

Introduction

Revelation 6:9–11 ESV

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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?” ¹¹ 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.

We've been walking through the seals of [Revelation 6](#), and we've seen the famous Four Horsemen bringing judgment to the earth. The first four seals showed us conquest, war, famine, and death sweeping across the world. But now, with the fifth seal, something changes. John's vision shifts from earth to heaven. What he sees there forces us to face a hard reality about following Jesus.

This passage is about martyrdom. It's about believers who died because they wouldn't deny their faith. Some of you might think, "That's ancient history. That doesn't apply to us today."

But here's the truth we can't ignore. Right now, more Christians are dying for their faith than at any other time in history. Open Doors reports that over 380 million Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination. Last year alone, over 4,400 Christians were killed for their faith.

These aren't just numbers. A pastor in Nigeria shot while preaching. A house church leader in China imprisoned for sharing the gospel. A young woman in Pakistan murdered for refusing to deny Christ. Their stories matter because their Savior is our Savior.

But even if you never face physical persecution, this passage speaks to every believer. We all live in a world hostile to the gospel. We all know what it's like to suffer for doing what's right. We all wrestle with the same question these martyred saints ask: "God, how long will evil prosper? When will justice come?"

A. The Shift from Earth to Heaven

Notice the dramatic change as we move from the fourth seal to the fifth. The first four seals focused on earthly judgments. Horses and riders brought destruction across the earth. But now John looks "under the altar" and sees something completely different.

This shift reminds us that there's always more happening than what we can see. While the world experiences judgment and suffering, heaven remains God's throne room. The martyrs aren't lost or forgotten. They're in the most sacred place imaginable.

B. The Connection to Jesus' Teaching

This passage connects directly to what Jesus taught about persecution. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:10-12 (ESV) *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Jesus didn't promise His followers an easy life. He promised them persecution. But He also promised them a reward in heaven. [Revelation 6:9-11](#) shows us what that looks like.

C. Why This Matters Today

This passage gives us God's perspective on three crucial questions every believer faces:

1. What happens to believers who die, especially those who suffer for their faith?
2. Does God see injustice, and will He act?
3. How should we live while we wait for God's perfect timing?

The fifth seal answers all three questions. And the answers change everything about how we view suffering, death, and hope.

Today we're going to discover that those who die in Christ aren't forgotten victims. They're honored saints who rest in God's presence while they wait for His perfect justice. This truth can transform how you face whatever suffering comes your way.

II. The Sacred Location: Under the Altar

Revelation 6:9 ESV

⁹ 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.

John sees something remarkable: the souls of martyred believers positioned "under the altar." This isn't random imagery. The location matters deeply, and it connects directly to the Old Testament sacrificial system that every Jewish reader would understand.

A. Old Testament Foundation: The Altar and Blood

To understand what John sees, we need to go back to the tabernacle and temple worship. In the Old Testament, the altar was the most sacred place where sacrifices were offered to God. And there was a specific detail about what happened to the blood of those sacrifices.

Leviticus 4:7 ESV

⁷ And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

The blood was poured at the base of the altar. This wasn't about disposal. The blood represented the life of the sacrifice, and its position at the altar's base showed that the life had been given to God.

Leviticus 17:11 ESV

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

The Hebrew word for "life" here is *nephesh* (נֶפֶשׁ), which can also be translated as "soul." When John sees souls "under the altar," he's using language that connects directly to this sacrificial imagery.

B. The Greek Word for "Under"

The Greek word John uses for "under" is *hypokatō* (ὑποκάτω), which means "beneath" or "at the base of." This isn't about being buried or hidden. It's about being positioned in the place of honor where the life-blood of sacrifices was placed.

In ancient Greek culture, *hypokatō* could also suggest protection or shelter. The martyrs aren't abandoned under the altar; they're sheltered by it.

C. Historical Context: The Heavenly Temple

John is seeing the heavenly temple, not the earthly one. Hebrews helps us understand this reality:

Hebrews 9:23–24 ESV

²³ Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

The earthly tabernacle and temple were copies of the heavenly reality. When John sees the altar in heaven, he's seeing the original that Moses was told to copy.

D. What This Position Means

1. The Martyrs as Living Sacrifices

The position of these souls connects to Paul's teaching about believers as living sacrifices:

Romans 12:1 ESV

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The martyrs didn't just live as sacrifices; they died as sacrifices. Their position under the altar shows God's acceptance of their offering.

