

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, January 12, 2020

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:” (Revelation 6:9)

It occurs to me that we had better be very ... very ... careful here, when it comes to opening this fifth seal for consideration. Through the inscrutable labyrinth of history, the world has been utterly filled with humans who are convinced that what *they believe* is absolutely correct, and will bring them some kind of positive end in accordance with that belief system. Many think and say that their version of religion – the “word” of the “god” – is a thing about which they may suffer when they speak about it publicly. They may gain a fewer number of friends ... hear some harsh words or receive harsh looks from somebody ... or even be killed by some tyrant or criminal because they are associated with a belief system. People addressing today’s Jewish and Palestinian conflict activities speak about it incessantly! By this undisciplined standard, it is hard to find a part of humanity that could not thoughtlessly claim this passage of Revelation for their own selfish purpose. We dare not be among them.

When expositor J.A. Seiss introduces this subject he says the fifth seal “*Indicates Bloody Persecution*”, by which he intends to reference a large-scale slaughter of new “Christians” who had waited until that last hour to exercise their faith – and for which they then are summarily slaughtered. Dr. John Gill, and others, go immediately to the bloody work of the Roman emperors – in the third and fourth centuries, beginning with the Emperor Diocletian – in issuing edicts to compel Christians to worship the Roman deities lest they be imprisoned or slain in public, grotesque ways. “*John [he expounds here] hears the voice of martyrs*”. If you read the whole of the expositors, I submit that you will be quite overcome with the range of rank speculationⁱ and a great bit of it focuses on the works and torment of the faithful, as though the point of the passage is in that work.

Though righteous martyrdom is a point worthy of serious examination here, the danger we run is that it becomes the *primary* part of our focus on the passage and therefore it may then quickly devolve into a self-righteous focus on our own sufferings, or those of our fellow laborers. As a result, we may lose the best points to be learned when this seal is removed. So, as we parse out these remarkable words of John in declaring what he was given by God to see, let us please be wary of the danger in propping up *bona fides* – our own or others’ – about what great things have been done or suffered for God and how humans are therefore worthy of some personal vindication or honor.

Now it’s worth noting that unlike the first four seals (conquering word, systemic conflict, starvation with apathy, and finally rampant death) – and unlike the sixth and seventh seals to come – as this seal opens there is no widescale *earth event* occurring which may be measured, and from which we may draw inferences. Instead, we have only the *result* of some event or events. The scene is of

those who have already been slain, so the focus here is not on the act of killing – the details of which may give rise to some self-aggrandizing drawing of comparisons. Instead, it is only stated as a fact! These that John is given to see **“were slain”** and are positioned curiously **“under the altar”** where he hears their cryptic inquiry and the resolution announced. This is a specific scene, that – like the first four on which we have spent time critically examining – continues to reveal what is going to come as Christ presents His day in the remarkable event of opening the Book of Redemption! Pedantic or academic discussions will not help us here. We must ask the question: “If this scene is to involve this little body of believers, what should we learn from *this* breathtakingly ominous scene?” Our inquiry can be broken into these discrete questions:

- Who are these *souls* and why are they placed here *under the altar*?
- What is this **“word of God, and [] testimony”** for which they have been slain?
- What is the meaning and import of their inquiry?
- What is the meaning and import of the answer?

Four questions that will, I believe, require us to see this seal’s removal as not a mere aside to the grand opening of the Day of the Lord, but an integral and necessary change in the world’s dynamics as the New Testament Church dispensation closes and the coming of the millennial reign of Christ is initiated. It should not be surprising to find this seal to be so critical in import and fascinating in scope – but I confess to my friends here that I *have been* surprised. Utterly flummoxed, in fact. I have consumed what other writers have provided, and have regurgitated those thoughts with some degree of confidence in conversing with others ... accepting the premise that these expositors’ lensing was sharpened and purposed. I’ll give them all a solid grade for giving us many subordinate offshoots and considerations ... but they have singularly missed an opportunity to preach on a doctrine that this seal (with other scriptures) compels and that brings awe and comfort in the contemplation when captured in the infused soul.

