

Prayers Result in Judgment

Last Things

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Our Scripture lesson is taken from Revelation 6, and that's on page 1,920, beginning at verse 12.

12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’

The word of the Lord.

May we pray.

Lord, help me as I proceed through this book to preach what it's actually saying and to preach it in a way that is practical to each person here today and listening today. Lord, help me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, this is continuing that thing about the prayers of God's people, and we looked at that last week when we thought about what is heaven, what is heaven like, and we saw that heaven is not like Joseph Smith's imagination or Muhammad's imagination or the imagination of this pink-haired

evangelist named Kat Kerr which sees heaven as a kind of a carnival where you can eat all the junk food you want and where you can get on a roller coaster called “The Rush” that just takes you way out into outer space, that heaven is a place where people are in warfare.

Warfare praying and that’s what we saw last week when we looked there in verse 9.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

And you see, that’s heaven and that doesn’t sound like the heaven that we think of heaven. Heaven is not, “I’ve got a mansion just over a hilltop. I’m satisfied with just a cottage below. I want a gold one that’s silver lined.”

And it’s all based on a mistranslation of a word that Jesus uses twice in the gospel of John 14 (John 14:1 and John 14:23, μονέ, monē). He says, “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places,” and the word mansion used to mean simply a place to live, “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places.” And he goes on and he uses the word a second time. This is the only time this word is used, it is in John 14 where it occurs twice and he said, “If anyone loves me, my Father will love him and we will come and make our mansion with him.”

And I pointed out last Lord’s Day that at Robeson Road, In Texarkana, Texas are many mansions, because you are a mansion for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places.” And he says, “We,” that is the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit, “will come and make our mansion, our dwelling place, in that person.” (John 14:23) So as I look out here today, I see—great Scott—it’s the best neighborhood in greater Texarkana sitting right out here today. You may not look at it that way, but you’re gold, and you’re silver lined because you are a dwelling place for the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We will make our mansion with him, our dwelling place.

So what is heaven as we think of heaven, the place where we go when we die, what is it like? It’s a place of prayer and that’s what we saw last week,

intense prayer, because the saints of God in heaven are aware of what's going on on earth, and they're troubled about it.

Do you watch the news? I don't watch the news. I read the news. I can't watch the news. I'm afraid if I watch the news, I would shoot my TV. But I can't watch it, but I read the news, and I can read it fast, and I realize that it's all bad news. Are you tired of bad news? I'm tired of bad news. Do you realize the saints of God in heaven are aware of the bad news on planet Earth and their reaction is to cry out to God and say, "O Lord, how long?"
(Revelation 6:10)

Now I want you to notice God answers that prayer in verse 12, that's our text, "I watched as he opened the sixth seal." The answer to the prayers of the saints is a judgment from God that is absolutely catastrophic. It is as severe as the flood of Noah's day in bringing destruction. Notice this great earthquake in verse 12 and notice how the sun and the moon change color. Notice how the stars in the sky fall to earth and how every mountain and island is removed from its place.

Hold your hand there and turn over a couple of chapters to Revelation 16 and what you realize is that the book of Revelation has these visions where things are repeated and intensified. Look at Revelation chapter 16 and verse 17. Revelation 16:17, page 1,931.

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!' 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21 From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

So would the mountains and islands come back together again? Now what this illustrates is that the book of Revelation is like a series of dreams.

Have you had an intense dream ever and have you awakened from that dream and then you dreamt something similar again? Have you ever had that happen? I've had that happen. And if you can understand, the book of Revelation is like a dream, and in these dreams, the Apostle John is shown the immediate future and the long-term future of our planet and of the people of God. And so what you have is that the end of Revelation 6 is parallel with the end of Revelation 16. So these are visions that cover the same material but advance a little bit each time and so we see that there.

