

Session 12: The Glorious Destiny of the Church in Martyrdom

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In light of the Day of the Lord being near (cf. Rom. 13:12; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:25; Jam. 5:8; 1 Pe. 4:7; 2 Pe. 3:3ff) *patient enduring faith* in God, his Messiah, and the restoration of all things is the foundation of the church's mission in this age (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jam. 5:8; 2 Pe. 3:12; Jude 1:21).

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. (^{ESV} Jude 1:20-21)

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come..." ¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (^{NIV} Revelation 14:6-12)

- B. However, in context to the Day of the Lord the church is also called to faithfully witness to Jesus and the judgment to come. This witness is essentially amnesic in nature, representing the kindness and longsuffering of the Lord toward the wicked.

The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. (^{NIV} Luke 24:46-48)

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify (cf. Acts 1:8) that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (^{NIV} Acts 10:42-43)

- C. This amnesic witness is most perfectly expressed in martyrdom, which the church must *embrace wholeheartedly* at the end of the age as wickedness finds full expression. The Scriptures clearly declare that global martyrdom is the *glorious destiny* of the end-time church.

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. (^{NIV} Daniel 7:21-22)

He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸ All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast... (^{NIV} Revelation 13:7-8)

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...¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?"¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (^{NIV} Revelation 7:9-14)

1. The loss of focus and theology concerning martyrdom after the Constantinian Shift is in direct relation to assimilation of Platonism into the Christian worldview. As such the essential amnestic witness of the Church was lost, and likewise the essential *meaning* of martyrdom itself was lost.
2. Within a Platonic worldview, the mission of God, and therefore of the church, is either dominionistic (if sovereignty is emphasized) or escapist (if salvation is emphasized). Therefore martyrdom is either seen as: 1) a failure (cf. dominionism), since God/church has failed in establishing sovereignty over injustice, or 2) a waste (cf. escapism), since God/church has lost another worker unto saving souls.
3. Within a Biblical worldview, the mission of God, and therefore of the church, is amnestic which supplies inherent meaning to the event of martyrdom (if the intentions are actually motivated by the same loving intentions as God).

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.¹³ For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme...¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish...¹⁸ Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. (^{NRSV} 1 Peter 2:11-21)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal...³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (^{NIV} 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

II. THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

- A. The faithful witness to the judgment of the Day of the Lord and God's longsuffering kindness in restraining from judgment is typified in the martyrdom of his own Son for the forgiveness of the sins of his enemies.

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals-- one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (^{NIV} Luke 23:33-34)

For God so loved the world (cf. wicked) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (^{NIV} John 3:14-16)

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (^{NASB} Romans 5:6-8)

1. This restraint from judgment in light of the greatest injustice in history is the central aspect of the early apostolic witness to those who had martyred Jesus.

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men... ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool." ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (^{ESV} Acts 2:23-36)

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses... ¹⁷ And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers... ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. (^{ESV} Acts 3:13-19)

Rulers of the people and elders... ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead- by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone (cf. Ps. 118:22). (^{ESV} Acts 4:8-11)

2. This restraint from vengeance is exemplified in the first apostolic martyrdom in the Book of Acts. Stephen's final declaration reveals the deepest drive and agenda of his heart.

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers... ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him... ⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him... ⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed... "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (^{NIV} Acts 7:51-60)

3. Those saints and prophets who were shamefully treated throughout the scriptures are honored as those with the greatest faith in the age to come and thus exemplifying the heart of the Lord in this age (cf. Heb. 11).

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light (concerning the messianic age), when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (in the resurrection).³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God (as a witness), you will receive what he has promised (i.e. kingdom).³⁷ For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay.³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.^{11:1} Now faith is being sure of what we hope (cf. the kingdom) for and certain of what we do not see.² This is what the ancients were commended for...³⁵ Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison.³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (in the resurrection).^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (to God's longsuffering), let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (in the resurrection, cf. 2:10), who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men (out of love for them), so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (in martyrdom). (^{NIV} Hebrews 10:32-12:4)

4. Paul thus considers it an honor to face martyrdom since his life goal was to witness to the longsuffering of God in the Cross.

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.²⁵ Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.²⁷ For I

have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God (cf. the sufferings of Christ before the glories of Christ, cf. Lk. 24:26; Acts 3:18; 17:3; 1 Pe. 1:11). (^{NIV} Acts 20:22-27)

5. Jesus himself exemplifies the witness of Antipas, and his martyrdom, as service unto the praise of God the Father's longsuffering.

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come (i.e. Father), and from the seven spirits ("sevenfold Spirit" NLT) before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. (^{NIV} Revelation 1:4-6)

I know where you live-- where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city. (^{NIV} Revelation 2:13)

6. The capstone of the "two witnesses" of Revelation is their own embodiment of their testimony.

"I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." ... ⁷ Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them... ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. (^{NIV} Revelation 11:3-11)

- B. As the definitive prophetic witness of the end of this age, Matthew 24 clearly spells out the purpose of the Church in the face of the culmination of human rebellion.

