when they dare Christians to defy their orders to approve the slaughter of the unborn or to pay to defy their own consciences. Such political acts are dangerous precisely because they shake the fist in the face of God.

The reply of the three men expresses the quiet confidence possessed by those who know the True and Living God. “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” [DANIEL 3:16-18].

The men were thrown into the furnace, a furnace heated to such intense heat that those who threw them in were themselves killed by the heat. Glaring at the furnace from a distance, the king was startled out of his rage. Rising up from his throne, he questioned his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire” [DANIEL 3:24]? When the counselors answered, “For sure, O king,” the king responded, undoubtedly in astonishment and perhaps even in terror, “But I see four men, untied and walking around in the midst of the fire! No harm has come to them! And the appearance of the fourth is like that of a god” [DANIEL 3:24, 25 NET BIBLE].

Don't imagine that God will always deliver His child from suffering in this life. One need but remember the Martyrs' Memorial in Oxford. The Martyrs' Memorial commemorates the Oxford Martyrs—Hugh Latimer, Nicolas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer. They defended the Faith of the Lord, affirming that salvation is by faith alone, without the elements of popery. After sentence had been pronounced, Latimer said, "I thank God most heartily that He hath prolonged my life to this end, that I may in this case glorify God by that kind of death." The prolocutor replied, "If you go to heaven in this faith, then I will never come hither, as I am persuaded." Latimer and Ridley were burned at the stake under Bloody Mary, Queen of Scots. Cranmer recanted his faith; avoiding the sentence of death by burning for six months. However, when pinioned to the stake because of their faith, Hugh Latimer cried out to Nicolas Ridley, "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Six months later, Thomas Cranmer withdrew his forced renunciation, proclaiming the truth of Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide. Tied to the stake with the faggots burning about him, he placed in the fire the same hand with which he had signed his renunciation of the Faith. Those present who witnessed his martyrdom quoted him as saying, "This hath offended!" With that gesture, the crown's hope of quelling the Reformation in England was lost.

What I would have you see is that God is ever at work, even when His choice servants are attacked. We take comfort from the Scriptural promise, but we are not eager to see it worked out in our lives. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" [ROMANS 8:28-30].

Is there any darker day in the history of this fallen world than that day when God sacrificed Himself because of our helpless condition? I do not doubt that all hell rejoiced at the thought that the Son of God was crucified. His life was taken, and all hell appeared triumphant. However, His death was not a defeat of righteousness—it was the triumph of the Living God. The Apostle clearly presents that truth in these powerful and comforting words. "You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" [COLOSSIANS 2:13-15].

Perhaps you remember a parable that the Master told His disciples. The parable was meant to encourage prayer; for through prayer, they would not become discouraged and lose heart. The parable Jesus told was this. "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" Now, listen to the application Jesus made for this parable, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily" [LUKE 18:1-8]. Christ will give justice to His own.

May God encourage His people to stand firm in this hope. Christ the Lord is in control, and He works for our good and for His glory. May He encourage each Christian, making us strong in this Holy Faith until the day appointed for His return. Amen.