Now I want you to see something else, I want you to see that your prayers and the prayers of your loved ones in heaven are resulting in terrible things coming on our world. Think about it. Well, you see in verse 12 with the sixth seal and the earthquake, stars falling from the sky, mountains and islands removed out of their place in verse 14. This is a terrible thing that's happening but it's a judgment of God. Why does God show his hand of judgment? God shows his hand of judgment that men and women and boys and girls would repent of their sins and come to him before it's too late.

Notice the reaction in verse 15.

The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne (and look at that next statement) the wrath of the Lamb!"

Now if you ever have observed animals out in agriculture, you might think of the wrath of a bull.

Our oldest boy was doing a study in France on Louisiana law one summer, and he had a Euro pass and he decided to go run with the bulls. I've always been grateful that he called us after he ran with the bulls rather than before because he had foolishly picked out his path and he saw he was going to grab this balcony that had metal underneath it, and he planned that. But some guy got ahead of him and grabbed on it instead of him, and the people that were on the balcony began to stomp his hands with their feet until he let go. And just before the cannon went off, this man said to my son, "My friend, you are in grave danger." And so, my son ran with everything he had,

and he got into the ring, and he was able to get out of the bullring before the bulls came in. The wrath of the bull. You don't want to be there. They gore people. They kill people. They stomp on people. It's a blood sport. And especially in the Hispanic world, blood sport is still popular today. I'm sure at some point, because it's so politically incorrect, they will end it because it's cruel to the bulls—But anyhow: the wrath of the bull, the wrath of a lion, the wrath of a tiger.

But look at what he says, the wrath of the lamb. Do you ever think of Jesus, the Lamb of God, is full of wrath? Well, there's coming a time when the sweet, precious Lamb of God, the loving Lord Jesus, who laid down his life for the world, who suffered in our place, who allowed men to slap him on the right cheek and the left cheek, who allowed people to whip him to death, who allowed people to nail him to a cross, who did all of those things because he loves you and loves me—there's coming a day when that changes. And that changes because of the prayers of the people in heaven because they cry out to God, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you not avenge our blood?" And he does. And when that happens, it's the wrath of the Lamb.

And you see some things in the next chapter that all are part of this. He said, verse 1 of chapter 7,

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.'

Now if you think back in your Bibles to the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel has a vision of the coming destruction of God on the city of Jerusalem at the time when the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Ezekiel is in captivity, the Babylonian captivity, and he sees this vision of the glory of God departing from the temple that was built by Solomon, and the judgment of God was coming on his people in Jerusalem at that time, and he sees before that judgment is poured out on the people of God, that God sends an angel, a messenger, to mark the people who were grieved over the iniquity

and wickedness of what was going on in Jerusalem with its idolatry (Ezekiel 9:4). And they put a mark on their foreheads, and it's interesting that the letter there in ancient Hebrew script, not modern Hebrew script, looks like a cross.

(This mark is a cross, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, תַּוְתָּא, written at the time of Ezekiel like the Latin letter, X. “The last letter of the Old Canaanite alphabet was written in the shape of a St. Andrew’s Cross; this amounted to a simple mark.” This is behind the tradition of illiterate people’s putting an “X” for their signature, as in Job31:35. “הִנֵּה תְּבוּנָה here is my sign!; this is the signature consisting of a hand-written sign corresponding to the finger-nail impressions on clay tablets from Babylonia.” (Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and M. E. J. Richardson, eds. (2000) *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: Brill), pp. 1693–1694.)

And so they put a mark on the forehead of those who mourned and wept and cried out to God, “Lord, have mercy on us! Lord, have mercy on our temple! Lord, have mercy on our kings, our priests, our prophets, because they’ve sinned against you!” And what God does is he sends his angel to put the tau (tāw, תַּוְתָּא), the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which I say in ancient script looked like an X, to put that mark on the foreheads of those who cried out to God, and you see the same thing happening in the book of Revelation. In other words, prophecy recapitulates throughout the ages.

So God puts a seal on those who cry out to him and in this case, we focus, in the first part, on the Jewish people but somebody’s missing here. If you count up the twelve tribes, somebody’s not there. Well, weren’t there twelve sons of Jacob? Yes, there were.

