

Message #46 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"Souls, Sacrifices, and Ashes"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk to you about souls, sacrifices, and ashes. Specifically, I would like to talk about the importance of you being found under the altar of the Lord. I know it sounds strange, but when we look in Revelation 6:9, we see that there are souls under the altar. Let's read verses 9-11, and then take a closer look at them. It says, "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: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given to every one of them; and it was said to 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."

Notice that the souls under the altar are those who were slain because of the word of God. This verse does not necessarily mean that these people are martyrs. It just means they were slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they held. In scripture, there are two meanings to being slain. We can be killed physically, but we can also be killed in a spiritual sense. Listen to what the apostle Paul says in Romans 12:1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Paul says that we should present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. The actual physical death is not a requirement. Paul also tells us in Romans 6:6, that our old man is crucified with Christ. He also tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:31, that he dies daily. Truly, Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, and we are encouraged by Jesus himself to take up

our cross and follow him. When we give ourselves as a living sacrifice, when we die daily, we are giving up that which appeals to our fleshly man so that our spiritual man might prosper and that we might fulfill the will of God. This is being an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord. But in this world, there are some whose life seems to be full, and others whose life seems to be cut down. When we look at death from a deeper scriptural context, we can see that the wicked seem to prosper in the earth, and the righteous seem to be beaten down. It is no surprise to see wickedness in the earth today, for just as Luke 17 tells us, in the last days it will be as the days of Noah, or as the days of Sodom, just before God caused their catastrophes. But although the wicked prosper, the righteous do not. Yes, the righteous do prosper in the spiritual sense, but in the world, we are like sheep led to the slaughter, as it says in Psalms 44:22, "Yes, for your sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter."

At the base of wickedness is a desire for self-exaltation. The whole concept of righteousness is an unselfish giving of ourselves for others, just as Jesus Christ set the example and gave himself for us. When we accept the role of servant, both to Jesus Christ and to people, we are, like Christ, becoming lambs who are ready to be slaughtered. But this is our sacrifice that we willingly give to God.

Let's take a look at the Old Testament concept of a sacrifice, and how it was accomplished. In the Old Testament, God established a Law of Commandments specifically for the Children of Israel which required animal sacrifices. In the Tabernacle in the wilderness, as well as in the later Temples, animal sacrifices were offered on the altar of burnt offerings. The Bible tells us that the altar of burnt offerings was 5 cubits square, and 3 cubits high. It had a bronze fire grate attached at the four corners of the altar. The priests would slay the designated animal, pour its blood out at the base of the altar, and place the animal upon the grate. The animal was then burned, and as it was consumed by the fire, its ashes would filter down through the grate onto the ground beneath the altar.

The most important thing to consider in this process is that in order for the sacrifice to end up under the altar, the animal had to be consumed by the fire of God. If this was to happen, the animal must first be inspected for purity. No animal could be offered that had any blemish or was sick or diseased. Jesus was our example of an acceptable sacrifice, and God received him because he had no imperfection. If we consider this concept, and apply it to ourselves, we see that as an animal could have no blemish, disease, or imperfection, than we ourselves can have no imperfection if God is to accept us. Of course, our perfection doesn't come from our own strength, but comes through the saving blood of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, we must remember that because this is a spiritual concept, and because we are not animals, but human beings, God does not force us to be a sacrifice. That is our choice. We can choose our own destiny. We can give ourselves daily as a living sacrifice, or maybe even a physical sacrifice as martyrs, but the choice is up to us. But once we decide we are no longer going to live for ourselves, but live for God and for others, the choice has been made. In essence, by doing this, we have put ourselves on the altar and told God to do with us as he pleases. When this happens, the purifying fire of God consumes us. As we are consumed by the fire of God, we pass through

the grate. In this spiritual sense, we finally reach that place where God can reach out to us and reward us with robes of pure white.

In Revelation 6:9, we read that the souls under the altar were given white robes. We all need white robes, for there is no way we can enter heaven without proper attire. White robes are the symbol of righteousness, which is the only proper attire for those who wish to be part of the marriage supper of the lamb. But in order to receive white robes, we first must be found to be pure, without any imperfection. It is only after this that we can possibly be sacrificed and pass through the grate of the altar. Once we become an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord the consuming fire of God can change us into ashes and we can filter down through the grate and at last lie under the altar. We know that the fire of God's Holy Spirit purifies us. Ashes are the purified remains of Christians who have become an acceptable sacrifice to God. They are found under the altar. Only the souls of those who truly love Jesus Christ and who give themselves as a daily sacrifice, resisting the desires of this world, but rather serving God and people, can be found under the altar.

