

The souls under the altar



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Please read, first: **Revelation 6:9-11**

“When (the Lamb) 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.

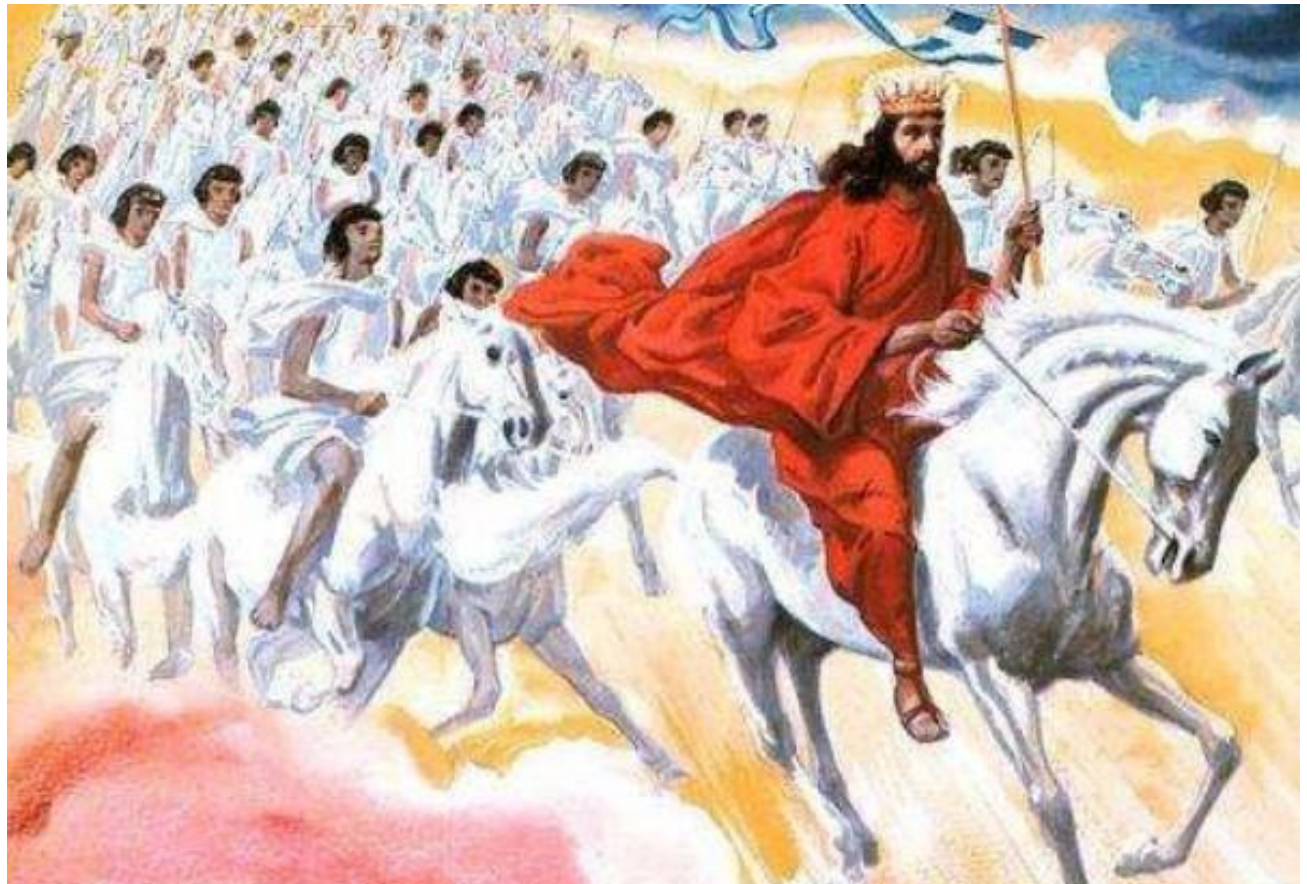
And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long. O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’

And 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 had been, was completed.”