2. Lives Given in Service to God

These believers died "because of the word of God and for the witness they had borne." The Greek word for "witness" is *martyria* (μαρτυρία), from which we get our English word "martyr." Originally, it just meant "testimony" or "witness." But by John's time, it was beginning to carry the meaning of dying for one's testimony.

Their deaths weren't meaningless. They were acts of worship, testimonies to the truth of God's word.

3. Honor, Not Abandonment

Being under the altar isn't a position of shame or forgetfulness. In the Old Testament, the area around the altar was the most holy place where humans could approach God. These martyred souls aren't hidden away; they're in the place of highest honor in heaven.

Psalm 84:10 ESV

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The psalmist understood that any position near God's altar was better than the finest position anywhere else.

E. The Comfort This Brings

For us, this imagery should bring tremendous comfort. When we see Christians suffering and dying for their faith around the world, we might wonder if God notices or cares. The position of these souls under the altar gives us God's answer.

Every believer who suffers for the gospel, every missionary who dies in service, every pastor who faces persecution—they're not forgotten. Their lives are precious offerings placed in one of the most sacred locations in heaven itself.

Their deaths aren't tragedies that caught God by surprise. They're sacrifices that God receives and honors in the very throne room of heaven.

III. The Cry for Justice: "How Long?"

Revelation 6:10 ESV

¹⁰ 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?"

The martyred souls under the altar aren't silent. They cry out with a loud voice, asking a question that has echoed through the ages: "How long?" I don't think this is a doubt, I think it's a bold appeal to God's character and justice.

A. Biblical Precedent for This Question

The cry "How long?" appears throughout Scripture. These martyred souls join a chorus of faithful believers who have asked the same question.

1. David's Cry in the Psalms

Psalms 13:1–2 ESV

¹ How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

David felt abandoned and wondered when God would act. But notice that David still calls Him "O Lord." Even in his questioning, he affirms God's authority.

Psalms 94:3–4 ESV

³ O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? ⁴ They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast.

David wasn't just concerned about his personal suffering. He was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked and their oppression of the righteous.

2. Habakkuk's Wrestling with God

Habakkuk 1:2–3 ESV

² O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³ Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

Habakkuk lived during a time when violence and injustice seemed to rule. His entire prophecy wrestles with the question of why God allows evil to prosper while the righteous suffer.

3. Jeremiah's Honest Question

Jeremiah 12:1 ESV

¹ Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

Even Jeremiah, called "the weeping prophet," brought this question to God. Notice that he begins by affirming God's righteousness, then asks his honest question.

B. What This Reveals About the Martyred Souls

1. They Are Conscious and Aware

This passage clearly shows that believers who die don't sleep unconsciously until the resurrection. These martyrs are awake, aware, and actively engaged in heavenly realities. They remember their earthly suffering and long for God's justice.

2. They Care About Justice on Earth

The martyrs aren't so caught up in heavenly bliss that they've forgotten about earthly justice. They care deeply about their persecutors being held accountable. This shows us that longing for justice isn't unspiritual—it's part of God's character reflected in us.

3. God Welcomes Honest Questions

Notice that God doesn't rebuke these souls for their cry. He doesn't tell them they're wrong to ask "How long?" This teaches us that God welcomes our honest questions and emotional appeals, even when they involve challenging His timing.

C. The Divine Titles They Use

The martyrs don't just cry out to God; they address Him with specific titles that reveal their understanding of His character.

1. "Sovereign Lord" (Despotes)

The Greek word here is *despotes* (δεσπότης), which means "master" or "sovereign ruler." It's the word used for someone who has authority and power. The martyrs acknowledge that God has complete control, even over their suffering and death.

Acts 4:24 ESV

²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

The early church used this same title when they faced persecution. They understood that God's sovereignty doesn't eliminate suffering but provides the foundation for trusting Him through it.

2. "Holy"

The word "holy" (*hagios* - ἅγιος) speaks to God's moral perfection and separation from sin. The martyrs appeal to God's holiness as the basis for their cry for justice. Because God is holy, He cannot tolerate evil forever.

Isaiah 6:3 ESV

³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

God's holiness guarantees that justice will come. Sin cannot coexist with perfect holiness indefinitely.

3. "True"

The word "true" (*alethinos* - ἀληθινός) means "genuine" or "reliable." It speaks to God's faithfulness to His promises and His commitment to truth. The martyrs trust that God's justice isn't just possible—it's certain because of who He is.

John 17:3 ESV

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

God's truth is the foundation of all reality. What He says will happen, happens.

