Radiant & Ready — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 6:9–11 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, August 29, 2021 · *Birth Pains*

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Revelation chapter 6. If you're just now joining us— which there are some first-time guests in our service today— as a church we've been going through the book of Revelation. It feels like the world is ending, so we figure we might as well figure out what it's going to look like when it does end. And I'm half— I say that joke, it is a joke, but it's almost like not funny as a joke anymore because it just feels like the world is really spinning out of control, but Jesus said that when the end times come, it's going to be marked by certain characteristics.

And he actually encouraged his disciples, you need to know the signs of the times. I know a lot of people say, well, Jesus said nobody knows the day or the hour, so these end-time junkies with their charts, they need to calm down, and Jesus said we shouldn't be all into that. And it is true, Jesus did say nobody knows the day or the hour, and nobody does know the day or the hour. So if anybody says, I know the day or the hour, you know, change the channel. But he did say you should know the seasons.

You should be looking for the signs. They are clear as day. And when you see these things happening, look up. Your redemption draws nigh. And so there is nothing wrong with us taking our cue from Jesus to say, if the world is going to end, according to Jesus, what does he say it's going to look like? And so that's what this series has been. We've been looking at the first four seals, which are described as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. They're popularly known in our culture as signifying the end of the world, the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

And what's interesting is Jesus in Matthew 24, he doesn't call them horsemen, but he talks about the same signs. He says there's going to be wars and rumors of wars. There's going to be false Christs or false messiahs who say, just trust me, go with me, follow me, and I'll make your life healthy, wealthy, and wise. I'll bring peace. I'll bring prosperity. I'll make things

better. Jesus says those guys are going to be abundant in the last days. There's going to be wars and rumors of wars. There's going to be famines and earthquakes.

There's going to be mass killing. He even said that when people kill you in the last days, they're going to persecute you and think that they're doing a service to God by killing you, my followers. And what's so fascinating is, as he says all that in Matthew 24, when you get to Revelation chapter 6 and you read about these four horsemen, it is an exact parallel with what Jesus said was going to happen. You have the first rider on the white horse representing a false Christ or a false peace that's put on the earth.

The second rider is wars and rumors of wars. The third rider is famines and inflation and economic distress. The fourth rider is death over one-fourth of the earth. And then the fifth seal is what we're going to look at today, and that is mass martyrdom, a mass persecution of Christians that is a result of, I think, a campaign of this figure that's going to rise at the end of days called the antichrist. Now Jesus doesn't ever call him the antichrist. Jesus says there's going to be many false Christs as birth pains before the end, but he says in Matthew 24, when the generation that precedes the coming of the Lord, that generation is going to see a particular event called the abomination of desolation.

And he says, let the reader understand the prophecies in Daniel. And we looked at this last week— if you're interested in this topic of the antichrist— actually two weeks ago. Jesus says, when that figure rises up and the abomination of desolation takes place, after that event, there is going to be triggered the greatest tribulation that the world has ever seen. And that's when he talks about this mass persecution of Christians, them proclaiming the gospel to every nation, and then the end coming. So while it is possible, and theoretically you could say that these four horsemen that we're about to look at have already come.

We've already seen wars, we've already seen false messiahs, we've already seen mass death. You could argue that. But the reason I think that they're yet future is because of what Jesus says in Matthew 24 about that abomination of desolation. He's zeroing in. The generation that precedes the coming of the Lord is going to see the rise and administration of this antichrist figure. And so with all that in view, let's reread those four seals and get a taste for what the end of the world is going to look and feel like.

So Matthew chapter, I'm sorry, Revelation chapter 6, starting in verse 1. John says, then I saw the Lamb, that's Jesus, open one of the seven seals. The seals are on a big scroll. The scroll is the future plans of God. So Jesus is breaking the seals to unfold the future plan of God. He breaks the first seal and he hears one of the four living creatures around the throne say with a voice like thunder, come. And I looked, and there was a white horse, and its rider held a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

If you're taking notes, I call this first rider the rider of deception, because he's a white rider, and many people think this is Jesus Christ himself. Because Jesus comes on a white horse later on in the book of Revelation, but it's not the Christ, it's not the true Christ, it is a false Christ. He's given a bow and he goes out in order to conquer. Some people think that means he rises to power without a lot of bloodshed. Maybe he has some kind of nuclear weapon or big bully pulpit and everybody's afraid of him.