Revelation 7:13,14

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where do they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are they who come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ”



Except for a tiny number of people the world does not know that **the Last Judgement took place in 1757, 268 years ago. At the same time the Lord's second Coming became a reality.**

These were events that Jesus Himself promised would one day take place. His words, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, read,

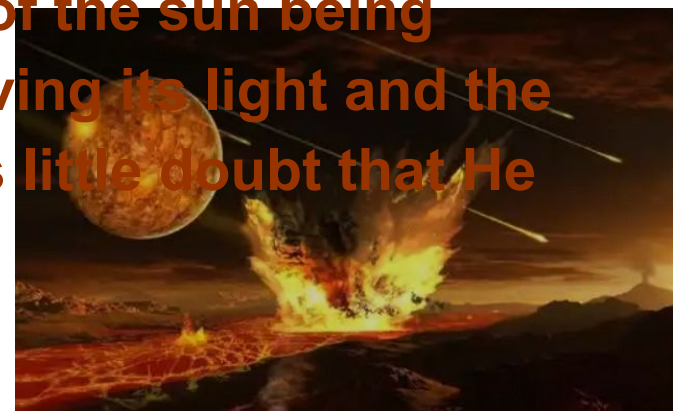
“For many”, He said, “will come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.....Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a



Recently I talked with a neighbour who is a fundamentalist Christian and during our conversation he talked about plans for the future which, he said, would depend on when Christ came again. I hadn't expected such a comment and, while I thought about it, I decided not to explore this issue with him. Not then, anyway.

There are three reasons, all from the Bible and two of them being things Jesus said which, if thought about, should cause us to question such a fundamentalist understanding of the Last Judgement and Second Coming.

Firstly, when Jesus spoke of the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light and the stars of heaven falling, there is little doubt that He was using imagery from the Old Testament and recalling a promise made about His first



“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.” (Chapter 2:30-32)

There is absolutely no evidence of such things actually happening in a worldly way in connection with the Lord's first Coming.

So the question arises: Why, when He knew these things hadn't literally happened, did Jesus use similar words in connection with His second Coming?

The teaching of the New Church is that this prophecy in Joel was about the state of religion, as it



Secondly, there is what Jesus said about the time of the second Coming. In Matthew's Gospel we have His words recorded, "Now learn the parable of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you, also, when you see all these things, know that it is very near, at the very doors. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My word will by no means pass away."

(Chapter 24:32-35)



Now we know that so certain were some of the early Christians that these events would take place in their lifetime that it became an issue for the apostle Paul to respond to. In 1 Thessalonians we read about some of the members there becoming stressed about the fact that some of their brothers and sisters had already passed away (Chapter 4:13-18). And yet Jesus had said “this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled.” How, then, could it be? Paul’s reply was to assure them that though dead yet they would rise from the dead at that time.



Even more than this questioning, some of the brothers and sisters in Thessaloniki had gone so far as to stop working, believing that the second Coming had already happened, or was about to do so. The apostle Paul heard about this and wrote, “Now, we ask you brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and lawlessness is revealed.” ” (2 Thessalonians 2:1,3).

Clearly, someone who believed that the second Coming had taken place, or was about to, was encouraging the members in Thessaloniki to now just stop everything and wait for it.



Thirdly, Jesus spoke **very differently** about a second Coming- as we have His words in John's Gospel - than what He is recorded as saying in the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In John's Gospel all the focus is on **the giving of the Holy Spirit**. As in Chapter 16, "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart I will send it to you. And when it has come it will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement....I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when the Spirit of truth has come, it will guide you into all truth.....It will glorify Me, and it will take of what is mine and declare it to you." (verses 5-8 & 12-14)



(Please notice **“it”** not **“he”**. **“It”** is the actual word in the Greek from which it is translated).

Do you see the difference? Not Jesus Himself coming, but **He would send the Holy Spirit from Himself**. **“It will take of mine and declare it to you”**. And this is precisely what the Lord through the Holy Spirit does.

What is fascinating is that Jesus did, indeed, send the Holy Spirit while that generation of His disciples was still alive! On the evening of His resurrection, **“when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’**. Now when He had said this He said to them, **‘Peace be with you’**. Now when He had said this He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, **‘Peace be unto you. As the**



It is something we need, always, to remember, that when we are studying the Bible about a particular topic **we need to bring together all of what we find taught about that topic.** The Christian Church has so focused on a physical second Coming, as seems to be taught in Matthew Chapter 24, forgetting or overlooking what Jesus taught - as we have just seen - in John's Gospel, **linking the second Coming to the sending of the Holy Spirit.** And if it is said that He didn't exactly say this yet He said sufficient to causes an open-minded person to pause and think again about taking what is said in Matthew Chapter 24 literally, and as if this is the sum total of what Jesus taught about the second Coming.



