A Hope For Vengeance

By Rod McDonald

We are drawn to the murder mystery novel. It calls to a desire we have for another world, where the crime is always solved. We are moral creatures living in a moral universe, and we long for justice. Swift. Immediate.

But the broken hearts of thousands of Nigerian widows, whose husbands were murdered by Islamic militants for their Christian work, bring us back to the real world. Justice, it seems, is nonexistent. Those for whom the world is not worthy, hidden in small and unknown corners of the earth, struggle to survive and ask, "Where is God?" Some stop asking. Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, whose mother and sister were murdered, wrote, "Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes."[1]

So we cry out in prayer, "Lord, why?" Like Abraham, we may pray, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25b)* In heaven, the souls slain for the word of God cry out, *"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:10*) And the psalmist pleads,

> *Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! (Psalm 44:22-23)*

We take comfort in the thought of escaping this evil world by the hope of Jesus' return, where our bodies will be raised imperishable and in power (1 Cor. 15:42-43), to dwell in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13), in the house that he prepares for us (John 14:2-3). There he will dwell with us and all the saints (Rev. 21:3), and we will be forever separated from sin and the wicked (Rev. 21:27).

But there's more. We hope for vengeance.

We **wait** patiently, not allowing ourselves to be overcome by evil (Rom 12:19a). Rather, we hope for a time when the promise is fulfilled: *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom 12:19b, cf Deut 32:35)*.

We wait knowing that an **accounting** is already underway. Not a cold, indifferent tally upon a celestial ledger, but a record of every word (Matt 12:37), and every deed for every person (Rom 2:6). Do you suffer? The Lord suffers more; sin grieves him to his heart (Gen 6:6b). For those who suffer, in all their affliction, he is afflicted (Isaiah 63:9a). For all who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19), for those who say, "Let not light see my black and deep desires,[2]" there is no hiding from the passionate, penetrating gaze of God.

Next, there will be a **revealing**. What has so long been hidden in darkness will someday be revealed (Rom 2:5). *"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened..." (Rev 20:12a)* When the heavens pass away with a roar, the heavenly bodies burned up and dissolved, this purifying event will expose the works of men like a refining fire (2 Pet 3:10).

The final **judgment will be just**.

> *And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. (Rev 20:12c-13)*

Finally, for the Nigerian widows, for the Ethiopian pastors imprisoned in shipping containers, for those of us who groan when we wake up to the world news, there comes a day we have waited for, where we will **be glad and rejoice** in his salvation (Is 25:9). We will be among a great throng who will declare, *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just." (Rev 19:1)*

Our present reality is not like a murder mystery novel. Crimes and all that is wrong in the world seem forever unresolved. But wait. We hope not only for the day when the dwelling place of God is with man (Rev 21:3), but also for the day of judgment, of complete and final vengeance.

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[1] Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), excerpt from the "Never Shall I Forget" passage

[2] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 1.4.51.

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