And so they gladly— are they willing? Maybe not willing, maybe not gladly, but they are coerced into giving this figure, this antichrist figure, power, and he goes out and conquers a good portion of the world and establishes some form of peace. We saw when we looked at this antichrist two weeks ago that he creates a peace in the Middle East. Right now we see the Middle East imploding in front of our very eyes. This figure, when he comes on the scene, will create a kind of a covenant or an agreement between Israel and her hostile neighbors.

And that peace is going to create a sense of relaxing that muscle that's all tense right now. That muscle is going to be relaxed. But before long, you're going to see the second seal come and take it all away. That's in verses three to four. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, come. And then another horse went out, and this was a fiery red one, and its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth. So seal one puts it on the earth, seal two takes it from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another, and a large sword was given to him.

As Jesus said in Matthew 24, nation will rise up against nation kingdom against kingdom. Now some people say this is a global world war, and I suppose perhaps that is the case. It could also just be a war in the Middle East between Israel and her allies and the people that are against her. Whatever the case may be, people hate one another. They're tearing one another apart. This people against people indicates some kind of civil war, even within nations. Nations that are fighting other nations, the nations themselves are in the midst of civil war and tearing one another apart.

So the second seal is the seal of destruction. So you have the deception of the antichrist, you have the destruction of the war that is unleashed on the world as a result of his rise to power, which is followed by the third seal of deprivation. The third seal is the seal of deprivation. And this is the famine and the inflation. Verse 5. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, come. And I looked and there was a black horse. In the Bible, black is always accompanied with mourning or grieving.

Its rider had a set of scales in his hand, and then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say a quart of wheat for a denarius, that's one day's wage. So one serving of food of wheat for one day's wage, and three quarts of barley, which was a cheaper kind of grain, three quarts of barley for a denarius, or one day's wage. But do not harm the

oil and the wine. So what you often see after war is economic inflation. We've seen this in World War I, World War II.

This is such a bad example of economic inflation that you work all day long and you can barely serve yourself one serving of food. And if you were married and had children, you're very bad off because number one, you had to eat the junky food. Number two, it was only three servings for one day's wage, and so you're not even able really to provide for your family without starving yourself. To make matters worse, this rider does not touch the oil and the wine which could be a literal reference to oil and wine.

Some people believe that's the case. Other people say that this is symbolic and it's basically saying people will not be able to obtain their basic necessities of life. But the things that we don't really need in life, the superfluous stuff, the junk that we collect for ourselves, there will be an overabundance of that stuff. So there's an overabundance of the stuff that we don't really need, and there's a lack of abundance of the things that we need the most. I know this is not the best example, but imagine if you're the kind of person who says, if I can only get the promotion at work, if I can only make that amount of money, then I'm finally going to be happy.

And so you pour yourself into your job, you pour yourself into getting that promotion. You finally get it, but then you lose your wife, your marriage, and your children. So you got stuff you don't really need, but you lost the thing you needed more than anything else. That's the kind of vibe that this third rider brings. It is deprivation. You lose the thing you need the most. You can't afford the thing that you need. Then the fourth seal brings devastation. So you have the white horse of deception, the antichrist, the red horse of destruction, of war, the black horse of deprivation, famine and inflation, and now fourthly the pale green horse of devastation or mass death.

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, come, and I looked and there was a pale green horse. It's the Greek word chloros. It's where we get our word chlorine. Have you ever seen chlorine gas? Anybody? It's kind of like a pale green color of gas. That's the color of this horse. Or another example, have you ever left meat out on the table, forgot to put it on the grill and it just stayed out hours and hours and hours. You know that smell?