Well, what do you say, somebody’s missing? What tribe’s missing here as you look at it? The tribe of Dan.

Well, how did they get another tribe? Well, they got another tribe because Joseph’s sons were adopted by Jacob as his own children. So, Ephraim and Manasseh are included in the tribes. There really are 13 tribes. But Dan is missing. Why is he missing? Because we have to understand, while this is about the Jewish people here in the first part of Revelation 7, it’s about the Jewish people who know the Lord, and its symbolism.

It's 12,000 from the tribe of Judah are sealed, and then Reuben, and then Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph. You see, we've already got him with Manasseh—Ephraim and Manasseh—and so the tribe of Joseph standing for Ephraim—and Benjamin.

Where's Dan? Is Dan left out? If you're a descendant of Dan, and you're Jewish at this time, or somehow or another you're accursed and abandoned, you know, there are all kinds of wild speculations as people ponder these things.

The point I would make simply is this: This represents the fullness of the Jewish people who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that's what we see here at the end of the age, the fullness of the Jewish people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, it's 12,000, and you see again the sacredness of the number 12, the sacredness of the number 1,000, the cube of 10.

Now notice what's after that in verse 9 and again, we're in the same time frame. It's your prayers and the prayers of the saints of God in heaven that are causing these things to happen, and they happen initially in the years 66 to 70 AD. But if we think that's all that there is to this, we have misread the whole book, because this is not completed and consummated in 70 AD, though it has a reference to it. It's ultimately looking forward to the second coming of Christ, as we'll see.

Now notice something else. While the Jewish people symbolically are portrayed as 144,000, that is 12 times 12, plus 10 times 10 times 10 (This appears to be an ideal number, the Jewish people squared (12×12) and then multiplied by the cube of the Holy of holies ($10 \times 10 \times 10$, Exodus 26:15-30) = 144,000)—while they're symbolically portrayed as 144,000, notice the contrast, and it's an amazing contrast, verse 9, and we're dealing with the answer to the prayers of God's people in heaven. Look at verse 9, page 1,921,

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

Now I want you to think about that for a moment. While Jewish believers are significant, and they were preserved by God in the first century with

these terrible destructions that came on the temple and Jerusalem—and the Jewish people are still around today, and many Jewish people have become true Jews. What is a true Jew? A true Jew is one whose circumcision is of the heart and not externally. A true Jew is a person who walks in the footsteps of the faith of Father Abraham and that's very plain at the end of Romans 2 and the end of Romans 4 (Romans 2:28-29; 4:10-12).

But this is what's interesting and it says to you and me, "Hey, hey, we need to be optimists." He says, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count" (Revelation 7:9). While there was a limited number of Jewish people saved in the first century and are saved throughout history, God's vision for the world is its conversion. God wants the whole world to be saved. Have you ever thought about that? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). And you see the result.

So the result of the prayers of the saints of God back in Revelation 6 and verse 10, where they call out in a loud voice, "How long, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, till you judge our blood," that prayer is being answered and it's being answered as God, in the middle of great tribulation, as God in the middle of great suffering, as God in the middle of great persecution, gathers his own from the four corners of the earth, and he says this multitude no one can count from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

I was blessed. The last thing that I did at Presbytery before I got in the car was, I was able to pray with a pastor from San Antonio and with two men who are starting a church within his church in San Antonio. That's Hope Presbyterian San Antonio. There's a church being started inside that church, and it's being started by two men from Cuba. I got to meet those men and I got to pray with those men. So, they're starting a Cuban church. Imagine that, inside that local church.

You realize that putting a building to multiple use is a blessing of God?
That's an amazing thing.