1. As humanity rejects God in unison, represented by the "abomination that causes desolations" (v.15), the nations rage against those who represent God. As we have seen, this representation is essentially amnesic in nature and prophetic concerning the judgment to come.

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. (^{NIV} Matthew 24:9)

2. In light of the universal martyrdom of the Church, the church is called to remain faithful in prayer, faith and proclamation, patiently enduring to the end of this age.

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other... ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (^{NIV} Mt. 24:10-13)

3. As the Church remains faithful in her faith, she is called to likewise remain faithful in her testimony of the coming wrath and God's present kindness and patience. This will result in a climactic global witness to all the nations, *typified by a global martyrdom* which will be God's final testimony to the nations before the great and terrible Day of the Lord

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (^{NIV} Mt. 24:10-13)

- ***You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.*** ¹⁰ ***And the gospel must first be preached to all nations...*** ¹³ ***All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*** (^{NIV} Mark 13:9-13)
- ***So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ..."*** ⁹ ***Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...*** ¹⁷ ***His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*** ¹⁸ ***So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.*** (^{NASB} Luke 3:7-18)

- C. It will be the "filling up in the flesh of the Church what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24) that will finalize the testimony of God to rebellious humanity, ushering in the Day of the Lord.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² ***he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death (at the Cross), in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him (at the Day of the Lord),*** ²³ ***if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*** ²⁴ ***Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake (as Christ did, cf. Heb. 12:2; Phil 2:8f), and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (i.e. longsuffering witness that many might be saved, cf. 2 Pe. 3:9),*** ²⁵ ***of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.*** (^{ESV} Colossians 1:21-25)

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ ***persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*** ¹⁰ ***We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus (emulating Jesus' suffering), so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (in the resurrection).*** ¹¹ ***For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body...*** ¹⁴ ***because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence (at the Day of the Lord).*** ¹⁵ ***All this is for your benefit (cf. Col. 1:24), so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*** ¹⁶ ***Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away (in suffering and persecution), yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day (in***

faith and hope in the resurrection). ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles (emulating Jesus) are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (in the resurrection). (^{NIV 2} Corinthians 4:8-17)

1. The church is called to embrace suffering and martyrdom wholeheartedly as an expression of service to the Great Martyr, Jesus, who died for the salvation of sinners (cf. Mt. 20:28; Lk. 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Jn. 3:8).

I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him (in this age), we will also live with him (in the resurrection); ¹² if we endure (in this age), we will also reign with him (in the kingdom). If we disown him (in this age), he will also disown us (in the judgment); ¹³ if we are faithless (in this age), he will remain faithful (in the judgment), for he cannot disown himself. (^{NIV 2} Timothy 2:10-13)

Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* (^{NIV} Romans 8:17-18)

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God.* ²⁹ *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,* ³⁰ *since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.* (^{NIV} Philippians 1:27-30)

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ... ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (^{NASB} Philippians 3:8-11)

2. To pledge allegiance to God, who is essentially longsuffering, we must also pledge allegiance to the consequences of that longsuffering, which has always been the suffering and martyrdom of the prophets.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (^{NASB} Matthew 5:11-12)

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches

suffered from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. (^{NIV} 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15)

3. The key to “overcoming the world” is the embracing of martyrdom at the heart level. Without a fundamental commitment to representing God, even unto death, the world will still have sway over the church with the threat of death.

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down (as a sign of the imminent judgment, cf. Is. 34:5-8; Hag. 2:6-7). ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (cf. the suffering of the Messiah before the judgment of the Messiah); they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (^{NIV} Revelation 12:10-11)

4. The great “falling away” (Mt. 24:10) of the church will ultimately be because of a lack of embracing suffering and martyrdom in this age.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. (^{NIV} Revelation 13:16-17)

"If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury... He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb..." ¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (^{NIV} Revelation 14:9-12)

- *As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word (concerning the kingdom) and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (^{ESV} Matthew 13:20-21)*

- D. The testimony of God to humanity, typified in the completion of the martyrdom of the saints, is the primary *measuring rod* of redemptive history. In other words, the completion of redemptive history happens in context to the completion of the testimony of God, which is typified through the completion of martyrdom.

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. ¹⁰ 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 (cf. Day of the Lord)?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (^{NIV} Revelation 6:9-11)

1. Like the intercession of the martyred saints under the altar (Rev. 6:10), so also the intercessions of the global martyrdom release the temporal judgments, which in turn causes the nations to rage and persecute the saints, which releases greater temporal judgments, etc. This escalating the testimony crescendos to the end of redemptive history at the Day of the Lord, when God brings the amnestive mandate to an end.