That stench of rotten food and that grayish, yellowish color of rotting meat. That's the color of this horse. And that's what he brings to the earth. Look what happens. Its rider was named death, and Hades was following after him. And they were given authority over one fourth of the earth to kill. How do they kill? They kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild beast of the earth. Now we've already seen the sword, we've already seen famine, right? That's rider two and rider three. But this fourth rider doesn't just kill people through the sword, and he doesn't just kill people through war and food shortages.

There's pandemics or plagues and wild beasts of the earth. And some people say the plagues and the wild beast are the same thing, and that the wild beasts are a vector of transmission for the plagues. You know, maybe. I don't want to get into conspiracy theories about our current pandemic and plague and the vector of transmission for all of that, but it is true that there are animal vectors of diseases. I tend to think that these wild beasts are literally wild beasts and that they're hungry. Because if there's a food shortage for human beings to me that implies there's probably a food shortage for other animals.

And I don't know if you've ever met a hungry animal. I'd much rather meet a full animal than a hungry animal. You ever heard the story about the hungry man and the hungry bear that met each other in the woods? Have you guys heard this? They both walked away stuffed. The bear was stuffed full of the man, and the man was stuffed in the bear. Do you think that's funny? I came up with that joke myself this morning while I was doing my hair. I kid you not. Because you've never heard it, right?

You've never heard that joke because I made it up. I thought it was funny. The 9:30 service did not laugh and made me very insecure. Y'all are my favorite service now. You've made it to the top. Congratulations. I will forever love the 11 o'clock. All kidding aside, this rider brings death over one-fourth of the earth through these various different means. This is another reason I don't think that this rider has already come. There are people who believe these four horsemen, they're already here, they're on the earth, they're doing these things now, and I get that.

But there's not been a mass death of one-fourth of the population to date. And I don't know why John would put a number on it unless it's going to be numbered. And a good portion of these people who are killed, I believe, are Christians. And the reason I say that is because of the fifth seal, and that is the seal of desperation. The fifth seal describes in riveting language the desperate cry of martyrs, Christians who had been killed for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony, the martyria, that's where we get our word martyr, the testimony that they had given.

They cried out with a loud voice: Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood? You know I circle that phrase, those who live on the earth. It's a descriptor of everyone who's not part of the people of God. There are those on the earth, and they're the saints. So how long until you avenge these people who have wiped us off the face of the earth? How long until you avenge our blood? In verse 11, they were each given a white robe.

Notice they're not wearing it, they're just handed it, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who were going to be killed just as they had been. Sobering passage, right? Sobering

passage, and it makes us uncomfortable to talk about martyrdom, to talk about death especially Christians being killed for their faith. There's a tendency in the West, especially in America, by skeptical people, atheistic kind of minded persons, when Christians talk about being persecuted and martyred, they all go like, oh please give me a break.

You live in the freest country of the world. You are not being persecuted just because people make fun of you. Or just because people look at you the wrong way, that is not persecution. Chill out. We're the freest country that's ever existed. And that's true. And they're right. We are not experiencing in the West the kinds of persecution that is being experienced by the vast majority of people around the world. But just because we're the exception to the norm doesn't mean that persecution doesn't exist in the world. And just because we're the exception to the norm doesn't mean that our exception is going to last forever.

The simple fact is the greatest level of persecution is settled on the Christian religion. It's that way now, and it's always been that way. Christians are more persecuted than any other religion in the world, and though we have an anomaly here in America. So what I wanted to try to do is expose you to the reality of this global phenomenon taking place really right in front of our eyes if you're willing to look at it. If you Google Christian persecution or Christian martyrdom, you'll get some astronomical numbers that I think maybe are misleading.

You can Google Christian persecution and it'll say things like A hundred thousand Christians are martyred for their faith every year, and that's a little bit steep. Okay, it's not a hundred thousand Christians. They come up with that number because of the way that they define martyrdom. They say that martyrdom is any Christian dying in any way in service to the Lord? And so I don't like that definition because just because you get on a plane to fly somewhere in service to the Lord and that plane goes down and you die, that's not a martyr's death to me, a martyr's death is where you are confronted with a choice, recant Jesus Christ or be killed.

