

"WHO SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND?"

"Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17)

These are the words which Jesus said that some would say to the mountains and rocks in a time of great fear and horror. This text suggests the language of terror on the part of those in danger of some impending calamity. The particular thing feared must be determined by the general teaching of the text and context. Substantially the same language was used by Christ in referring to the destruction of Jerusalem when he said, "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us." (Luke 23:30) Hence this text is simply a poetical and symbolic way of expressing the cry of distress. When the calamity came they would consider it a day of wrath coming from God and Christ. Their conclusion would be that if divine favor was against them, no one would be able to stand; no one would be able to prevail against the might and strength of God. That, of course, is true, regardless of when or what particular wrath of God may be in view here.

There has been a great diversity of opinion respecting the events symbolized by the sixth seal mentioned in the last part of the sixth chapter of Revelation, in the passages immediately preceding our text. Some apply them to the wars between the Jews and Romans under Nero and Vespasian. Some refer these symbols to the persecution under Diocletian. Others refer them to the defeat of Pagan powers, and the final suppression of those powers as opposed to Christianity. Some refer them to the day of vengeance at the end of the world.

The events that transpired during the reign of Constantine (emperor from AD 307 to 337) will harmonize with the things pictured in the sixth seal. However, in principle, these things also allude to the end of the world. It is to this end in view that we study the principle of this text.

Parallel with our text, David said, "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" (Psalms 76:7) That is, who can prevail against the might of God? Who shall be saved eternally?

The question for our study is not "Who shall stand before the Lord in the day of judgment?", or "Who is going to be there?"; but "Who shall be able to stand?" The scriptures tell us that "Before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:32)

Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (II Corinthians 5:10) therefore our question is not who is going to be at the judgment, but who shall hear him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"? (Matthew 25:21)

SOME CLASSES OF PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT BE ABLE TO STAND

1. Sinners. The wicked shall not be able to stand. David said, "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." (Psalms 1:5) Again David said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." (Psalms 9:17) There are both nations and individuals who, though they know God, yet they forget him; that is, they become unmindful of him. They do not acknowledge him in their designs, their ways and their plans. These are all to be thrust down to hell. David further said concerning the eternal plight of the wicked, "But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off." (Psalms 37:38)

The New Testament also is filled with divine declarations concerning the eternal condemnation of the sinful. Jesus said "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:49-50) This is contrary to the theory that the impious are never to have any resurrection, but are to be annihilated. Peter said, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter 4:17-18) Through John, the beloved disciple, the Lord said, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8) That is, they will be excluded from heaven and punished forever.

2. Honest people who have been deceived in religious matters shall not be able to stand. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21-23)

There are many good people who are deceived in matters of religion, but will they be saved on the basis of their moral goodness? It takes honesty to be saved, but it takes more than honesty. It takes conformity to the will of God, for Jesus said that those who will be saved are those "that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Just because one may think that he is right does not make him right. Solomon said, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12) Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:13-14) Hence both the seducers and the seduced shall perish. It seems that some people like to be deceived. In religion any one can preach a new doctrine and get a following. Jesus said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matthew 24:24) Therefore the Savior said to his disciples, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." (Matthew 24:4-5)

3. Backsliders shall not be able to stand. Those who have known the way of truth and turned back, their plight shall be worse than those who have never known the truth. Peter said, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."-(II Peter 2:20-21) The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews was written to warn them of the danger of backsliding and apostacy. Early in the epistle the writer said, "Take heed, brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12) Again he said, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, and of you should seem to come short of it." (Hebrews 4:1) Yet there are those who say that it is impossible for the Christian to come short of God's promises; that it is impossible for a redeemed soul to be lost. But Paul addressed these words of warning to fellow Christians--to brethren in the Lord. To his brethren in the church at Corinth, Paul said, "Wherefore let him that think he standeth take heed lest he fall," (I Corinthians 10:12) The man who says that it is impossible for him to fall; that man is the very one who should take heed, lest he fall.

WHO, THEN SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND?

1. The Righteous shall be able to stand. Solomon said, "The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand." (Proverbs 12:7)

Who are those of "the house of the righteous"? David said, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness." (Psalms 119:172) Therefore those who obey his commandments are righteous. In obedience to God's commands they can claim this promise: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14)

2. The Redeemed, who continue faithful in the Lord's service, shall be able to stand. In becoming our High Priest, Christ has obtained eternal redemption for us. (Hebrews 9:12) In reminding Christians of the cost of their redemption, Peter said, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19) But Christ is "the Author eternal salvation" only "unto all them that obey him." (Hebrews 5:9)

3. Those in Christ's Kingdom, who remain loyal to their King, shall be able to stand. Paul declares that God "Hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14) Prophetically, Daniel spoke of this kingdom and declared that it "shall never be destroyed", but that "it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44) Paul reminded the Hebrew Christians that they were in "a kingdom which cannot be moved." (Hebrews 12:28) Hence if I am a faithful member here in this life, I shall be a member in the immortal and eternal state of that kingdom.

David raises this heart-searching question: "If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalms 130:3) That is, if thou shouldst call us into judgment for all our transgressions, both in heart and life, O Lord, who could stand? This is a most solemn saying; and if we had not the consolation of the next verse, who could be saved? Hear David again, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Psalms 130:4) That is, thou canst forgive; mercy belongs to thee, as well as judgment. One of the greatest messages of redemption in all the Bible is expressed in these inspired words: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:23-26)

Here we learn that no sinner can be saved in his sins, and that no sinner can be saved from sin, only as he is washed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Are you washed in the blood of Christ? The hope of the world is in the blood of Christ. Without being bathed in his precious blood you cannot be saved, it matters not how moral, upright and honest you may be. Unless you have been washed in the blood of "the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world", there will be no heaven for you.

But the blood of Christ is not reached by faith only. In addition to believing in Jesus Christ as God's Son, the sinner must repent, for Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) In addition to repenting, the sinner is commanded to be baptized into Christ upon a confession of his faith. On the morning of Pentecost, Peter said to sinners inquiring what they must do to be saved, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38) Paul declares that we are baptized into the death of Christ. (Romans 6:3-4) It was in Christ's death that he shed his blood. Therefore when a believing penitent is baptized into Christ he reaches the cleansing blood. Being faithful unto the end of life's way, when he comes to the judgment bar of God, he then, shall be able to stand.

Radio Sermon by Melvin J. Wise