

**9/4/22 “The Great White Throne Judgment”
Revelation 20:11-15**

Welcome...

This morning we come to the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. The throne is central throughout the book, representing God as sovereign Lord over His creation. The throne is the place where a king sits. The basis of Judgment Day is the kingship of God; we, His created beings, are His subjects. God is the Creator of the universe and of the ends of the earth. Because He made everything, He has the right to rule over everything.

Every king rules by law. God made laws that He wants us to obey. He gave us the Ten Commandments, which we are to obey: You shall have no other gods; You shall not make or worship any idols; You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy; Honor your father and mother; You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor; You shall not covet (deeply desire in your heart anything that belongs to your neighbor).

The law was presented mostly in the negative: “You shall not, not, not, not, not.” But Jesus turned it around, summarizing the law with the Two Great Commandments, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40.

That law exposes all of us as sinners. Every one of us has violated the Ten Commandments and the Two Great Commandments. The essence of sin is lawlessness, or breaking of the law of God. If you do not understand the law or you do not think it applies to you, you will think that you are sinless, that you do not have anything to fear from judgment before God. The law alone convicts the guilty. The Word of God does that. Evangelism must apply the Ten Commandments and the Two Commandments to the one receiving the Gospel. This is the King’s standard, and we have all violated it.

There is only one who was perfectly obedient to the law, and more than that He went to the cross as substitute for you and me. We are offered free and full forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. If we believe this, the New Testament teaches, enter the Kingdom of Heaven, God’s Kingdom. When we get there, we will find a King ruling on a throne forever. As believers, we do not have a problem with that. We are delighted in the kingship of God. But for unbelievers, those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior, the throne will be a place of judgment. It is called the Great White Throne Judgment.

Let’s read about it in Revelation 20:11-15...

This passage describes the final sentencing of the lost and is the most serious, sobering, and tragic passage in the entire Bible.

Main point: This powerful text describes the terrifying reality of God’s final verdict and sentence on unrepentant sinners. We see three facets of judgment day:

- I. The Inescapable Judge (verse 11)**
- II. The Incontestable Trial (verses 12–13)**
- III. The Irreversible Sentence (verses 14–15)**

In you are not a Christian, my prayer is that the truth of the Great White Throne judgment will lead you to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. If you are a believer, then the reality of Judgment Day should be the greatest motivation to share the gospel with the unsaved.

Now by way on introduction, look at the following Timeline of Future Events in your bulletin.

After Christ defeats all His enemies at Armageddon, after Satan is bound for a thousand years while Jesus reigns on the earth, and after evil's last, desperate attempt to attack Christ and regain the world, and after Satan, the Antichrist, and his false prophet have been cast into the lake of fire. The final act of judgment in this world, before the new heaven and new earth, will be the Great White Throne Judgment.

Hebrews 9:27...

So, what happens when to a person after death? Look at the following chart.

The Christian...

Once a believer has died, though his or her physical body remains on the earth and is buried, at the moment of death the soul (or spirit) of that believer goes immediately into Christ's presence with rejoicing. When Paul thinks about death, he says in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

The thief who was dying on the cross next to Jesus said in Luke 23:42, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

The second row down on the chart shows the Old Testament Believer...

Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar. In Luke 16:22 He says, "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom."

So the OT believer soul is in God's presence and the body of the OT believer is resurrected at Christ's second coming (which we studied last week). There is a judgment in the millennial kingdom on earth for rewards. Their eternal destination is heaven – which we will get to study next week. You can see the row for the person who becomes a believer during the seven-year tribulation.

Well, what happens when an unbeliever dies, he follows the Old Testament unbelievers to the torment of Sheol (OT term) and Hades (NT term). In our text today, Hades will be emptied before the Great White Throne, where its occupants will be judged prior to entering the lake of fire (Revelation 20:13–15).

Notice the next chart at the bottom your page, which contrasts the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ with the Great White Throne Judgment...

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

All Christians will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, which will follow the Rapture of the church. But salvation is not the issue here. One's eternal destiny will not be determined at the judgment seat of Christ. Salvation is by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9), but deeds issuing from that faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3) will be evaluated.

The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of reward and recognition for Christians. For those of us who have been faithful, it will be a time of rejoicing as we glorify the Lord by giving our rewards back to Him in worship and in praise.

What about the Great White Throne Judgment of the unbeliever? Well, that takes us back to our text and first:

I. The Inescapable Judge (verse 11)

There are really four questions we want to answer as we look at our text.