To begin, it is a beautiful analogy to find these souls positioned **“under the altar”**. The Jewish priest was instructed to pour the unused blood of the sin offering **“at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering” (Leviticus 4:7)**. It serves as a continual type of the blood of Jesus Christ being spilled for the sins of His elect. Dr. Gill remarks: *“This denotes the efficacy of Christ’s blood to make atonement for sin, and the reverent esteem it ought to be had in, being precious blood.”* These souls of men who were washed in the blood of Christ (Revelation 7:14) would rightly be found in that place to symbolize that they are in Him (1 Corinthians 1:30). Another way that this can be viewed – which is very much consistent in import with the place of the spilled blood under the altar – is that found in this passage in Hebrews:

“We have an altar [i.e., Christ], whereof those have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle [i.e., Jews].” (Hebrews 13:10)

These slain of the saints are under Christ our altar, washed in His blood and protected by that precious Sacrifice that gives them a living existence beyond this temporal life. We serve **“not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32)**, so those whose lives were lived in sacrifice to Him (Romans 12:1) do not die when slain, but go on living in the comforting company of Christ. So it is not consistent with that truth to envision these who speak in John’s vision as being in distress. Friends, when the saints quit this life – howsoever prospectively discomfiting such a thought is to the flesh – there is no longing for that temporal life. Such a thought stems from human superstition, not Scripture. There is no thought of regret for sins, or pity for those who are left behind, or longing for the kinship of others in the flesh, or any other vexing concerns. The only interest they show in Scripture is about how God’s providence is pouring out upon those saints who remain, until the resolution of all things (Hebrews 12:1). Paul said that **“to be with Christ [] is far better” (Philippians 1:23)**, because we go on to dwell in His presence after having our entrance to that jurisdiction **“ministered unto [us] abundantly” (2 Peter 1:11)**. This opening part of the scene under the fifth seal being removed is not a distressing one, but a *comforting* one. We see joyful saints here, like that happy soul of Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22).

Expositors also show much speculation about who these slain saints are. Are they representing all of those in time who have lost their temporal lives at the hands of those who hate God and His Word? Is the scene pointing to some specific or acute instance in history where the numbers of those slain for such a cause were remarkable? Further, why would *any* slain of God hold *so much* relevance to the opening of Christ’s Revelation that it is built right into the opening of the Book of Redemption? Why is it one of the seals? Think about this point. Preaching of gospel truth has always been in the earth ... but the preaching under the white horse is an acute condition. Conflict – even that between good and evil, as well as between the earth dwellers generally – has always been in the earth ... but the state of conflict under the red horse is acute and targeted! Starvation and death have always been present ... but under the black and pale horses it’s not just episodic, it’s systemic and prevalent! Understanding this truth, why would we not make our lens about this fifth seal the same? It is displaying for us a unique condition to the work of opening Christ’s Revelation ... not generically a reference to the history of Christian martyrs. So *what* is the condition presented?

J.A. Seiss spends time making a pretty substantive point about this specific language under the removal of the fifth seal: **“for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held”**. Seiss: *“It was not the testimony of Jesus in general; but ‘[] THAT testimony, which they held fast’ — some particular testimony specially in question in their times, and specially obnoxious to the then reigning spirit. And when we consider the character of the period in which they were called to testify; what it was that had operated to bring them into this attitude of zeal for the Divine word; what would naturally be uppermost in a mind enlightened as to the times on which they had fallen, and what would be most offensive to an unbeliever in those times, we can be at no loss to have suggested to us what the particular character of that testimony was. It was necessarily a testimony touching the*

judgment already begun; a testimony which interpreted all the plagues, disorders, and horrors around them, as the veritable inflictions of the Almighty, now risen up to pay off all the long-accumulating arrearages of his wrath upon transgressors; a testimony that the [] whole mystery of God should be finished, and all his enemies cast down to irretrievable perdition; a testimony that swift and utter destruction now impended over all the governments, fabrics, powers, and hopes of this world; that the fires were then already burning which should never more be extinguished or repressed till everything of this world, and all its devotees, should be consumed from root to leaf; that Christ, the angry Judge, was [] ready to be revealed in all the terrors of his consuming power; that the day of grace was in its last darkening twilight of departure, after which nothing should remain but everlasting discomfiture and death; a testimony that the world was then already trembling in the agonies of its dissolution, and that the last hope of salvation was flickering in its socket, ready to expire.”