你的角度



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Down through the history of the human race.

Looked at from a spiritual perspective the history of the human race has witnessed the ebbs and flows of people's connection with God. And from the Bible we can see that God has responded when the need arose.

For example, in Genesis Chapter 6 we read of how depraved and wicked people had become following the "Fall" in the Garden of Eden. And so a Judgement became absolutely necessary, God saving just Noah and his family. And they would be **a remnant** from which **would grow a new and purer sense of God.**



But that didn't last. And so **God raised up the Jewish Church** but it, too, fell into idolatry and wickedness. There is a powerful indictment of that idolatry and wickedness in Isaiah Chapter 59, part of which reads, "No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch viper's eggs and weave the spider's web. He who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out.....they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.." (verses 4,5 &8)



And so it would be, sadly, **at the end of the first Christian Church**. There is so much historical evidence that it, too, became corrupted and that **sin and the love of power and control** became the way of things. And the Lord foresaw that. It was this that Jesus was foreshadowing in His words as we have them in Matthew Chapter 24, about the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven. **The sun means people's love for God; the moon**, which is a reflected light from the sun, **means faith in God**; and **the stars are knowledges of truth according to which we should navigate our lives**, just as the sailors in years past used to be guided by the stars. But these knowledges, meant by the stars, would become obscured and lost. Such it would be at the end of the first Christian Church.

You may know that in the early 16th century there was widespread protest throughout Europe about the excesses, the greed, the covetousness, the wrong teaching, and the worldliness of the Christian Church at that time. From “protest” was born the “Protestant” Churches .Amongst



Judgement was needed and the truths of the Lord needed to be restored and made meaningful again.

But before they were, and because of the lack of strong light shining down from God, even from the early centuries of the Christian Church, people took with them into the spiritual world distortions of the truth and fanciful ideas of what heaven would be like. And they actually formed pretend heavens in the world of spirits into which they attracted simple, good, people coming across from this world.

What were **these distortions of truth** just mentioned?

For example, there is what the apostle Paul said, as recorded in his epistle to the Romans, Chapter 3, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Verse 28) And from a distortion of this was born the doctrine of



But that is NOT what Paul taught. Paul had been asked about the necessity for Christians to continue to observe Jewish ceremonial laws and laws regarding diet and personal hygiene. THESE are the works he was referring to. And he was saying that ‘No, there is no need for Christians to observe **these laws and regulations.**’

So, as we read in the Doctrines for the New Church: “The doctrine that faith alone, that is faith without works of the law, justifies and saves, **is not derived from the Word, but from a single saying of Paul misunderstood.**” (“Apocalypse Revealed” 571)

Another example is the misunderstanding, intended or otherwise, of what we have in Isaiah Chapter 53: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded”,



From the wrong translation of “for” comes the doctrine that Jesus suffered for us, or instead of us. (This is the doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement). But that’s not what the Hebrew says. **He suffered because of the sin humans had brought into the world.**

It has been said that if you set your mind to do so you can make the Bible say whatever you want it to say. I hadn’t known until I looked it up on the internet that the Christian wars against Islam, known as “The Crusades” (1096-1300 A.D) , were justified on the basis of obscure Scripture such as Psalm 72:11, which reads, “For all kings shall fall down before Him, and nations shall serve Him.” And yet Jesus had said “All who take the sword shall perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52).



Falsity arises when, like we've seen, **one text is taken and separated** from any others which touch on that topic and would otherwise modify it or challenge us to think, again, about what it is really saying.

How could it have been?, you might ask, that there was a lack of strong light and that people so quickly came to distort the truth and make it say what it was never intended to say?

Part of the answer lies with what Jesus said that He had been unable, during His ministry in this world, to say and teach more than He had. People in those days were not ready for more. They did not have the capacity to understand more. "I still have many things to say to you", He said to the disciples, "but you cannot bear them now." (John 16:12). A lack of light means semi-darkness. **The first Christian Church was**, in many respects, **in semi-darkness.**



But all this changed in the mid-1770's. The time had arrived when at last **the Lord could reveal what He had not been able to teach while He had been in this world.** A new, strong, shaft of light beamed down through the spiritual world and into this world. And in this natural world this light, originating with God, **was captured** - to the extent that it could be - **in the Writings.** The Writings were the receptacle into which this intensified light could be received and then made known.



