

Week of December 30-January 5

## **HOW LONG?**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Revelation Chapter 6

***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..."***

How long? It's not a clock issue, not really. It's not a time question, a matter of seconds or minutes. Rather, it's a plea, the cry of a heart to God. *"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"* It's the desperate prayer of martyrs who were put to death for their stand for Christ, faithful warriors who were persecuted by wicked men simply because they believed in Jesus.

But is it right to ask for justice? Is it Christian? Shouldn't we forgive? Jesus forgave his captors didn't he? Shouldn't the martyrs follow in his footsteps? We do well to be reminded of what the apostle Peter taught us about Jesus in his first epistle: *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* Did you catch that last phrase? *"...he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* God is not only a loving Father; he is also a just judge. Jesus trusted his Father to act and, therefore, didn't retaliate. The martyrs didn't take it upon themselves to fight back either or to take revenge on earth when they had the chance. They too entrusted themselves to him who judges justly. They followed the counsel of the apostle Paul: *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."*

The problem for the martyrs, however, is not that they died for Christ. It's that God didn't seem to be judging justly those who caused their deaths. He seemed to be allowing the power of Rome to run unchecked, for more martyrs to suffer without any punishment. Hence, the cry, **"How long..."**

It's a cry King David would have understood. He prayed in similar fashion in Psalm 13: *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"*

Righteous people suffering at the hands of wicked men. It still happens today. Cries for justice and pleas for God's intervention and deliverance still ring upwards to heaven. Chapter 6 reminds us, however, that a response will come. Prayers are promised an answer. *"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."* The one who judges justly will act.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Have you been treated unjustly because of your faith in Christ? Are you wondering, "How long, Lord?" Use Psalm 13 as a prayer guide and pour out your cry to God. Place your faith in the God who judges justly.

**Take-a-way:** *The answer to "How long?" is more about trust than it is about time.*