His offering here is dramatic, as much of his writing is found to be. It nearly loses the sharp tip of his point in all the recitation of redundant elements – that the testimony championed by those slain saints (and those who are yet alive and remain in the battle) is a unique application of God’s Scripture to the unfolding wrath under the times of the opening seals. It’s not a bad piece of analysis, and at least insofar as it makes the point that spiritual people are not to look *backward into history* in the examination, it is a solid piece of work. But it falls short ... and misses the doctrinal message that I believe points from many places in Scripture to this electrified time of resolution. We have to do better if we’re to have full rejoicing in what John was shown.

Get your focus clear here. With these seals being removed, Christ has shown us that: Preaching the gospel will conquer the whole globe, because the lion roars; conflict disrupts the whole globe because they would not have the doctrine of reconciliation; the necessities of nutrition is constricted across the globe because they would not have the Bread of Life; and death consumes a full quarter of the population because they have made themselves the enemy of the blood of Christ and the eagle-eyed saints who seek that blood to cover their sins and make them redeemed. The fifth seal is part of *that* scene; except it is about what those saints in the earth are doing in the bringing forth of the plagues under these seals. They’re preaching, yes. But there is more punch to it than that.

“¶ And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.” (Joel 2:28-32)

In this piece of the prophecy of Joel, I have underlined some significant reference points for you to focus upon to frame his words. “[W]onders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke” are a perfect depiction of the works under the first of the seven trumpets that blow as the Lord begins the work of disrupting the hostile earth dwellers in answer to the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:7). “[T]he sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood” are part of the description of the physical world being disrupted under the removal of the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12). “[I]n mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call” is an unmistakable reference to the calling forth and then deliverance of the remnant of the Jews upon Mt. Zion ... which we also know is a matter that begins under the removal of the sixth seal (Revelation 7:1-8). The context of this scene cannot be misunderstood by any student of Scripture or eschatology.

It is in *that* context, then that the saints of God in the earth are given the gift of prophecy. The breath of God – the spirit – is poured out, it says, “upon all flesh”. That clause *amazingly* comes from the root Hebrew word “basar” (“baw-sar”) that makes reference to those who “bear news, bear tidings, publish, preach, show forth; to gladden with good news, etc.”. It isn’t a reference to all human flesh; it is making the point that human beings who are publishers – the saints of God – have the spirit poured out upon them. That is, tender friends, they “have an unction from the Holy One, and [] know all things” (1 John 2:20) about what is coming to pass – as our friend John identifies in that same passage – when “it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).

In Joel’s vision, the saints are said to “prophecy ... dream dreams ... see visions”. In John’s words, those saints receive “the anointing ... [and] need not that any man teach [them because] the same anointing teacheth [them] of all things” (1 John 2:27). When John is introducing the “two witnesses”, one of their descriptors is that “they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth” (Revelation 11:3) because God grants them “power” to do so. The word used for “prophecy” here is “propheteuo” (“prof-ate-yoo’-o”) which focuses on a specific aspect of a broader-termed root word and expresses “to utter forth, declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation”. The root word that was under it is “prophetes” (“prof-ay’-tace”) and includes both an *interpretation* of the writings of former prophets, *as well as* prophesying based on direct and divine inspiration. These “two witnesses” seen by the Revelator are speaking from divine inspiration, not just articulating or explaining (like we do) the written word as the Holy Ghost opens it to us in a context.

“¶ We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:” (2 Peter 1:19)

We’ve used this passage hundreds of times, and done so properly, to express that this book from which we learn doctrinal and practical divinity is an inspired cannon that provides all we need to prepare ourselves to live in every generation, looking by that light forward to how things are going

to wrap up. God sent His prophets to teach us and prepare us ... **“until”!** Until what? Until when? And once that identified line of demarcation comes, what will be our source of light? This language **“the day dawn, and the day star arise”** is not simply fluffy-sounding words to express a time in the future. The words mean specific stuff. What is the day that dawns ... what is the **“day star”** that will rise?