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...¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God (cf. Rev. 12:10; 19:1), who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ...¹⁴ he (one of the elders) said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation..."^{8:1} When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour...³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. (^{NIV} Revelation 7:9-8:5)

2. The dominant theme of the Book of Revelation, besides the temporal judgments of God, is the culmination of wickedness upon the earth *expressed in the persecution of the saints*—cf. the persecution of the churches (2:9, 13; 3:9); the slain souls under the altar (6:9); the great multitude of martyrs from every nation (7:14), the two witnesses (11:7), the “destroying those that destroy the earth” at the seventh trumpet (11:18), those that “love not their lives unto death” (12:11), the dragon makes war upon those that hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:17), the beast is given power “to make war upon the saints and to conquer them” (13:7), the patient endurance of the saints in light of the mark of the beast (14:12), the harvesting of the earth’s righteous (14:16), those beside the sea of glass “victorious over the beast” (15:2), the cause of the bowls of wrath (16:6), the drunkenness of Harlot Babylon on the blood of the saints (17:6), the judgment of Harlot Babylon for the way she treated the saints (18:20), the rejoicing of the multitude in heaven for the avenging of the blood of the saints (19:2), and the vindication of the martyrs in the Kingdom (20:4).

*I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God*³ *and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.*⁴ *Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you..."* (^{NIV} Revelation 15:2-4)

*Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged;*⁶ *for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as*

they deserve." ⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." (^{NIV} Revelation 16:5-7)

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." ⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (^{ESV} Revelation 17:5-6)

"Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." ²¹ Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again..." ²⁴ In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." (^{NIV} Revelation 18:20-24)

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God," ² for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." (^{NIV} Revelation 19:1-2)

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (^{NIV} Revelation 20:4)

III. THE FALSE WITNESS

- A. A false witness will also arise at the end of the age, which will pervert the witness of the gospel. This false witness will ultimately be designed to avoid the embracing of suffering and martyrdom.

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ *At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,* ¹¹ *and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.* (^{NIV} Matthew 24:9-11)

- B. The False Witness will be founded upon *false ideologies* that undermine love unto death. Moreover, it will be a history of small denials of the Cross that will culminate in the final denial of Jesus in context to the Antichrist.
1. This False Witness is exemplified in Peter's confession and subsequent denial. Peter's "stumbling block", like many in Israel at that time (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23; 1 Pe. 2:8; Rom. 9:32; Gal. 5:11), was the rejection of suffering before glory (cf. Lk. 24:26; Acts 3:18; 17:3; 1 Pe. 1:11; Heb. 2:10ff).

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah..."* ²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to*

explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (^{NIV} Matthew 16:16-24)

- Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night..." ³³ Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." (^{ESV} Matthew 26:31)
- When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs (cf. v.16, 17)... ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." (^{ESV} John 21:15-19)
- Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ² for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute... and has avenged on her the blood of his servants... ⁶ Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory (cf. resurrection), for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (^{ESV} Revelation 19:1-8)

2. Paul warns believers to avoid those whose lifestyles deny the reality of the Cross.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (^{ESV} 2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (^{ESV} Philippians 3:17-19)

- C. Ultimately, the False Witness will abandon the Cross and everything it communicates. It will seek “riches, honor and long-life” for self, rather than embracing suffering and martyrdom as faithful witnesses of God’s longsuffering. The measure of the Church is its production of loving martyrs.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist (concerning “his appearing and his kingdom”), discharge all the duties of your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering... ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness... and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. ⁹ Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. (^{NIV} 2 Timothy 4:1-10)

- D. This is the ultimate danger of ideologies that equate the Kingdom of God with the Church. If the Kingdom is now in the Church, then there is no real impetus for denial of the flesh, seeking a greater inheritance in the age to come. If the Kingdom is now, then the inheritance (i.e. prosperity for the righteous) is now, which is the driving force behind the modern Church’s insatiable desire for more wealth and power. This false theology results in a false witness concerning Jesus and the Day of the Lord, and it will ultimately result in a great falling away at the end of the age.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life (in this age) will lose it (at the Day of the Lord), but whoever loses his life for my sake (exemplified in martyrdom) will find it (in the resurrection). ²⁶ For what will it profit a man (in the judgment) if he gains the whole world (in this age) and forfeits his life (cf. eternal life)? ... ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (i.e. in accordance with the will of God as a longsuffering witness). (^{NIV} Matthew 16:24-27)

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (^{NIV} John 12:24-26)

- E. The false prophetic witness in the OT exemplifies the False Witness at the end of the age.

I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. ²² But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. (^{NIV} Jeremiah 23:21-22)

Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds... ¹⁵ I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine." (^{NIV} Jeremiah 14:14-15)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders... ⁷ The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. ⁸ The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel... ¹² Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. ¹³ But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty. ¹⁴ So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day; ¹⁵ the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail. ¹⁶ Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. (^{NIV} Isaiah 9:6-16)

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough... ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. (^{NIV} 2 Corinthians 11:4-15)