Renounce Jesus or we are going to chop off your head. When you're confronted with that choice and you say, I will not recant. My allegiance is to Jesus Christ as Lord. I am not ashamed of the gospel. Here I stand, I can do no other. When you are killed because of that kind of decision, that's a martyr's death. But when you take that definition, which is a very narrow definition, even still the numbers are boggling. You can go to opendoors.uk, which is an organization that tracks these kind of numbers with that definition.

And just with that definition, on average, there are 13 Christians that are martyred every single day for their faith. Thirteen Christians every single day. That's around 4,700 every year. Eighty-four churches or Christian buildings are attacked every single week. Three hundred and ninety Christians are falsely prosecuted and imprisoned for their faith every single month. Or 309. The two countries where the church is experiencing the most severe

persecution are North Korea and Afghanistan. And that was before we took our troops out. Now that our troops are out of Afghanistan, the Taliban and ISIS and other Islamic extremists will only make it worse.

I received reports from pastors who are on the ground in Afghanistan who say they're getting calls from the Taliban saying we know who you are, we know where you live, and we know who your church members are, and we are coming for you. They may be waiting a little while till the world's eyes are not watching them as strongly, but these are people who will be martyred for their faith. If you're a Christian in North Korea and people find out about it, you're done. You're toast. You'll go to a work camp or worse.

The most violent kinds of persecution are right now being experienced in Nigeria. Nigeria came on our radar when Joseph came on our staff; he was from Nigeria. We considered planting a church down there, and as we were exploring those options— the kinds of violence that is committed against Christians by Boko Haram and Muslim extremist groups will boggle your mind. For the first time in 29 years— because of COVID-19— When COVID-19 hit the earth, the world locked down, but persecution lit up more than it had ever done before. Mostly by state governments persecuting Christians because they had a crisis to justify their persecution.

The greatest numbers of Christians, when it comes to Christians being killed for their faith, are killed by the government. They're killed by the state, followed by Islamic extremists and Hindu extremists. For the first time in 29 years since Open Doors has been measuring these statistics, for the first time in 29 years, all 50 of the 50 nations that persecute Christians don't just sort of persecute, they intensely or severely persecute the Christians in their nations. It is going up, it is not going down, it is getting worse, it is not getting better.

And if it surprises you, it shouldn't. It should not surprise you. If you are going to follow Jesus in a culture that is settled against him, then you will invite suffering and persecution into your life. Paul told Timothy, a young pastor who was trying to teach his flock what to expect as a Christian person. He said, everybody who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And that was then, in the first century, when Christianity just became a religion. Everybody who desires to live a godly life will be persecuted.

Jesus in John 15:20 said, remember what I said to you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. So the idea that persecution and martyrdom are normative to the Christian life makes us a little bit uncomfortable in the West. Because in the West, if you became a Christian, there used to be some social advantage to becoming a believer because Christianity was our cultural religion. You go to church on Sundays, it was good for your business relationships, it was good for your economic situation, those days are gone.

And whatever remaining residue of that still exists in the Bible belt will not be here for long. It will not be long until we experience the same thing that the vast majority of Christians have experienced for the vast majority of human history, and that is alienation, persecution and death. Now what are you saying, Wes? Are you saying that every Christian should die a martyr's death? Of course not. And I'm not suggesting that you become a Christian who wants to be a martyr. I don't think that would be wise. I don't think every Christian is called to die a martyr's death, but I do want to try to argue this morning that every Christian is called to embrace the martyr's mindset.

And what I mean by that is the martyr's mindset is not a mindset that looks for persecution under every rock. Okay, I don't want us to become those kind of people who say, somebody gave me a funny look at work. I'm just so persecuted for my faith. Woe is me. That's not a martyr's mindset. And a martyr's mindset is not a glorying in death. I don't think that we should be the kinds of people who take dumb risks for the Lord and end up being killed as a result of our foolishness.

A martyr's mindset is not glorying in death, it is not glorying in being persecuted, it is not how they die, even. A martyr's mindset is on how they live. A martyr's mindset is a mindset that treasures Jesus Christ above and beyond anyone or anything else in this world. A martyr's mindset is saying, Jesus is more precious to me than anything that I might gain in this life or anything that I might lose through my death. Jesus is greater. Jesus is better. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world can give me.