There are a lot of things written on this subject by men who had some good sense of it, but not terribly focused. The **“day star”** is where the understanding is improved. The Greek word for **“the day star”** in this passage is **“phosphoros”** (**“foce-for’-os”**) – the substance we know as generating a short flash of light when ignited – and is a reference to a planet, Venus. Because of the distinct placement of the planet in relational angle to the earth and the sun, it can be seen just before the dawn, but cannot be seen when the sun is shining. It, therefore, is a reference to the unique vision of a thing just as the **“day”** that is referenced in the passage is dawning. The **“day”** that dawns is the Day of the Lord, which most of the expositors identify without difficulty – though different ones of them pile on a great deal of undisciplined details because the Spirit had not parsed out the nuances of that period. Taken in proper understanding, then, we have this passage that tells us of a greater vision that comes uniquely as this Day of the Lord is dawning. Until that day dawns and that day star arises, we are to be making use of this blessed and more sure word of prophecy to supply us with the light of God’s doctrine, providence, and nature. When that day dawns and when that day star arises, there is an explosion of understanding and knowledge (i.e., light) that the prophet Isaiah articulates by saying:

“Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.” (Isaiah 30:26)

So, it is wholly consistent with the other places in Scripture to conclude that there is an anointing granted to the saints in the time of the Revelation to open up new truths and details and declarations that are specific to that time ... that are detailed and contextual ... that appear to the earth dwellers to be commandments for the awful judgments of God to fall upon their heads, where and when they do, and promises of more to follow. All of which is in complete and wonderful compliance with the word of God as it has been prophesied for thousands of years about Christ, His Revelation, the promised end of things, the shifts in power and dominion, the deaths of billions, the violent separation of the wheat from the tares. All of it leading to the **“kingdoms of this world [becoming] the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15)**, and beyond. *This is “the testimony which they held”* in the vision of the fifth seal being removed.

“And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:10)

Since we have examined the work of these slain saints that led to their dispatch from temporal life at the hands of ***“them that dwell on the earth”***, it is necessary now to properly view what they are being heard by John to say in their dialog with the Lamb who ***“hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof”*** (Revelation 5:5). Keeping in mind that these who speak are seen dwelling safely under the shadow of Christ and therefore possess no capacity for pain, suffering, fear, confusion, desperation, or any other flesh-driven emotion, what are we to hear in this question? In all my years hearing preachments on these words, this passage was joined with a similar sounding expression from the parable of the unjust judge, to wit:

“And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” (Luke 18:6-8)

I fear that in our haste to join together words that sound alike, we may have linked two passages that are quite dissimilar. In the parable, it is the saint in the church militant stage. That poor widow, who stands symbolically for the people of God in her weakened and undefended state, requests that she be avenged of her earthly adversary. Being the faithless, stone-hearted persons they typically are, the human judge is first only annoyed by her complaints but from her persistence concedes to grant her help. That being true, how certain may we be that our God will avenge us against our earthly enemies when we call unto him day and night in prayer? These are comforting and instructive words ... but address a condition for the saints who yet occupy flesh; quite a different reality than what we find under the removal of the fifth seal. The sweet soul who expresses a desire for help while facing an enraged Satan is quite different from those who rest under the altar, away from the cares of this temporal existence in such a state of repose they can scarcely be said to even have a memory of this vain existence. Context changes the significance of the words.

In John’s vision, the slain are said to have ***“cried with a loud voice”***. Let’s start with these three instructive words ... and put our minds around how that looks. ***“Cried”*** comes from the Greek ***“krazo”*** (***“krad’-zo”***). It is a root word and therefore can have a range of definitions when placed into various contexts. These include ***“to cry or pray for vengeance”*** as well as ***“cry out aloud, speak with a loud voice”***. You can go examine the word yourself, and I think you will agree that it in no way demands any connotation that the words articulate lamentation or grief or suffering ... or are joined with tears. In our generation when we hear “cry” we often associate it with such complaining expressions. But in a technical sense ... and more importantly within the context of this passage ... no such indication is required. In fact, when you add the two words translated into English ***“loud voice”*** the accurate thought is completed. These words come from the Greek ***“megas”*** (***“meg’-as”***) and ***“phone”*** (***“fo-ney”***), and mean exactly what they sound like ... MEGAPHONE! These saints are not said to have complained about their condition very loudly ... but rather have shouted with a megaphone the rhetorical question their slaying demands be answered as part of Christ’s

Revelation: ***“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”*** So, what does that question mean in the context of the seal’s opening?