But the next question is, "Exactly how are the people of God put to death?" Jesus told us that we were to take up our cross and follow him. The cross, for Jesus, was an altar of sacrifice. Just as the blood of animal sacrifices was poured out upon the ground next to the altar, the blood of Jesus was also poured out on the ground next to the cross. When we respond to the invitation of Jesus to take up our cross and follow him, we place ourselves in the same jeopardy that Jesus Christ placed himself. Jesus was crucified by the wicked people of the earth. Our death on our cross is not physical, but spiritual. We don't actually get crucified in the flesh, we get crucified in the spiritual sense, in the symbolic sense. Because wickedness reigns in the earth, righteousness is put down. When you try to live a righteous life for God, the evil spiritual battle begins. We are attacked on every side. Everything goes against us, because the forces of evil are against Jesus Christ. And as Jesus Christ willingly gave himself for a sacrifice, Christians willingly give themselves as a living sacrifice. Although the world encourages everyone toward selfishness, and toward earthly desires, true Christians shun these worldly desires so that they might concentrate on doing the will of God. They shun the world that they might seek after heavenly things.

In this world the wicked seem to prosper. That was one of the frustrations of Jeremiah the prophet, who asked God why the wicked prospered. God's reply to him was essentially that the wicked prospered for now, but that when the end came, they would be disadvantaged, for they wouldn't have the necessary qualifications which would enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven. Malachi 4:1-3, says, "For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the LORD of hosts."

These verses talk about the end times in which the wicked will be consumed by the fire of righteousness. The fire of the Holy Spirit only purifies and cleanses. For Christians this is a blessing, and we rejoice in that fire, but the wicked will be consumed by it. They will be consumed with the fire of the Holy Spirit just as hay or stubble is consumed by fire. Instead of Christians becoming ashes, now the revenge of God will cause the wicked to be burned up. But because these wicked people have not willingly given themselves in sacrifice to God, there will be no altar, and when they are consumed by the fire and become ashes, they will not be ashes under the altar, but as we just read in Malachi 4:3, they will become ashes under the feet of the righteous. They will not be given white robes like the righteous who are found under the altar, for they are not going to be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

If you want to be part of the group of Christians who receive white robes, then you will have to consider whether or not your life conforms to being an acceptable sacrifice unto God. You must ask yourself these questions. Do you truly take up your cross and follow Jesus to Calvary? Do you willfully give yourself for service to God, or do you serve yourself? Is God your Master, or are you your own master? You know, it might be fun to be wicked for awhile, but when Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven, those who reject Jesus Christ will not be celebrating. But then, neither will the false Christians be celebrating who have continuously refused to give themselves as a daily living sacrifice.

If you intend to end up under the altar, and therefore become eligible to wear a white wedding garment, the first thing you have to be is pure. You can have no spiritual blemish. This requirement is attained through the blood of Jesus Christ. However there is still one more requirement. Before you can get on the altar you have to be killed. Old Testament sacrifices were not burned alive on the altar, but slain first, their blood poured out on the ground, and then they were consumed by the fire of God. So, how is the actual death of a Christian sacrifice accomplished? It works like this.

Satan has established a world system in which each individual can find as much to stimulate his fleshly nature as he wants, for the life of the body is measured in how much it enjoys the carnal things of this world. Life in Christ encourages a rejection of the carnal nature and an attitude of love and service for others, and immediately the quality of your earthly life begins to wain. This is both by personal choice, and also because the wicked people have their social system firmly in place and in this social system there is not room for true Christianity. False Christianity, yes, playing the game of Christianity, yes, but not real Christianity, for the wicked don't like true Christians. They don't like them coming in and demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ with clean hands and a pure heart, because it brings conviction against them, and reminds them of their future death which is coming. As soon as a person chooses to serve Jesus Christ, he immediately comes into conflict with those who would rather seek the things of earth. The wicked people of earth like the world system that Satan has established. They don't like you to talk about Jesus, they don't like you to pray in their presence, they don't like anything at all that might remind them even remotely of how wicked they are or that their final destination is hell. Instead of a Christian enjoying a nice earthly life, suddenly they have had the nice earthly life turned upside down.