D. The Hebrew Background: Crying for Justice

The concept of crying out for justice has deep roots in Hebrew culture and law. The Hebrew word *za'aq* (זָעַק) means "to cry out" or "to call for help," especially in the context of injustice.

Genesis 4:10 ESV

¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Even Abel's blood cried out for justice after Cain murdered him. The martyrs in Revelation join this ancient cry that began with the first murder.

E. The Timing of Their Cry

These souls ask "how long before you will judge." The Greek word for "judge" is *krino* (κρίνω), which means "to separate" or "to decide." They're not asking for revenge; they're asking for God to act as the righteous judge who separates good from evil and sets things right.

2 Timothy 4:8 ESV

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

The martyrs long for "that Day" when God's justice will be fully revealed and His righteousness will be vindicated.

F. What This Means for Us

The martyrs' cry teaches us several important truths:

1. It's okay to question God's timing while affirming His character
2. Longing for justice reflects God's heart, not human vindictiveness
3. God hears and responds to the cries of those who suffer for righteousness
4. Our present suffering doesn't negate our future hope

When we face injustice or watch evil prosper, we can join our voices to this ancient cry: "How long, O Lord?" But we cry out to a God who is sovereign, holy, and true—and who will answer in His perfect time.

IV. The Lord's Response: White Robes and Rest

Revelation 6:11 ESV

¹¹ 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.

God doesn't ignore the martyrs' cry. He responds with a gift and a promise. Each soul receives a white robe, and each is told to rest. But this response also reveals God's larger plan—a plan that includes more suffering before the final victory comes.

A. The Gift of White Robes

1. The Significance of White in Scripture

White clothing in Scripture consistently represents purity, righteousness, victory, and honor. The Greek word here is *leukos* (λευκός), which means "bright" or "shining white." Not just clean clothing; it's radiant garments that reflect the glory of God.

Isaiah 1:18 ESV

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

White represents the complete cleansing from sin that God provides. The martyrs receive robes that symbolize their perfect righteousness in Christ.

2. Righteousness Made Visible

Isaiah 61:10 ESV

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The Hebrew word for "righteousness" here is *tsedakah* (צְדָקָה), which means "rightness" or "justice." These robes represent the righteousness of Christ given to every believer. But for the martyrs, this righteousness is now made visible and complete.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The white robes show that the martyrs now fully possess the righteousness of Christ. Their suffering is over; their vindication is complete.

3. Victory Over Death and Suffering

Revelation 3:4-5 ESV

⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in

white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Jesus promises white robes to "the one who conquers." The martyrs have conquered through their faithful witness unto death. Their white robes are victory medals from the King of kings.

The word "conquers" (*nikao* - νικάω) means "to overcome" or "to be victorious." The martyrs conquered not by avoiding death but by remaining faithful through death.

4. Honor and Recognition

In ancient culture, white garments were worn at celebrations and times of honor. The martyrs receive clothing that marks them as honored guests at heaven's eternal celebration.

B. The Command to Rest

1. Present Peace and Comfort

The Greek word for "rest" is *anapauō* (ἀναπαύω), which means "to cause to rest" or "to give rest to." This is the same word Jesus uses in His famous invitation:

Matthew 11:28 ESV

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The martyrs now experience the complete fulfillment of Jesus' promise. Their labors and suffering are over. They've entered into perfect rest.

2. Sabbath Rest Fulfilled

Hebrews 4:9–10 ESV

⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The Hebrew concept of Sabbath (*shabbat* - שַׁבָּת) meant "cessation" or "rest." God instituted the Sabbath as a picture of the eternal rest that awaits His people. The martyrs have entered that eternal Sabbath.

Psalms 23:2 ESV

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

The 23rd Psalm's imagery finds its ultimate fulfillment in the rest these martyred souls experience. They've reached the green pastures and still waters that David could only glimpse.

3. Comfort While Waiting

Isaiah 40:31 ESV

³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

The Hebrew word for "wait" is *qavah* (קָוָה), which means "to look eagerly for" or "to hope." The martyrs rest while they wait, but their waiting is filled with eager anticipation, not weary endurance.

C. The Timing: "A Little While Longer"

1. God's Perspective on Time

2 Peter 3:8 ESV

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The phrase "a little while longer" reflects God's eternal perspective. What seems like a long delay to us is brief in light of eternity.

2. Divine Patience and Mercy

2 Peter 3:9 ESV

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

It is not weakness or indifference that causes God to delay bringing the final judgment. It's mercy toward those who haven't yet come to faith. Every day of delay means more opportunities for salvation.