If you take the essence of the question, there are two different ways to analyze the words. First, it could be asking of the LORD to say how long it will be before He will ***“judge”*** (i.e., condemn) and then ***“avenge”*** (i.e., take vengeance upon) the earth dwellers for spilling their blood. Second, it could be asking of the LORD to declare the time when He will ***“judge”*** (i.e., determine or pronounce a conclusion on) and then ***“avenge”*** (i.e., vindicate the doctrinal position of) the saints (including those whose blood was spilled) in the presence of those who dwell defiantly upon the shaken, yet remaining earth. The Greek words used in the passage are amenable to either exposition, so to be spiritually discerned the context of the seals and the Revelation have to guide our interpretation.

An examination of the whole of the ceremony or dispensation called the ***“Revelation of Jesus Christ”*** (**Revelation 1:1**) demonstrates that both of these expressions are compatible. That is, during the seven-year period we see God condemning the rebellious unrighteous in the earth and subjecting them to the worst level of torment and eventually death. This includes recompense for the blood of the saints, since the expressed purpose of the third vial includes:

“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.” (Revelation 16:6)

Indeed, such a handling of the damned is integral to the earth being renewed and restored to the original Eden-like glory where Death and Hell have no more existence. Also, during the seven-year period, the righteous are declared so and are demonstrated to be 100% accurate in doctrine and prophecy about what will come to pass. So, my focus on expounding the words of these slain saints is not to suggest that one or the other of these views is not consistent with Christ’s Revelation ... but to help my friends here to more discretely discern what is happening under this amazing expression of Christ opening the Book of Redemption at this specific time.

As I demonstrated earlier in this sermon, the work of these slain saints is that they have been given words from God to speak, and they have held that unique testimony about what the book is that Christ is opening ... what the events under the removal of the seals is about ... what is coming in this cataclysmic dispensation ... how ***“the wicked might be shaken out of [the earth]”*** (**Job 38:13**) ... and how Christ will take possession, rule for the last grand era or millennium, and then will hand the kingdom over to His Father for the initiation of His eternal dominion over those who will live with Him in the new heaven and earth and sea. These are the words that brought the conflict to the point that the earth dwellers slew them and seek to slay their fellow laborers. These are the words that are wrapped into the power and efficacy in the contents of that very book these seals are being removed to open up. These are the words that all of the righteous – both in heaven and in the earth at that time – desire to see being vindicated. It isn’t a personal vengeance being sought here. It is an awe-inspired desire to see the outcome of all the prophecies – both distant and those revealed

and spoken by themselves. Like the words of the Apostles when considering the presence and Words of Christ during His first advent:

“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3)

An excited and plaintive inquiry that burns in the hearts and minds of every elect soul from the first who was ever given to understand a grand conclusion was appointed to this earth and her inhabitants. How can we even imagine with any accuracy how sublimely present Christ will feel when the Spirit of God is poured out upon those trembling saints and they have such involvement and engagement. How amazingly delightful to be in such contemplation that one might be among those who ***“are alive and remain [and] shall be caught up together with [the dead saints] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)?*** In that conflicted and hopeful hour to be slain and put into possession of the pre-advent state of rest in Christ would understandably place such thoughts of the final conclusion of the matter in them and cause them to declare the question for all those in the battle, ***“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”***

“And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” (Revelation 6:11)

The answer coming back from ***“[H]e [who] came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne” (Revelation 5:7)*** is wholly and completely compatible with the lens we have developed with this exegesis of the passage. When one of God’s little sheep is appointed in providence to be transferred from temporal death to eternity in His presence, it is indeed a joyous occasion. Integral to that appointment is that each is given a white robe, evidenced by that passage under the sixth seal declaring the ***“great multitude ... clothed with white robes” (Revelation 7:9)***. The opening statement in this passage is expressing an instructive activity ... one which we would be so encouraged to grasp and hold tight to our often-fearful hearts. When we sin – because ***“when [we] would do good, evil is present with [us]” (Romans 7:21)*** – a darkness of terror comes into our spirit. It causes every sensitive soul to cry out ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:21)***.