Now instead of being readily accepted by all men, they are shunned. People no longer want them around because they hinder the enjoyment of the wicked people.

If Satan had his way, every person on earth would concentrate on stimulating their flesh. They would buy and sell all things that stimulate their natural man. This is exactly what the Image of the Beast is attempting to make happen to all walks of people. Everything in the secular world is shaped to cause people to worship their beast nature rather than their spiritual nature. Everything that Satan does is geared to causing people of earth to shun heavenly things and to concentrate on earthly things. Colossians 3:1-3, says, "If you, then, are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Satan does not want you to seek those things which are above. The wicked people of earth don't want to seek those things which are above, either. Yet, God does not force anyone to obey him at this time. Everyone has a free will to choose whom they will serve. God calls us to accept him, to believe on him. But if anyone does not believe God, that his word is true, and that he is the Almighty God, and they do not accept Jesus Christ as Lord, then they automatically choose to believe in Satan. Contrary to some opinion, when it comes to the difference between righteousness and wickedness, there is no middle ground. Let me explain this in a way that might make it easier to understand.

To believe God, or to believe anything about God, is to believe that it is good, for God is good. The whole concept of good and evil is born out of the concept that God is good and Satan is evil. If you believe God is good, then you will receive him. But if you believe God is bad, then you will reject him. Some people think they believe God, but they don't really receive him. Yes, they may receive him partially, but then reject a portion of him. Jesus is God. Those who reject Jesus reject God. When God says that we were put here to do his will, and a person doesn't want to do God's will, but rather desires to act according to their own desires, then they have rejected God. Yes, they like the part about God loving them, and they like the part about going to heaven and being happy, but they don't like the part about coming out from among the wicked people of earth and being a separate people. They don't like the idea of reading their Bible. They don't like the idea of going to church anymore than is absolutely necessary. I think you can see where I'm going with this. Many people like parts of God, but they don't want to exalt him to the place where God becomes the power in all parts of their lives.

Satan does not believe. Yes he does know that God is God, but if he really believed that God was Almighty, then that would mean that Satan considered him to be the supreme authority. It is evident that Satan has not done this. Satan, in no way, looks to God from a subservient view. The whole concept of evil is based on the rejection of God as the Almighty complete power and authority. When people call themselves Christians, yet ignore God's will, they are rejecting God as complete authority, as Lord, as Master, of their lives.

Here's something to think about. Suppose someone offers you something to eat, and suppose they offer you two choices. Suppose one is a piece of apple pie, and the other is a dish of cold Brussels sprouts. And for the sake of the example, let's assume that you love apple pie, and that you hate cold brussels sprouts. Because you are a human being, you have a natural tendency to embrace that which you consider good. You will pull it to you, and you will push away that which you consider to be bad. In the case of this example, you will receive the apple pie, and you will push the Brussels sprouts away. It is no different with anything else. You will always choose what you consider as good, and you will reject that which you consider as not good. Let's use one more example.

Let's say that you like squash, but you don't like it real well. Let's say you like to eat a little, but you wouldn't want your main diet to consist of it. Therefore, you could say, truthfully, that you liked squash. You could say that you accepted squash as food for you. But that wouldn't really be the whole truth. The whole truth would be that you liked it a little, but wouldn't care to eat it often, nor in great amounts. In fact, the whole truth might be that you could take a little of it, and that you really did like it when there wasn't much else to choose from, but that if something else was offered on the table that was more appetizing, such as a hamburger, steak, or dessert, you would just as soon have one of these choices.

This is how many Christians form their Christianity. They say they like Jesus, and say that they believe in God's word, but if the whole truth were known, their desire for Jesus might be more like their desire for squash. Maybe they like Jesus, but not in great amounts at one time, and maybe not very often. Also, if the opportunity to concentrate on Jesus is available, but there was something else to do at the same time, maybe they would choose to do the other thing just as they would choose to eat the other thing instead of eating squash.

If you like something you embrace it. If you don't care for something you push it away. Many people do not realize that they claim to be Christians, but have no intention of offering themselves on the altar of the cross. They have no intention of becoming an acceptable sacrifice to God, and they certainly have no intention of becoming ashes under the altar. But the problem with this is that they will not be found to be under the altar, and therefore they will not be given white robes. You don't get white robes for standing next to the altar. You don't get white robes for helping to kill the sacrifices. You get white robes for allowing those who slay the righteous of the earth, to kill you.