D. The Completed Number

The passage speaks of waiting "until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

1. The Fellowship of Martyrs

Hebrews 11:39–40 ESV

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The martyrs wait for their "fellow servants and brothers." This isn't just about numbers; it's about the completion of the family of faith. No one receives their final reward alone.

Philippians 3:10 ESV

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Paul understood that suffering for Christ creates a unique fellowship. The martyrs wait for this fellowship to be complete.

E. What This Means for Believers Today

The Lord's response to the martyrs teaches us several crucial truths:

1. God sees and honors every act of faithfulness, especially suffering for the gospel
2. Those who die in Christ receive immediate comfort and recognition
3. God's timing in bringing justice reflects His mercy, not His weakness
4. Every believer is part of a larger plan that spans all of history
5. Our present suffering has meaning within God's eternal purpose

When we face injustice or watch fellow believers suffer, we can find hope in God's response to the martyrs. He doesn't dismiss their pain or ignore their cry. He clothes them in honor, gives them rest, and assures them that His plan is moving forward according to His perfect timing.

V. Promises for All Believers Who Die in Christ

The Hope That Transcends Death

The martyrs under the altar aren't the only believers who face death. Every Christian must eventually pass through death's door, whether through persecution, illness, or old age. What

does Scripture promise to all believers who die in Christ? The answer transforms how we view death itself.

A. Immediate Promises: What Happens at Death

1. Immediate Presence with Christ

Luke 23:43 ESV

⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus spoke these words to the repentant thief on the cross. Notice the word "today" (*sēmeron* - σήμερον). There's no delay, no waiting period, no intermediate state of unconsciousness. Death for the believer means immediate entrance into Christ's presence.

The word "paradise" (*paradeisos* - παράδεισος) comes from Persian and means "garden". It refers to the place of the blessed dead, the immediate dwelling place of those who die in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8 ESV

⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Paul describes death as being "away from the body" (*ekdēmeō* - ἐκδημέω) and "at home with the Lord" (*endēmeō* - ἐνδημέω). These are contrasting states with no gap between them. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

The Greek construction here suggests immediate transition. Paul doesn't speak of soul sleep or unconscious waiting. Death means instant relocation from earthly exile to heavenly home.

2. Death as Gain, Not Loss

Philippians 1:21 ESV

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul uses the word "gain" (*kerdos* - κέρδος), which means "profit" or "advantage." In the ancient world, this was a commercial term used for financial benefit. Paul sees death as a profitable transaction.

Philippians 1:23 ESV

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

The word "depart" (*analuō* - ἀναλύω) was used for breaking camp or loosing a ship from its moorings. Death is simply breaking camp on earth to sail into Christ's presence.

"Far better" translates *pollō mallon kreisson* (πολλῷ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον), which means "much more excellent" or "far superior." Being with Christ after death isn't just good; it's incomparably better than the best earthly experience.

3. Freedom from Suffering

Revelation 14:13 ESV

¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

The phrase "from now on" (*ap' arti* - ἀπ' ἄρτι) means "from this time forward." Since Christ's death and resurrection, dying in the Lord brings immediate blessing.

"Rest from their labors" uses the Greek word *kopos* (κόπος), which refers to exhausting work that produces weariness. Death ends all earthly toil, struggle, and suffering.

B. The Intermediate State: Between Death and Resurrection

1. Conscious and Active

The martyrs under the altar are clearly conscious, remembering their earthly experiences, and actively crying out for justice. This pattern applies to all believers who die.

2. Perfected but Not Yet Complete

Hebrews 12:23 ESV

²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

The phrase "spirits of the righteous made perfect" refers to believers who have died. The word "perfect" (*teleiōō* - τελειόω) means "completed" or "brought to the intended goal."

In death, believers are perfected in righteousness but still await their resurrection bodies and the final consummation of all things.

C. Future Promises: The Resurrection Hope

1. The Certainty of Resurrection

1 Thessalonians 4:13–14 ESV

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul calls death "sleep" (*koimaō* - κοιμάω), but this refers only to the body, not the soul. The body rests in the grave like someone sleeping, but the soul is awake with Christ.

The phrase "God will bring with him" means that when Christ returns, He brings the souls of believers with Him to be reunited with their resurrected bodies.

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 ESV

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.

The resurrection happens in stages: first the dead in Christ rise, then living believers are transformed. But the end result is that all believers will "always be with the Lord".