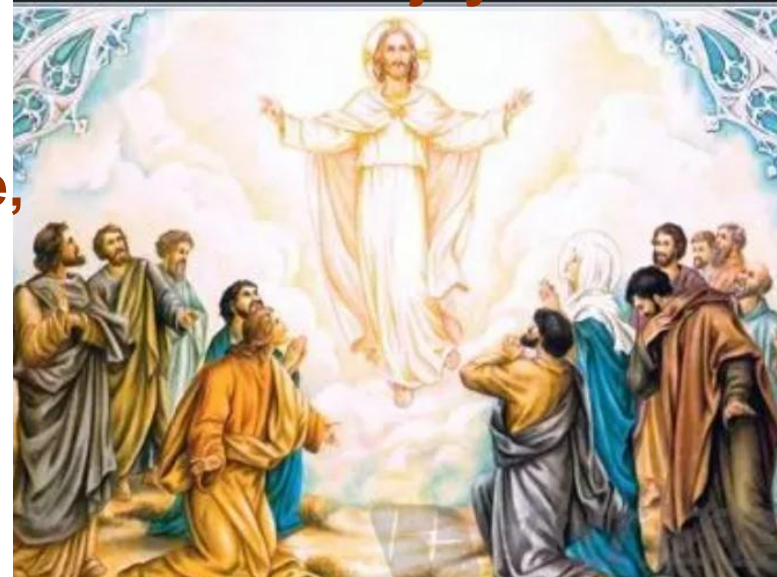
The souls under the altar.

Until this stronger light from the Lord shone down through the heavens and into the world of spirits, simple people who on earth had “desired to know the truth but had been unable to do so on account of the untruths being taught in the Church” (“Apocalypse Revealed 325:3), and who had passed into the spiritual world, **had to be protected** there from evil spirits who sought to do evil to them. These people are those meant by the souls under the altar under which they were protected.



When, however, **the light - now in much greater intensity** - shone down through heaven and into the world of spirits, it sent the evil spirits scattering. And this made possible the release of those who had had to be protected from them. In the world of spirits they had suffered from insults, were rejected by the evil in the world of spirits and were vulnerable to be led away by dragonists and heretics. (“Apocalypse Revealed” 325:1). **And from these people a new, and fully Christian, heaven, was formed by the Lord.**

Now released, and able to see truth with so much greater clarity, their hearts became full of joy and praise of the Lord, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:10)



Judgments such as we experience them

Throughout our lives, and if we are working with the Lord to become re-born people, we will **experience periodic judgments**. None of us sees truth in all its clarity, especially at first. We get drawn aside into falsity and wrong understandings of what the Lord teaches us. It happens time and again. However, as light from the Lord is intensified within us, as it will do **from keeping close to the Lord and shunning what is sinful**, we come to **see this falsity and wrong thinking for what it is**, and so the Lord is able to free us from it.

An example is how, as a young Christian we look for reward and praise, thinking, too, how much we have impressed the Lord and won His approval. But as we advance, and greater light from Him beams into our minds, we come to see that **reward is not the issue and is a self-centred, “look at me”, expectation.**



In the meantime, and until then, the Lord protects the essential love we have for Him and our yearning to be a true follower of Him. Such **love and yearning**, along with **innocence and awe** carried over from even our earliest childhood, are what the souls under the altar are. Mercifully **He protects these within us**.

Once the judgement has taken place this love and these yearnings are set free and are made stronger and become an integral part of the heaven that is being **formed in our hearts and minds**.



Just think of this: **the Lord is raising up a new and truly Christian heaven in us.** And, having heaven in us, we will easily find our place in heaven after we die.

Amen



Readings:

Revelation Chapter 6:verses 9 to 11

Revelation Chapter 7: 9 to 17



Apocalypse Explained 687:4

“Who cannot see, that to judge myriads of myriads of people, everyone according to the state of his love and faith, in both his internal and external man...is what the Lord alone can do from the Divine which is in Him...For He who is to judge must see every state of the person who is to be judged from his infancy to the last of his life in the world, and what the state of his life will be afterwards to eternity.”

Apocalypse Explained 297:2

“When judgement takes place, the Lord is present with all, and from Divine love wills to save all, and also turns and leads all to Himself. **They who are in good and the derivative truths follow**, for they apply themselves. But they who are in evil and falsity turn themselves backwards from the Lord, thus to hell.”



THE END

