

Hell: A Necessary Truth

The Final Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

This is number 4 in the five-part series on the doctrine of Hell. If you have made each of these messages, well done. There will be one more. Next week I will address some of the common questions that people have about hell.

This morning we look at a key event in the future. The final judgment. Right now, those who die without faith in Christ are in hell awaiting a judicial appointment with God. They are awaiting their final appearance before the ultimate judge. There is an appointed time when all unbelievers will be brought out of hell to stand before God and be judged for their sins.

This scene, which may be one of the most terrifying scenes in the Bible, is found in Revelation 20. John, the beloved apostle, was given a vision of future events. Toward the end of that vision John saw the final judgment of those who lived their lives without repenting of their sins and seeking salvation through faith in Christ.

It is like being called to the principal's office when in trouble . . . only worse.

It is like being called into the IRS office after cheating on taxes . . . only worse.

It is like being called before a military tribunal after committing treason . . . only worse.

It is like being called before a judge after committing a capital offense . . . only worse.

*Daniel Webster was asked, **What is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your head?** He responded with no hesitation, **My accountability to God.***

Let me hasten to point out that the judgment revealed in these words is for unbelievers only. Time when unconverted of all the ages will be called before the great throne of God to hear their fate from the creator.

This is the most serious, sobering and tragic passage in the entire Bible. It is commonly known as the ***Great White Throne Judgment***. It is the last courtroom scene in the Bible and in human history. After it there will never be another trial. As you will see, the language of this passage is plain and unembellished.

There will be no debate over the guilt of those who are condemned.

There will be a prosecutor but no defender.

There will be an accuser but no advocate.

There will be an indictment but no defense.

Since Adam and Eve's fall into sin, Satan, has attempted to deceive people about the reality of judgment. He has done his best to convince people that they could reject God and live their lives in any way that they desired, without a final accounting. As many will one day discover, **Satan is, indeed, a father of lies.**

READ Revelation 20:11-15

1. The Scene (11-13a)

A. The Judge

First thing John sees is a **great white throne**. Nearly 50 times in the Revelation John mentions a throne. In this case it is clearly the seat of God's sovereignty.

This throne is great in size and power. White signifies the purity of the ruler who sits upon it and of His right to judge.

But even more inspiring than the massive throne is the one who sits upon it. This is none other than the Lord Jesus, Himself. In John 5:22 Jesus said, ***not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.***

So awesome is this scene that ***heaven and earth fled away.*** This is an amazing statement. Why would they run? Keep in mind that the present heavens (atmospheric) and earth are tainted by sin. Even at this point they will still carry that stain. They will have to be destroyed and remade into the ultimate Heaven.

Reminds me of 2 Peter 3:7,10.

But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.. .

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."

B. The Defendants

The Dead. These are those who have died without trusting Christ. These are those who participate in the "second death." The saved are not a part of this group. Note some things about these "dead."

1) Great and Small

All are included. At this point there will be no distinctions.

Lawyers, doctors, farmers, politicians, technicians, electricians, plumbers, secretaries, etc. Good and the Bad. Some who were wicked like cruel dictators will be next to those who were good people, but who just did not have time for Christ or the things of God.

2) Standing

These are ***The living dead***. They have been resurrected from every part of the earth. Note verse 13. The point is that none escape. All will be there. None can hide in the far recesses of Hell. Even those who died at sea. Even those whose bodies were torn apart in war, etc.

Standing was an act of reverence before the Throne. It is seen in courtrooms today. **No defendant remains seated when addressing the judge or being addressed by the judge.** There is now, no more disrespect, no more arrogance. No more selfishness.

2. The Process (12b, 13b)

This is not a normal trial. However evidence will be presented. Witnesses will be called. A standard of judgment will be used to determine the fate of those judged.

Evidence is found in two types of books.

A. The Books

Our text makes it clear that these books contain the records of the actions of the lost. Note verse 13. These are judged from the books and from their deeds. The books are the record of those deeds.

These are not there for God's benefit, but to show the defendants. Proof that they are deserving of the verdict is about to come. Horrifying thing for these people to have the deeds of their lives suddenly exposed. I believe this not only refers to actions but the inward thoughts of the hearts. Something no one wants exposed.

We are beginning to get a sense of what this might be like. There was a time when a person could still live much of his or her life in obscurity. Things could be done with very little concern about public exposure. Not so, anymore.

Everyone has a phone with a video camera. Security cameras are in more places than you and I want to know. Long before either of those were around, God was keeping track of our actions. Records were being kept. Nothing has or will go unnoticed.

B. The Book of Life

8 references in the New Testament. 3 times the OT mentions a book in which names are mentioned. Sometimes called the Lamb's Book of Life. This is the book that contains the names of all the saved.

C. Special Witnesses

Jesus made a fascinating statement about witnesses who will bring a condemnation on certain ones during the judgment. He mentions two groups of special witnesses who will add condemnation specifically to the generation of Jews who were alive during Jesus' day. Listen to His words.

Matthew 12:41-42

The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Queen of Sheba and the men of Nineveh will be called upon to testify against the generation that witnessed the life of Christ on earth. Does this mean there will be other witnesses called for other classes of people? There is no indication of that. We have to be careful to stick with what we know and not allow our speculation to run to far.

3. The Verdict (14-15)

Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. They will no longer be in operation or needed. Followed by them are all the lost.

The image of Hell being a lake of fire is indeed a frightening one. Whether the fire is a literal fire is unknown. If it is symbolic, then the reality which it depicts will be just as horrible or worse than it.

The Bible depicts Hell as a place of darkness and separation. It is a place where the worm which devours never dies and the first never stops burning. A place of unending sorrow, separation and anguish. Dying without death.

Notice the simplicity of the verdict. They are judged according to their deeds, but the criteria for their destiny is whether or not their names are in the Lamb's book of life. Are you saved? What have you done with Jesus? That is all that matters.

Some would protest a message like this. No longer relevant. Not popular. Don't want to hear it. But hear it you must.

Some say this points to a flaw in the character of God. But just the opposite is true. The fact that some will die and go to Hell does not point to a flaw in the character of God to a flaw in the character of people. If there is no punishment for sins, then there is no justice. If there is no justice, it seems to me that there can be no real holiness. The holiness of God demands the payment for sin.

In light of Calvary, no lost sinner can condemn God for casting him into the lake of fire. God has provided a way of escape and paid for that way with the ultimate price. He has done all that needs to be done for anyone to escape Hell.

Faith in His Son is all it takes to be saved and escape punishment. Genuine faith.

Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

John 5:24