Who is the Judge?

Who are the judged?

How are they judged?

What is their judgment?

First, who is the Judge?

Verse 11...

The first thing John saw was a great white throne. It is called great not only because of its size as greater than the thrones mentioned in 20:4, but also because of its significance, majesty, and authority. That it is white symbolizes its purity, holiness, and justice. The verdict handed down from this throne will be absolutely equitable, righteous, and just.

Even more awe inspiring than the throne was the vision of "Him who sat upon it" as verse 11 says. The judge on the throne is none other than the eternal, almighty God (4:8–11). Sharing the throne with the Father is the Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 3:21 Jesus promised, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Though the Father and the Son share the throne, it is the Son who is uniquely in view here, since Scripture teaches that He will judge sinners. John 5:22 says, the Father "has given all judgment to the Son." John 5:27 says, the Father "gave Jesus authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man." In Acts 10:42 Peter said, "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that Jesus is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead."

Notice also verse 11 says...

This is an awesome reality. Revelation 21:1 reiterates it plainly... This present physical universe will depart; in some sense it will be no more. Everything will be destroyed. In this text, earth and sky are somewhat personified, running in terror from the presence of the One on the Great White Throne.

Donald Barnhouse writes, "There is to be an end of the material heavens and earth which we know. It is not that they are to be purified and rehabilitated and restored, but the REVERSE OF CREATION is to take place. They

are to be UNCREATED (spoken out of existence). As they came from nothingness at the word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by this same word of God.”

The details of God’s uncreation of the universe are what Adrian read in 2 Peter 3:10–13. With heaven and earth removed, God will deal with the last group of humans who have not yet been judged—the unsaved. They have no place to stand except before their Maker. We have seen The Inescapable Judge in verse 11; second we see:

II. The Incontestable Trial (verses 12–13)

First question: Who is the Judge? The Lord Almighty.

Second question: Who are the judged?

Verse 12...

The objects of judgment are referred to as “the dead.” This title refers back to “the rest of the dead” in Revelation 20:5 and has reference to all the unbelievers of all time. In other words, the judgment of Revelation 20:11–15 is the judgment of unbelievers, not believers.

The objects of judgment are further described as “the great and the small.” This phrase emphasizes that no unbeliever—regardless of his status here on earth—will be exempt from the final judgment. This idea is emphasized further in verse 13b, where John says that “every one of them” is judged.

With heaven and earth dismissed from God’s all-consuming presence, the unsaved dead will have no place to hide from God Almighty. Scripture teaches that the physical bodies of unbelievers will one day be resurrected. Daniel 12:2 speaks of a resurrection “to disgrace and everlasting contempt. John 5:29 speaks of “a resurrection of judgment.” Acts 24:15 speaks of “a resurrection of ... the wicked.”

Notice this resurrection is described in Revelation 20:13a... “The sea” literally refers to the sea. Anyone who died and was buried at sea or sank into the sea. The victims of the Titanic will come up out of that to stand before the Great White Throne. Anyone who died of disease on a British man-of-war in the 19th century and was buried with honors with the cannonball wrapped around their sheeted body will arise. Everyone will be there.

“Hades” refers to the place of the dead (i.e., the grave). Most people die on land and are buried on land or cremated. Their bodies will come together in order to be judged and condemned. Death and the corruption of the grave will no longer be needed; their job will be finished. The idea, then, is that the sea, the grave, and death itself all release the dead bodies that they held captive, and the bodies are raised to stand before the Judge on the great white throne.

When Hitler committed suicide in a reinforced concrete bunker, he thought he was escaping Russia’s Red Army and its rage. He did not realize a far greater enemy was waiting for him on the other side. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Imagine the different categories of people who will form that group of unsaved from all history:

- those who replaced the Creator with idols and false gods
- those who turned their backs on the free grace of God in favor of a works-based false religion
- those who repeatedly heard the gospel of Christ but rejected Him until too late
- those who concluded, based on logic, reason, and experience, that God doesn’t exist
- those who foolishly believed that their good deeds will outweigh their evil deeds

This brings us to the third question: How are they judged? What is the basis of their judgment?

Verse 12 says with all the dead gathered before the throne of God, “books were opened.” Books of what? The “books” are a written record of the deeds the unbelievers committed during their lives on earth. These include everything the individuals had ever done, said, thought, desired, or purposed in their hearts.

Revelation 2:23 says of Jesus, “I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.” He looks at minds, hearts, intentions. 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.” He will look at the motives behind everything. There will be no secrets on that day. Romans 2:16 says, “...on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ...”