Put yourselves into the mind of those beloved souls who are dwelling on the precipice of the coming of the Christ – still dwelling in bodies wracked with the sinful nature of Adam. One of them is being slain – for the prophecies and testimony of Christ’s imminent return against that violently rebellious generation – and fears it is evidence that the love of the father is not for his sinful self. The comforting answer given by our gracious Father, though, is ***“Bring forth the best robe, and put it on***

him”! (Luke 15:22) It has always been a wondrously perplexing, and yet comforting, vision to me to consider sweet Stephen’s behaviors when being stoned by the enraged Jews. I like that he cried **“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60)**, but what I key on is his **“calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (Acts 7:59)**. His chief desire was to be forgiven for his own sins and seeking assurance from God that those sins did not separate him from the promised eternal rest. That, I believe, is what we’re seeing in this passage under the fifth seal. It is a clear declaration to the relevant saints, shown to John the Revelator, that each who perish in that conflict will *first* be clothed upon with the righteousness of Christ to make them worthy to be in His eternal presence.

They have been in a great battle – filled with tremendous physical and spiritual engagements that cause the body of the believers to be **“fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Ephesians 4:16)** like no generation before them. We have been in such a great battle, and have many times felt the surge of angst about how the battle goes in the spirits of all our friends here. Remember, please, that we fight the battle of the Great King and the enemy is not just **“flesh and blood, but [] principalities, [] powers, [] the rulers of the darkness of this world, [] spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12)**. How much greater are these forces awakened in the conflict under these seals?

Our interest in our own fleshly fears and problems certainly cease when we quit the earth, but our interest in the things of God, Christ, His kingdom and His people do not. That’s why we are on this very day said to be come **“to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23)**. This is not, like many so-called Christians pretend, to indicate that there are perfected saints moving about intervening for the living saints. Intervention is only Christ’s role, who **“is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34)**. It is to show that our fellow citizens of the heavenly kingdom – who have already exited this flesh and who occupy that jurisdiction in some form, though not yet with glorified bodies – are keenly interested in how the things of God’s people proceed. They know when this dispensation ends there will be a joining again with their dead bodies and a transition to another dispensation that will never end. They know that it will all depend upon the redemption of those bodies, by a returning and avenging Christ.

And those who are in the vanguard of that final pre-millennial dispensation have a most heightened interest in the resolution. Once they are put into possession of their robes, these are actually told – so that every interested saint who is given ears to hear and eyes to see as this Day of the Lord opens up will be fully aware – what is left to be accomplished before they too will receive their bodies back from the hungry grave. There are yet some of their **“fellow servants [] and [] brethren, that should be killed as they were”**. The fight in the disrupted earth is not over. There is still expressly recorded that some of God’s servants under this acutely enraged time will still be slain.

“And when [the two witnesses] shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city[]. And they of the people and kindreds

and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.” (Revelation 11:7-12)

Friends, this is a grand event. This event brings in many ways the earth to a crescendo in this conflict. It represents the final showdown before the New Testament Church age officially closes and all those who are asleep in Christ are called up together with the remnant of living Gentile saints. If you are among the saints who have lived as the first three and a half years of intense disruption opens with the earth-rending events under the seals, it will be important to you to know when it will be over. If you have been slain in that erupting conflict, your knitted soul will be especially interested in knowing when your close friends who have faced the wrath of an ending world together will be joined again with you. ***“[W]hat [indeed] shall be the sign of [Christ’s] coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3)?*** Here’s the answer. When the two elders of that gentle church complete their testimony – have bound the earth fully with their prophecies and tormented them with the plagues flowing from God in the wake of their terrifying words and prayers – they too will be slain. The earth dwellers will believe the fight is over. So completely blinded to any understanding of what comes next – they will rejoice and celebrate because they believe they have succeeded in removing God and His Word from off this globe. The whole of the conflict begun with the removal of the seals will come to final resolution when those slain witnesses are restored to life and are lifted up into the air for all of those celebrating earth dwellers to behold them. The declarations of God, Christ, and all the prophets will then be fulfilled – the seventh trumpet will sound, Christ shall appear in the heavens as appointed, and His redeemed who have been slain will be joined with their bodies in glorified beauty.