For almost seven years, the church I served in Alexandria hosted an African-American congregation that had lost their building, and so it was a great blessing to them and to us. We never charged them a dime. Never charged them a dime. The relationship that was built there is still around today. Every Tuesday evening at 5:45, I join their pastor, Dr. Raymond Franklin,

who has a degree in psychology and works for the Rapids Parish School Board as a counselor. And so for seven years almost, they worshiped inside the building of the church I served in Alexandria. And here is this church, pastored by Tom Masterson in San Antonio. Two Cuban men, one of whom lost a son to cancer in the past year and a half, and I was struck in spite of the suffering, in spite of the trouble, in spite of the persecution. I remember watching television in 1959 when Castro took over and they lined people up. I don't know if you remember the news. I used to watch the news with my father, and they had these people just lined up and they're shooting them down.

And here are two men who've escaped. They're much younger than I am. Two men who've escaped, one of whom lost his son, and Tom said to me, "Bob, look at his tattoo." And I looked at his tattoo, and it was the perfect tense of the Greek word teleo (teléō, τελέω), meaning it is finished (tetelestai, τετέλεσται). And he stood in the gap for his son with his son's cancer. But in spite of the tribulation, in spite of the suffering, he's determined to share the glory of God with other people, two Cuban men, using the church facility of Hope in San Antonio.

So there you have it, this great multitude and we read here that

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' 11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!' 13 Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?'

And remember, this is a multitude nobody can number. Nobody can number this vast multitude from all over the world, from every tongue and tribe. He says,

14 Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.

The world we live in is the great tribulation. Does that mean there won't be a final manifestation of that tribulation?

There will be a final manifestation of that tribulation. There will come a time of intense suffering just before the return of Christ for his own. But he says,

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Another jarring picture. The wrath of the Lamb, save us from the wrath of the Lamb, and now we have blood washing away and making stained clothes white. They've made them white in the blood of the Lamb.)

15 Therefore, 'they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

When is heaven going to be heaven?

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, the warfare praying of heaven will cease and be only praise.

At that point, all the tears you've shed in this life, all of the suffering you've known in this life, all the pain and the agony, burying a child, burying a spouse, burying a sibling, burying a parent, all of the suffering of this life, all of the horrors of living in this world that is wracked by sin and trouble and misery, all of the pain, all of the fear, a nail-pierced hand comes to you and he wipes away every tear.

When will heaven be heaven? When will it be the way that we think of it as a place of no more pain, no more suffering, no more agony?

Right now, it's a place of agony because the people in heaven are aware of what's going on on our planet. and they're pleading with God, "Lord, hurry

up! Lord, avenge our blood on those who are on the earth!” And God’s delaying.

Why does God delay? Because as Peter tells us, God’s delay, God’s patience is salvation (2 Peter 3:9), because there are people who need still to be saved because we’ve got to see that multitude that no one can number of every nation and tribe and tongue reached with the gospel. We need to be optimists, and we also need to take great comfort.

At the return of Christ, every tear will be wiped away and I address myself in closing if you’re watching this on the internet. The world we live in is a very imperfect world. If you study the civilization that we call Western civilization, which has sometimes been called Christendom, it’s a very imperfect thing where sinful things have been done in the name of Jesus throughout the past 2,000 years.

When is the church going to be what the church has been called to be, one holy catholic and apostolic church? When is that going to be?

It’s when Jesus completes this age. It’s when he has summed up all things in himself (Ephesians 1:10). It’s when he returns.

And you do not want to be unsaved when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, because then you will know only tears and terror, the wrath of the Lamb, crying out to rocks and, “Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of him who sits on the throne and from the Lamb.”

But if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, I can tell you there’s coming a day, it’s a great day, it’s not far from now, it is at the return of Christ, and the Lord Jesus Christ with nail-pierced hands will wipe away every tear from your eye.

Oh, do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? That’s the most important question you will ever answer. Do you know him? Choose him today, knowing that by his Spirit, he makes you willing.

In the name of Jesus, may we pray.

Lord, bless this message that we would find comfort in the prayers of all saints, that we would find comfort in the fact that you seal your own before

*the final great outpouring of wrath and, Lord, we would find comfort that there's coming a day at the end of the age when the Lord Jesus himself will change heaven for all time and will change the earth. For Jesus' sake.
Amen.*