Luke 12:2-5 says, “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. ‘I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.’” Nothing will be kept secret on Judgment Day.

Can you imagine the details in those books? When I was in 6th grade my elementary school principal called a conference with my parents. I was such a misbehaving student, that there only last hope was to take turns telling my parents just how rude, selfish, disrespectful and disobedient I had been. The solution was for me to carry a blue spiral book for my teachers to sign at the end of each week. Then went I got home my parents were supposed to ask for the book. Well, I can tell you not much changed in my attitudes and actions until my junior year of high school when the Lord saved me and repented of my sin and trusted in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. The funny thing is my brother was the best man in my wedding and at the rehearsal dinner he announced that he had found the blue book!

Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, “I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.”

In a search, I found that on average, according to a team of linguists, people speak approximately 20,000 words a day. That means that over the course of 80 years of speaking, we will give account for half a billion words. I have a hard time remembering what was said this morning before I started preaching this sermon. But God will remember every careless word we have spoken, and we will give an account for it all based on God’s perfect record. He misses nothing, whether a slight glance of the eye, a slight inclination of the heart, a little action, a little snide comment. It is all there; there is no escape.

You may think, “I’m not such a bad person, I’ll take my chances with the book of deeds.” But you forget one vital truth: in order to qualify for heaven, your entry in the book of deeds needs to be filled with all good deeds and absolutely no bad deeds. God’s standard is complete moral perfection. If He finds just one sin recorded there, no matter how small, the sentence will be an eternity of suffering in the lake of fire. No one except the Son of God has ever lived without sinning.

Notice in the middle of verse 12 it says another book was opened, the book of life. Thank God there is a Book of Life. Thank God there is a Savior and salvation for sinners like us. The Lamb’s Book of Life is the record of all of those who are born again through faith in Christ, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. They also were sinners. They violated the Ten Commandments and the Two Commandments, but there is an infinite difference. By the working of the Holy Spirit of God on them, they came to see their sins while they lived here on earth. They turned away from those sins in repentance and turned toward Jesus Christ, the crucified Savior,

for forgiveness and atonement for their sins. At that moment, their sins were all wiped away, and they received the gift of forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

God the Father sent His Son to fill up the books of actions, words, motives, and thoughts. Jesus says, “You can read all of My books, I have nothing to hide. Our sin is great, but His grace is greater. He says, “John Marc, we don’t need to open your books because I was already punished for all of them on the cross. In fact, it was your books of sin and unrighteous thoughts, words and actions that put me there and it is my book of perfect righteousness that is now applied to you. My righteousness is imputed to you.”

We have seen The Inescapable Judge in verse 11 and the The Incontestable Trial in verses 12–13. Third, we see:

III. The Irreversible Sentence (verses 14–15)

Verse 14...

The casting of death and Hades into the lake of fire indicates the destruction of death itself. In other words, no longer will death and the grave (“Hades”) have power to take lives. This later serves as a comforting assurance to those who inherit the new heaven and the new earth in the eternal state. Look at Revelation 21:4, “He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” In other words, this marks the Lord’s victory over death itself.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:26, “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Verse 14...

C.S. Lewis said, “If you are born once, you die twice. If are born twice then you only die once – and you can live this life fearless, with confidence, joy and gratitude for all that Christ has done for you.”

Four questions:

Who is the Judge?

Who are the judged?

How are they judged?

What is their judgment?

Verse 15...

Unbelievers are here described as those whose names are not found written in the book of life. These are those individuals who have refused to take refuge in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The place of the sentence is said to be “the lake of fire.” This graphic title for hell is described elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus called hell the “unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12), “the fiery hell” (Matt 5:22; 18:9; cf. James 3:6), “the furnace of fire” (Matt 13:42, 50), “the eternal fire” (Matt 18:8; 25:41). Jesus had more to save about hell than he did about the heaven in the gospels.

Language like this leaves no room for any form of universal salvation, an intermediate state of purgatory, a second chance, or annihilation of the wicked. This is the eternal infliction of punishment resulting in the physical and spiritual and mental misery mentioned by Jesus (Matthew 25:41, 46). The wicked will be tormented without rest, day and night, forever (Revelation 14:11). Remember, “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). This day is coming, and it will be impossible to avoid it

There is no second chance. If you stand at the throne of God for judgment it is too late. How many procrastinate and think they can repent later? I don't want that to be you.

Let's pray...