That's the martyr's mindset. And when you embrace that kind of mindset, when you become the kind of Christian who says, I want Jesus more than anything else, more than the approval of man, more than I want money, more than I want the promotion, more than I want a family in a nice little cottage on a good piece of ten-acre acreage on the outside of the Abilene city limits where everything's so beautiful and the trees are so— more than any of that stuff, I want Jesus. And if I have to give up those things in order to have Jesus, then I would give them up gladly.

That's the martyr's mindset. And every Christian is called to embrace that mindset. It's described by Jesus in the parable about the treasure hidden in a field. A man discovers a treasure hidden in a field and he goes away gladly. He sells everything that he has, and with joy he comes and he buys that field because what's there is more precious to him than anything else in this world. That's what it means to be a believer, and that's what it means to embrace the martyr's mindset. And I think we see that in our text.

I think you see it by the things that they say and don't say that they are people who possess this mindset. And the reason I say every Christian is called to do that is because when Jesus says in Acts 1:8, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. He uses this word that we use for martyr. To be a witness for

the Lord Jesus is to be a martyr. And the focus is not on how you die, the focus is on how you live.

You're living as if Jesus is more precious to you than anything else in this world. So what does that look like, practically speaking? A couple of things that I see from the text. Number one, they're marked by grateful surrender. They're marked by grateful surrender. If you look at verse 9, he opens the fifth seal. He says, I saw the souls under the altar. I'd circle that. Under the altar. And they had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony, or the martyria, that they had given. Now, I don't know if there's an actual physical altar in heaven.

If you go to the altars on earth in the temple, there were two altars. There was the altar on which they sacrificed the animal sacrifices to make atonement for sin. But then there was a secondary altar. It was called the altar of incense where you would basically give a sacrifice of praise to the Lord. And so the altar in terms of what we experience today, we don't have a temple, we don't sacrifice animals. But the New Testament says that Jesus was our once and for all sacrifice on that altar of burnt offering.

Jesus made atonement for our sins. We do not have to put ourselves on the altar. We do not have to put lambs and goats on the altar. Jesus has paid for our sins once and for all. Forever it is atoned for through the blood of Jesus Christ. So I do not think that they're on that altar. Because Jesus is on that altar. If they're with that altar, they're under the altar, they're not on top of the altar. I think they're at the altar of incense. And the altar of incense— as Paul said in Romans 12, too, in view of God's mercies, in light of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, now I want you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.

That verse characterizes the martyr mindset. It is a mindset of grateful surrender. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Jesus, if you have given everything to me, who am I to withhold anything from you? Wherever you say go, Wherever you say go, I'll go. Whatever you say do, I'll do. I am completely surrendered to your will. That's the martyr's mindset. They're under the altar. Number two, you see humble submission. I see this in verse 10 where they cry out with a loud voice and they say, Lord, how long until you judge those who live on the earth?

It's really interesting. The word Lord is not the typical word used for Lord in the Greek New Testament. Usually it's the Greek word kurios, which means Lord. The disciples, when they say to Jesus, Lord this, Lord that, they use the word kurios. This is the word despotes. It's where we get our English word despot, which has negative connotations in our usage, because a despot is kind of like a mean-spirited totalitarian ruler. But that's not necessarily the connotations it had in the original Greek language. It just meant the man in charge, the boss man, the sovereign, the king, the one who calls the shots, who says go or not go.

That's how they recognize the Lord Jesus. They are essentially saying, I recognize that you have a will and you have a way, and I'm going to humbly submit myself to your purposes, even though right now it doesn't make much sense to me. And what a picture of the martyr's mindset. For us today in our culture, some of you may be even right now having situations in your life where you say to the Lord, I don't know why. I don't know what your reasons are. They don't make any sense to me.

I can't see any good reason for you allowing the things that you've allowed to take place in my life. But the martyr's mindset is, even with that angst and even with those unanswered questions, you submit yourself to the sovereignty of a good and wise heavenly father. Just because I can't see it doesn't mean there's not something there. Just because I don't know how, doesn't mean that you don't have a way. And I'm going to trust by faith that you are working all things together for good. I'm going to submit to your sovereign plan.