2. Transformed Bodies

1 Corinthians 15:42–44 ESV

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Our resurrection bodies will be "imperishable", meaning they cannot decay or be destroyed. They will have "glory" (*doxa* - δόξα), the radiant splendor that belongs to God's presence.

1 Corinthians 15:51–54 ESV

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must

put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

The transformation happens "in a moment" (*en atomō* - ἐν ἁτόμῳ), literally "in an indivisible instant." The word "atom" comes from this Greek term meaning something that cannot be divided.

3. Victory Over Death

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 ESV

⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul quotes from Hosea 13:14, celebrating death's defeat. The "sting" refers to a weapon that inflicts a fatal wound. Sin gave death its killing power, but Christ has removed sin's penalty.

D. Eternal Promises: Life Forever with God

1. The Promise of Jesus Himself

John 11:25-26 ESV

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Jesus doesn't just promise resurrection; He IS the resurrection. The Greek construction emphasizes that Jesus personally guarantees eternal life to every believer.

"Shall never die" (*ou mē apothanē* - οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ) is the strongest possible negative in Greek. It's an absolute denial that spiritual death can touch the believer.

John 14:2-3 ESV

² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Jesus personally prepares a place for each believer and promises to come back to take us there. The phrase "take you to myself" (*paralambano* - παραλαμβάνω) means "to receive to oneself" or "to welcome into one's presence."

2. Unbreakable Union with Christ

Romans 8:38–39 ESV

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul lists every conceivable threat to our relationship with God, including death itself. Nothing can "separate" us from God's love. This word was used for divorce, division, or tearing apart. No force in the universe can divorce believers from Christ.

Colossians 3:3–4 ESV

³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Our life is "hidden" with Christ in God. This means it's protected and secure in the safest possible place. When Christ returns, believers will "appear with him in glory," sharing His visible triumph.

3. The Crown of Life

Revelation 2:10 ESV

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Jesus promises "the crown of life" to those who are faithful unto death. A *stephanos* was the victor's crown given to winners in athletic competitions. It represents triumph, not just survival.

James 1:12 ESV

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

This crown isn't just for martyrs but for all who "remain steadfast" under trial. It's promised to "those who love him".

E. No More Sorrow

Revelation 21:3–4 ESV

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

The ultimate promise is the complete elimination of everything that causes sorrow. God will personally "wipe away" (*exaleiphō* - ἐξαλείφω) every tear. This word means "to obliterate" or "to erase completely."

Death itself "shall be no more" (*ouk estai eti* - οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι).

What This Means for Every Believer

These promises transform everything about how we view death:

1. Death is not the end but a doorway to something far better
2. Separation from saved loved ones is temporary, not permanent
3. Every struggle and sorrow has an expiration date
4. Our hope is not wishful thinking but guaranteed by God's character
5. Christ's victory over death becomes our victory

Whether we face martyrdom like the souls under the altar or die quietly in our beds, the same glorious promises await every believer. Death cannot separate us from God's love, destroy our relationship with Christ, or prevent our participation in His eternal kingdom.

VIII. Conclusion: The Hope That Sustains

The Lamb Who Makes All Things Possible

We began this study by opening the fifth seal and seeing martyred souls under the heavenly altar. We've walked through their sacred position, heard their cry for justice, witnessed God's response with white robes and rest, and learned about His perfect timing. We've explored the glorious promises that await every believer who dies in Christ.

But behind every promise, underneath every comfort, at the center of every hope stands one figure: the Lamb who was slain.

A. Christ: The Foundation of Every Promise

Revelation 5:6 (ESV) *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

The Lamb appears "as though it had been slain." The Greek word *sphazō* (σφάζω) means "to butcher" or "to slaughter violently." Jesus didn't die peacefully in His sleep. He was brutally killed, and He bears the marks of that death forever.

But He stands. Death couldn't hold Him. The same Jesus who died for our sins conquered death and now lives forever. Every promise we've studied today flows from this central reality: Christ died and rose again.

1. Our Position Under the Altar

The martyrs rest under the altar because the Lamb's blood was shed. In the Old Testament, the blood of sacrifices was poured at the altar's base. Christ's blood, poured out on the cross, makes the altar a place of acceptance rather than judgment.

Hebrews 9:12 (ESV) *He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

We have access to God's presence not because of our faithfulness but because of Christ's perfect sacrifice.