As I anticipated when I began – by God’s tender mercy and infinite wisdom – to have an acute interest in the things of eschatology, the more saturated my mind and spirit becomes with the things written of this coming time the more I see emerging the nuances of the conflict. Where I used to see the Revelation as one relentless series of events that race to the millennial reign of Christ, I increasingly understand that there are distinct events that have resolution during that period. One such nuance is opened up with this seal. The first half of the Revelation – the seven-year dispensation – is focused on the resolution of the New Testament Church age. The second half is focused on the restoration of the Jewish remnant from their dark apostasy to a renewed existence with God, through the returned Messiah. So, when these slain saints appear under the fifth seal it is for our eyes to capture how their work – the New Testament Church members’ work – will be acutely engaged in the violent gathering up of the tares to be bound in bundles and burned until the appointed end at the second advent of Christ when the wheat will be gathered into the His barn (Matthew 13:30).

John was given to see these amazing things, because he was appointed to report these truths to that coming generation. Just as he was to report of the conquering word under the white horse, the conflict of the red, the blight of the black, and the death of the pale ... he was to help us see the prophesying of the saints and how they persevere – both living and slain – to the day when the church dispensation closes and the Redeemer takes them to their reward. Next time I am given to speak on these matters with you, Lord willing, I will move to the magnificent array of events that shake the world and shape the conflict to follow with the sounding of the trumpets. We don't know how much time we have left in this created world, so I again call upon you all to search out these mysteries, pray for light and wisdom from God, and help with the edification of the body.

I love you all.

Amen.

Offering of the Lord's Supper – Sunday, January 12, 2020

“¶ For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

While we have the ordinance of the Lord's Supper being conducted in this house, it is important to understand that in both spirit and practice this body is unique to every other human institution in existence today that calls itself a Christian church. As any here who has had his or her eyes open by faith – or just has had granted a healthy honesty or objectivity in their view of so-called Christian practice – will attest, these institutions have made this simple and blessed ordinance into a hocus-pocus session. They do freaky things with the practice so that humans can have a gushy feeling about participating. Just doing what we're directed by Scripture to do is never enough. It has to be mystified. It has to have some flash and pomp. It has to pull in as many humans as possible, and involve bizarre ceremonies to get those ignorant masses to think they're part of something.

It's not about us. It's not about the Jews and it's not about the Christians. It's about Christ.

You hear in this pulpit on a fairly regular basis the term “New Testament Church” or “New Testament Dispensation”. We hear on the streets the Bible-ignorant people of the world screeching at us that

we're not supposed to read from the Old Testament, but from the New Testament because they stupidly believe that the eternal and immutable God somehow got nicer. That Jesus Christ is God-light, and part of the New Testament is Him showing that the Beetles were correct in singing "all you need is love"!

"This cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for you." (Luke 22:20)

There are six uses of the term "New Testament" in the Bible. Four of those are in passages directly engaged with the Lord's Supper in the practice of the ordinance. The remaining two help to understand the first four. If you're in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you should understand what you're doing when you eat at the Lord's table. You should understand what is intended when Christ said that His blood – symbolized in the cup from which each of you members here will shortly be taking a sip – *is* the new testament.