It means doing that even when you're wronged. People make fun of you, people persecute you, people falsely misrepresent you. It is a willingness to say vengeance is the Lord's. It belongs to him and not to me. And so I'm not going to repay evil for evil. I'm going to overcome evil with good. It is a willingness as a young person to say, my body does not belong to me. I cannot do with my body sexually whatever I want to do just because it feels good, doesn't mean I get to do it.

I'm going to submit myself to the sovereign design of my king, of my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the martyr's mindset. And does that mean that you're going to die for your faith? No, but it does mean you're going to live a lot differently than other people live because for you, Jesus is more precious. He is more precious to you than anything you might lose through submission to his will. The third thing I see is confident faith. You've got grateful surrender, humble submission, thirdly, confident faith. When they say how long until you judge those who live on the earth, they're not saying, God, will you ever judge those who live on the earth?

They believe that God is faithful to his promises, that Jesus will do what he promised he would do. They're just wondering when he's going to finally get to it. And so it's a confident faith. It is a faith that is resting in the promises of God, patiently enduring God's timeline to bring about what he's going to do. So they're marked by confident faith and patient endurance. Confident faith and patient endurance. The patient endurance you see in verse 11, they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the full number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who were going to be killed just as they had been.

So it's as if Jesus is telling them, rest a little while longer. It's going to be okay. The Lord, this week, when I was very discouraged looking at all the things that were taking place around the world. And I was getting those reports from pastors in Afghanistan who were fearing for

their families, who knew that unless they got out, they were dead, not only them, but their wife and their children were dead and I began to ask the question, why in the world, Lord, why are you allowing these kinds of things to take place?

That's the vibe that these martyrs are under. And yet Jesus still tells them, wait, wait. Why? Because I'm doing something through your death, and I'm doing something not just through your death, but through their death as well. I have a plan, and my plan is to take what Satan intends for evil, what Satan intends to bring about his victory, I'm actually using as a Trojan horse to overcome Satan, to overcome his plans through the blood of these saints. As Tertullian said back in the first century,[1] it was the blood of the martyrs that became the seed.

The first church exploded on the scene because of the willingness of Christians to say, I treasure Jesus more than anything else in my life, and as a result of that, I will boldly, confidently go to my death. Not renouncing the name of Jesus. And it was through that bold declaration of the gospel that many people in the first century came to faith in Jesus Christ. And it's through that same bold declaration of people that the world will be evangelized, not just our nation, but every single nation on the earth will be evangelized through the blood of the martyrs.

And that's not my wishful thinking. This is exactly what Jesus said was going to happen. If you go back to Matthew 24, which remember, Matthew 24 and Revelation chapter 6, two peas in a pod, okay? Matthew 24, Jesus says, you will be persecuted. They're going to hand you over to be persecuted, and they're going to kill you, and you're going to be hated by how many nations? All. All nations. You cannot be hated by all nations if you're not in every nation. I suppose you could be, but you're going to be hated by all nations.

And then he says after that the love of many will grow cold. You're going to be betrayed. It's going to get really ugly. But he closes with this statement in verse 14. He says, this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to how many nations? All nations. It's our word martyrion. It's our word martyr. Your martyr's death is going to be a martyrion. It's going to be a testimony to every single nation. And then the end will come. And do you know what's so crazy?

Do you know the next time that you see these martyrs, remember the martyrs are given a what color robe? A white robe. And the next time you see the white robes is in Revelation chapter 7. And it's not just these martyrs. John says, I looked, and there was a countless multitude of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and they were wearing white robes. And these Christians began to worship the Lord. Some people think this is a reference to the rapture. He can't count them. John counts everything, but he can't count these Christians.

They were clothed in white robes. One of the 24 elders comes to John and says, John, who are these people? And John says, I don't know. I don't live here. You do. You tell me. And the elder says, these are the people who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. In other words, they love their lives not unto death, and as a result of them not loving their lives unto death, through their death they gave a testimony to all nations.