2. Our White Robes of Righteousness

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) *I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

The white robes aren't earned through martyrdom. They're washed white in the Lamb's blood. This paradox only makes sense at the cross: blood that cleanses, death that brings life, weakness that demonstrates power.

Isaiah 53:5 (ESV) *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

Every white robe in heaven bears the price tag of Christ's suffering. Our righteousness cost Him everything.

3. Our Rest and Peace

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV) *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

The rest that the martyred souls experience flows from Jesus' invitation. He took the heavy burden of our sin so we could receive the light burden of His love.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV) *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus understands our suffering because He suffered. He knows our pain because He experienced pain. Our rest isn't given by a distant God but by a Savior who walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

B. The Glory of Christ's Character

1. His Justice Will Prevail

The martyrs cry out to "Sovereign Lord, holy and true." They appeal to Christ's character as the basis for their hope of justice. And that character guarantees that every wrong will be made right.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 (ESV) *Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels...*

Christ's justice isn't weak or delayed. It's perfect and certain. Every persecution will be answered, every injustice will be addressed, every tear will be remembered.

2. His Love Conquers Death

John 3:16 (ESV) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

The promises we've studied aren't just legal contracts; they're love letters. Christ didn't die for us because He had to but because He wanted to. Love drove Him to the cross, and love guarantees every promise He's made.

Romans 5:8 (ESV) *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

If Christ loved us enough to die for us while we were His enemies, how much more will He keep His promises now that we're His children?

3. His Power Ensures Victory

Ephesians 1:19-21 (ESV) *And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

The same power that raised Christ from the dead works for every believer. Death couldn't hold Jesus, and it cannot ultimately hold us. Persecution cannot defeat Jesus, and it cannot defeat those who belong to Him.

C. The Way Made Open

1. Access Through His Blood

Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV) *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near*

with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Christ didn't just show us the way to God; He became the way. His torn flesh is the curtain through which we pass into God's presence. His shed blood is our entrance ticket to the holy of holies.

2. Life Through His Death

John 14:6 (ESV) *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Every promise of eternal life rests on this exclusive claim. Christ isn't one way among many; He's the only way. But He's also the certain way. Everyone who comes to the Father through Him will be received.

1 John 5:11-12 (ESV) *And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

The promises we've studied aren't for people who try hard or live good lives. They're for people who have the Son.

D. Our Response to Such Great Salvation

1. Live Fearlessly

Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV) *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

Christ came to "destroy" (*katargeō* - καταργέω) the one who has the power of death. This word means "to render powerless" or "to put out of action." The devil's greatest weapon—the fear of death—has been neutralized by Christ's victory.

We can live boldly because death has lost its sting. We can witness fearlessly because the worst our enemies can do is send us home to Jesus.

2. Love Sacrificially

1 John 3:16 (ESV) *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

Christ's love calls forth our love. We love others not to earn salvation but because we've already received it. We serve not to pay a debt but to express our gratitude.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (ESV) *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

Christ's love "controls" (*sunechō* - συνέχω) us. This word means "to hold together" or "to compel." We're not driven by fear but drawn by love.

3. Hope Confidently

1 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV) *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...*

Our hope is "living" because it's based on Christ's resurrection. Dead saviors produce dead hopes, but our living Savior guarantees a living hope.

Our inheritance is "kept" in heaven. This word means "to guard" or "to watch over." God personally guards our future with the same care He used to preserve Christ through death and resurrection.

E. The Final Word

The souls under the altar teach us that death is not the enemy we thought it was. For believers, death is simply graduation day—the moment we exchange our white robes of faith for white robes of sight, when we stop hoping for Christ's presence and start experiencing it fully.

Whether we face persecution like those martyred souls or die peacefully in our beds, the same glorious Christ waits to receive us. The same powerful God who heard their cry hears our prayers. The same loving Father who gave them white robes and rest will welcome us home.

Revelation 14:13 (ESV) *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them."*

This isn't just a promise for martyrs. It's God's guarantee to every believer: those who die in the Lord are blessed. Their struggles are over, their labors are finished, their victory is complete.

And it's all because of Jesus—the Lamb who was slain, the King who conquered death, the Savior who makes every promise possible.

Today, we can rest in these promises not because we're strong enough to earn them but because Christ was faithful enough to secure them. We can face tomorrow's uncertainties not because we know what's coming but because we know *who's* coming—the same Jesus who died for us and rose again.

The martyrs under the altar found their hope in the Lamb. That same Lamb is our hope today and forever. In Him, death has no victory, suffering has purpose, and every ending becomes a new beginning.