¶ Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:

¶ The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean [red heifer sermon], sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

¶ And for this cause he [Christ] is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must

also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

¶ It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:1-28)

Let's break down the language of our discussion. Each time the phrase "new testament" is used, the same two Greek words are utilized. The Greek word "**new**" is "*kainos*" ("*kahee-nos*") and means (as to the form of the word) "*recently made, fresh, recent, unused, unworn*"; (as to the substance of the word) it means "*of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of*". The passage above meets that meaning in the way it repeatedly makes the point that Jesus the Christ's sacrifice was in all respects unlike anything ever presented to a perfect God in payment of the whole debt of sin! Before He came in His first advent to perform His sacrificial duties under the Covenant of Grace – the only thing those who pretended to the worship of God had was the nasty blood of bulls and goats! Over and over and over and over ... year after year, after year, after year ... the high priest went into the holy of holies with the blood of animals to *symbolize* the blessed blood of Jesus Christ by sprinkling animal blood onto the Mercy Seat! When the person serving as high priest was one who was possessed with saving faith, he understood fully that the blood he sprinkled was a type of Christ's blood – which when it was shed would do what none of that animal blood could do; pay the debt once and for all. In that sense, the event of spilling *effectual* blood was truly and comprehensively "**new**".

The word "**testament**" comes from the Greek word "*diatheke*" ("*dee-ath-ay'-kay*") and has two distinct expressions included. First, it is "*a disposition, arrangement, of any sort, which one wishes to be valid; the last disposition which one makes of his earthly possessions after his death; a testament or will*". So it involves the process generally of making a sworn statement, and more commonly makes specific reference to swearing to a "*last will or testament*" that disposes of your

possessions at your death. Second, it is *“a compact; a covenant; a testament”*. This is to identify the entering into an agreement that includes swearing to the conditions. In application to the behaviors of Jesus Christ during His first advent, both of these are critically relevant. Christ, as a member of the trinity, entered into the Covenant of Grace before the world began. He acted in the arrangement as the Messiah – the sacrifice – the intervenor – the only being capable of making full and final payment to satisfy the justice of an offended God at those creatures who had sinned and thereby separated themselves from Him for eternity.

So, what do we need to understand about this term *“new testament”* as it pertains to this blessed ordinance? When you sweet people sit at this table and obediently participate in this simple act as directed in Scripture, in what ways should you understand that the wine you drink represents this new testament in Christ’s blood that was shed for His elect people? I submit, at least these:

- The sacrifice of Christ on behalf of His saints is once and for all! None of those elected persons need any action taken to pay the debt again (like the impotent annual type required during the Mosaic dispensation)
- The blood is efficacious because the Testator is sufficient. Jesus Christ is God and therefore His blood is sufficient to satisfy what God requires in payment for the sins of those who were given to Him (Ephesians 1:4)
- Since Christ is the Testator of this *“new testament”*, He had to die (Hebrews 9:16) or the gifts (graces, eternal life) cannot pass to those who are written in the “will” -- which is the Book of Redemption from which the seals are removed.
- The standard of Christ’s blood being required for the propitiation of the sins of every elect soul from Adam to the end has always been present, but that *“way into the holiest of all”* – that is, to the presence of God – had not been made fully manifest under the Old Testament.
- When Christ came (in His first advent) and spilled His blood, the types of that act in the Old Testament ended and consequently, there was no longer any need for a priest. Those high priests were types and they passed away with the ceremonies they oversaw. Christ is both Sacrifice and High Priest and ... as referred to earlier ... the Altar.

There is much, much more to be said about this subject. Indeed, in the passage from Paul above he himself says that the subject is so grand and so perfectly symmetrical and comprehensive he *“cannot now speak particularly”* – in great or full detail – about because it would consume the whole of his epistle. It is a good exercise to continue working on your knowledge of the types of the Old Testament because they fully enrich your knowledge and understanding of the New Testament – which is encompassed in the wine we consume in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

ⁱ It’s interesting that while Seiss himself has brought forth unsupported theories in his own exposition of the passage, he begins with this quite lucid declaration about the expositions of others:

“It is hardly worth while to occupy attention with the diverse and contradictory interpretations that have been given of this seal. Though all are more or less intermingled with some truth, the principles upon which the Apocalypse is to be construed, and which have been followed in this exposition, lead us, with directness and certainty, to conclusions which brush away, as only so much rubbish, the most that has been written on the subject.”