And now look at who's here. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation gathered around the throne singing, Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb. And so it is through the proclamation of martyrs that the Great Commission is finally accomplished. Now I know there are some people who say, we looked at this last week, they'll say, well, the church is going to be raptured before the antichrist comes and so we're not going to experience this persecution. You just need to hope for the rapture. And there are reasons why people hold that view and I'm not going to belittle that view, but what I would say is it's better to be radiant and ready in case you're not raptured and removed.

It could be that the church is not raptured until after the Antichrist comes on the scene. There's disagreement on the rapture. Some people say it's in the middle, some people say it's at the front. Some people say it's three-quarters of the way through. Some people say it's at the end. So I'd rather be radiant and ready in case I'm not raptured and removed. Number two, we may not be the generation that precedes the coming of the Lord, but just because that's true doesn't mean we're not going to experience the kinds of persecution that these brothers are experiencing.

Who's to say we're not going to be in the same kind of situation that our brothers and sisters are in, in Afghanistan, right now? So I'd rather you be ready and not need it than to need it and not be ready. So this morning will you ready your heart? Will you live today in light of then? Will you be a person who evaluates whether or not my heart truly treasures Jesus Christ more than anyone or anything else in this world? The martyr's mindset is not about how you die, it's about how you live.

It's not about glorying in death and treasuring death. It's about glorying and treasuring Jesus Christ more than anyone or anything else. More than my possessions, more than my spouse, more than my children, more than my job. I'd rather have Jesus than all of those things. And whatever this world takes from me, it cannot take that. And so I'm going to live today in light of that truth. So let me challenge you to do that as we bring our time to a close. Some of you may be here this morning and you're not a Christian, and you would not be part of that great multitude around the throne.

And maybe this morning you were kind of close to becoming a Christian. And then you came to Broadview and I talked you out of it. Because you're like, I don't want to do all that. I don't want to be a martyr. I mean, I want Jesus to make my life better. I don't want my life to end.

And here's what I would say to you. I can't remember the missionary's name who said he is a fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep.

So if you're here this morning and you're struggling with the idea of giving your life to Jesus Christ because of what it's going to cost you, I would encourage you to consider what you really have to gain by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ. Yes, you may have to give up sex before marriage and give up things you want to do with your future or your body or you may have to give up a lot of things but whatever it is you're giving up in obedience to Jesus Christ it pales in comparison to what you're going to gain, because this world and the things of this world are passing away.

I think if an honest person is honest about what's going on right now, you see that this world is broken and that the system of this world is not producing what it said it was going to produce. And that the judgment of God is falling. And so when that judgment comes, and when you stand before God's throne of grace, and he asks you, why should I let you into my holy heaven? Any other answer other than because the blood of Jesus Christ has covered my sins? Any other answer besides, I have washed my robes white in the blood of the Lamb?

It's not about me, it's not about what I've done, it's about what Jesus Christ has done. Any other answer is not sufficient. So if you're here this morning and you have not surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as Crystal plays and we respond to the Lord, would you come and say, I need to give my life to Jesus. Some of you're Christians, but you're not surrendered to the Lord. You don't have that martyr's mindset. You're holding on to things and to actions that you know you need to give back to the Lord.

Some of it's a simple act of obedience. Some of it if you do what God wants you to do, it's going to cost you. And I want to challenge you to wrestle with the Lord this morning. And to ask the Holy Spirit to give you a seed of faith so that you can respond to what God's calling you to do with obedience instead of rebellion. And then the last thing I want to encourage you to do, if you're a Christian, I want you to use this time to pray for the persecuted church.

To pray for our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan, to pray for them in North Korea, Nigeria, other places around the world, to stop ignoring the death of our brothers and sisters, to stop separating yourself from the reality of this terrible plight on our world. But to join with them in saying, how long, O Lord, until you come. Let's pray.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "back in the first century"; Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220) wrote the line about the blood of Christians being seed in his Apologeticus, ch. 50, around AD 197 (late second century). Source: Wikipedia, "Tertullian" and "Apologeticus." ↩