

Blessed Are the Dead Who Die in the Lord

14: 12-13

DIG: Previously we are told that there will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name (14:10b-11). Here we see those who remain faithful to Jesus will rest from their labor. It seems like an easy choice. Why do you think some choose to worship the beast and not rest from their labor? Do you think this choice is conscious or unconscious?

REFLECT: How do you look upon death? As a rest? A reward? A new phase in the journey? What should you be doing when the Lord calls you home? What does patient endurance look like to you? How are you doing with it?

There is an important interval between the first three angels (14:6-11), and the last three angels in 14:14-20. We are able to take a breath between all the wrath of God, for some much needed comfort about our own salvation.

The Bible has much to say about blessing, which refers to spiritual joy or satisfaction. It describes an inner peace and contentment that is untouchable. Both the TaNaKh and the B'rit Chadashah reveal much about blessedness (Psalm 1:1-2, 2:12, 32:1-2 and Romans 4:7-8; Psalm 40:4, 41:1, 65:4, 84:4-5, 106:3, 112:1, 119:2; Proverbs 8:32 and 34; Matthew 5:3-12; John 20:29; James 1:12; First Peter 3:14, 4:14; and here). Remarkably, this second of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7 and 22:14) declares a blessing on the dead. **They will be blessed because of the way they lived and because of the way they died.**

First, the dead will be blessed because of how they lived. By refusing to take the mark of the beast, the people of God will undergo heavy persecution and martyrdom. The pressure for them to take the mark and declare their allegiance to the antichrist, will be merciless. Yet they will not budge in their devotion to the Lord. This is when perseverance is needed on the part of God's people, those who observe His command and exercise Yeshua's faithfulness (14:12 CJB).

The phrase **the perseverance of the people of God** introduces one of the most important and most comforting doctrines in the Scriptures. It expresses the truth that all of those whom ADONAI has elected, called and justified will never lose their faith, but will persevere until death. What some point to as biblical proof that believers can lose their salvation (see my commentary on Hebrews), merely highlights unbelievers who were never saved to begin with (First John 2:19). No, the Bible is clear on this most important doctrine.

As **Jesus Himself** says even today: **I tell you the truth, those who believe [in Me] have eternal life (John 6:47)**. That reality provides us with assurance, hope and joy to every true believer in **Messiah**, and brings an end to fear and doubt. It also reveals that **believers' deaths are blessed because to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord (Second Cor 5:8)**. **God keeps His own holy ones** by sustaining **their** faith to the very end, no matter what happens. True saving faith, by its very nature, is **eternal** and cannot be lost (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**).

The persevering nature of saving faith will never be more clearly seen than in this passage. No group of **believers** has ever or will ever face stronger assaults on their faith than the Tribulation believers. This large group of **holy ones (7:9 and 13-14)** will include both **Gentiles (7:9)** and **Jews (12:17)**. They will be saved through the ministries of **the two witnesses (11:3-13)** and **the 144,000 (7:1-8, 14:1-5)**. The Tribulation believers will endure the most intense persecution in human history. **Yeshua Himself** described this period as a time of **great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world**. The conditions will be so terrible that **if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Mat 24 21-22)**. **YHVH** will set a limit on the Great Tribulation so that **the elect** will not suffer more than **they** can bear (**1 Cor 10:13**). There is no stronger evidence that saving faith perseveres than the reality that the most tested **believers** in history will maintain **their** saving faith until the end.³²²

Secondly, the holy ones will be blessed because of how they died. Then I heard a voice from heaven say write: **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on**. And **the Holy Spirit** agreed with this, by saying: **Yes, they will rest from their labor**, and receive a reward, **for their righteous deeds will follow them (14:13)**. There will come a point in the Great Tribulation when it will be better for **the saved** to die than to live. **They** will leave **their** grief and torment behind, enter **heaven**, and **rest** in the presence of **God** where **their** righteous **deeds will follow them**. This was a special word of encouragement and comfort to all **believers** who lived during the first century persecution and for **those** who will die during the Great Tribulation from the persecution of the antichrist.

The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, has developed a doctrine in which it is held that all who die at peace with the Church, but who are not perfect, must undergo severe and purifying suffering in an intermediate realm known as purgatory. Rome has based her doctrine of purgatory primarily on a passage from Second Maccabees 12:39-45, and was not proclaimed as an article of faith until 1439 by the Council of Florence. This doctrine teaches that even if a priest forgives all mortal sins of a Roman Catholic in confession, but he does not perform enough "good works," he will go to purgatory and remain there in torture until his soul is completely purified. Only after suffering the full punishment due to him for his sin will he be allowed to enter heaven. According to Catholic doctrine, the

sufferings of purgatory are very severe, surpassing anything endured in this life. It teaches that the fire of purgatory does not differ from the fire of hell, except for duration, and in some cases lasts entire centuries. The Roman Church says people can pray for the dead and get them out of purgatory sooner, or pay money to the Church and get them out sooner.³³³ Either way it doesn't sound like much **rest**. Redeemed souls are cleansed, not by the fires of purgatory, but by **the blood of Christ**. The Bible declares **that blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin (First John 1:7)**.

The lost of this world are the ones who make the disastrous choice to build their lives around something less than the **God** of the universe, the only proper object of worship. They suffer from a reduced sense of guilt because they refuse to believe the good news of forgiveness and redemption to all **who live on the earth (14:6)**. By contrast, **the Holy Spirit** calls us not only to keep the faith through **perseverance**, but to **rest** from our labors as well. And why **rest** in that? Because **Christ's** decisive victory is assured **(14:12-13)**.

We who **labor** for **the Lord** in this world often find it difficult to enter into the **rest** that **God** wants all of **His** children to enjoy. Second-guessing our choices troubles us, wondering if we could have done a more thorough job, spoken more boldly, held our temper longer. You name it. We are discouraged by our ineffectiveness not only in turning the tide of evil in the world but remaining faithful to the seemingly simple tasks of seeking **ADONAI** in prayer; speaking the truth; and loving our spouse, parent, child or co-worker.

Sometimes we feel like the whole weight of **His** mission here on earth is entirely dependent on our efforts. No wonder we get tired! Instead, **Yeshua** invites us to come to **Him** and find **rest**, not by making a break from our work but by uniting our efforts with **His**. In those times of discouragement, we need to be reminded of **His** words: **Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-29)**. He reminds us that **His Holy Spirit** is at work within us to accomplish **His** will **(Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13)**. The final outcome depends entirely on **Him** and may not match what we currently observe with our limited human vision because **we now see but a poor reflection as in a corroded bronze mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (First Corinthians 13:12)**.

*Lord, I so often grow tired of doing **Your** work. Reveal the pride that lies at the root of my discouragement. Revive my faith in **Your** power to conquer evil, not only the evil that seems to rule the world, but also the evil that lurks in my own heart. Because **You** love me so much, renew the strength with which I cling to **Your** love.³³⁴*