

Chapter 19

Seal Five - Persecution from Anti-Christ

*“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.”
(Revelation 6:9)*

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It was the Sabbath day in Capernaum, a small town of about 1500 on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. As was the custom of most good Jews, they were allowed to walk to the Synagogue for a time to hear the Word of God. It was not church like we are familiar with today but it was a Saturday gathering out of respect for the day of rest – the Sabbath.

They were not allowed to work on the Sabbath for God Himself had declared it a day when no work was to be done. However, over the many years different religious groups like the Pharisees had put definitions on just what was considered to be work. In an emergency, like one of the oxen falling in a ditch and needing helped out, or some other such situation they were allowed to take care of it on the Sabbath. The ox was part of their livelihood after all, and not getting it out until the next day could mean severe injury or even death to the

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animal. That could not be tolerated because it was imperative to meeting their family needs.

But somehow they had come to define healing, or the practice of medicine on the Sabbath to fall under the category of work and so it was not allowed.

Jesus had been to this Synagogue before as is indicated in Mark 3:1 where it says that “He entered the synagogue again ...” He spent a lot of time around Capernaum so the people had grown accustomed to seeing Him there on the Sabbath.

But this day was a little different. On this day a man who is described as having a withered hand – probably caused by some form of paralysis, was present.

Another group was there as well. Some of the Pharisees were present. We aren’t told as to whether they always came to the Synagogue on the Sabbath or if perhaps they had sent the man with the withered hand there so as to entrap Jesus into healing on the Sabbath. They were constantly looking for a reason to arrest Him.

On the surface it doesn’t make sense why they would want Him out of the way. He performed miracles that could only come from God and only did good – Except when He spoke about their own deceitful ways. Jesus exposed the Pharisees for being self-righteous liars and cheats. He accused them of only wanting the money of the people and had on more than one occasion cost them money. This was unacceptable even if He did

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seem to work miracles from God. No, He upset their system too much and so He had to go.

They watched Jesus intently. Would He heal the man with the withered hand or would He refrain knowing that they were present. Either way would have been good for them. If He healed the man then they could accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath and could finally arrest Him. If He didn't then all the people would wonder why He had not and it would serve as a discredit to Him. They thought they had Him between a rock and a hard place.

Jesus spoke to the man, "Step forward," and the man stood and came to Him. Okay, now all they had to do was to wait until He healed Him and He was theirs.

But Jesus turned, looked them square in the eye and asked, "*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?*" He said it in this way because if they answered that it was unlawful for Jesus to heal the man on the Sabbath then they would be speaking without compassion and would in essence be serving a death sentence on the man. Now the tables had turned and they could not answer without discrediting themselves. So they kept silent.

After Jesus had looked at them in anger and was grieved because of their hard, sinful hearts, He then turned back to the man and told him to stretch out his hand. When he did his hand was now completely healed. What a wonderful miracle that had been

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witnessed that day. This man's life had been forever changed.

But instead of rejoicing the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they could destroy Jesus.

That seems strange doesn't it? That someone who had done so much good would be the subject of a plot of how He could be destroyed? Why do men think like that? All through the centuries and millenniums those who only want to help, heal and give have been considered the enemy and have been subject to persecution, imprisonment and death. It doesn't make sense does it? Unless that is you factor in the evil of the devil. His influence makes those who are his children hate and despise those who are of God and only want to do good.

Christians have always been persecuted and killed because of their testimony. Their testimony is simply that they have been saved by a man who claimed equality with God who was killed on a Roman cross. That by its self may not be powerful enough to spark a movement but given that many eyewitnesses saw Him after He had risen from the dead, now we have something on which to build a testimony.

Because of this testimony during the time shortly after the Church was born Jewish leaders continued to persecute Christians and then the Roman government got in on it. Centuries later, after a corrupt Christianity took

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power, those supposed to be of the Church herself began persecuting those who only wanted to bring the Bible to all people by translating it into the common language.

Yet today Christians are persecuted. In many countries of the world Christians are still imprisoned, tortured and killed simply because of their testimony.

The Antichrist will be no different. In fact he will enhance the persecution like no other before him has done. Many believers will be executed simply because they profess Christ as their Savior. It seems impossible that those who are inspired by Christ to do good to their fellowmen would be hunted, persecuted and executed for that reason. But it has happened and will happen.

Christians will become the enemy of the kingdom of the Antichrist and so become the number one public enemy with priority to eliminate them from the picture. Many thousands of Christians will be killed.

Revelation 6:9-11 says this: *“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”*

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Persecution of the Church will come to a climax under the rule of the Anti-Christ. He will reign down more horror than all the tortures and persecutions before him. He is the beast, influenced and possessed by the devil – that great Red Dragon – Who will wage war with the descendants of the woman. We don't know how many will be slain but there will be a great number. Some of us may live to see that day. Some of us may be in that number. I don't know. I don't want to be, but if so then I pray "Lord give me the strength to stand for the testimony. Allow me to count it all joy to be persecuted for Your name's sake."