

Apocalypse Now?
Judgment Day
October 10, 2021

Good morning North Heartland.

Today, as Andrew said, we're in the final week of our series *Apocalypse Now*.

And if this is your first time with us or your first time in a long time you should know that we've been talking about ...

- What Jesus and the Apostles had to say about "the end times" ...
- What "the end of the age" (or "the end of our world as it currently exists") will be like ...
- As well as what it will be like in "the age to

come” (which is the future world that God will create out of this world).

And if you’d like to know more about what they said (and what *I* said about what *they* said), you can actually go back and watch, listen to or even read the previous messages ...

... all of which are collected in the media section of our app and also our website, www.northheartland.org.

So, up until this point, we’ve been talking about THE “end times” but today we’re going to talk about YOUR end times and MY end times.

We’re going to talk about what you and I will *personally* experience and what the implications are for your life and my life right now.

And, by the way, I realize that what we've been talking about in this series hasn't been very heavy on that – on personal implications and applications.

That's because we've had to spend a lot of time digging into biblical and theological “data” ... which is important and necessary because this isn't a straightforward subject.

But today ... and next week ... and in the series that will follow *after* next week, we're going to get very personal and very practical.

Next Sunday? Well, let me just put it this way.

- If you've been feeling down and discouraged
- If you've been feeling like it's all up to you
- If your emotions are getting the best of you

- If you've been sad or angry or confused
- If you've been feeling a little (or a lot) hopeless

... you do not want to miss next Sunday because we have a very unique and special experience planned for the entire hour – from beginning to end – that will help you with those things.

If fact, I'll be really transparent with you right now. *I personally need* what we're going to do next Sunday because so many days lately I feel like "I got nothin'." I feel like I'm running on empty.

So, if you can be here in this room with me, you should be. If you can't, then make sure you're watching online. It will do your heart and soul good.

Then ... after next Sunday ... we're going do a

five-week series called *Greater Than Everything*

...

... in which we're going to learn about the amazing power that can transform us and our relationships and, in fact, our whole world.

It's going to be great. You don't want to miss it.

And it will also be a great time to invite someone who thinks church is boring and irrelevant to join you.

Anyway, as I said, we've been talking about THE "end times" up until this point in this series.

But today we're going to talk about YOUR end times and MY end times ...

... because the truth is *you will experience something* very personal and profound when

Jesus comes back.

There will be an individual and private moment in that overall big picture of “the end times” that will shape your experience going forward into eternity.

Now, as a reminder, in the message two weeks ago, we talked about that big picture.

And we saw that pretty much every system of biblical interpretation agrees that three things are going to happen.

First of all, there will be a time known as *The Great Tribulation* ...

... which is characterized by a worldwide rebellion against and rejection of God ...

... a time in which the Anti-Christ (or “The Man of Sin” or “Man of Lawlessness” as Paul and Jesus called him) is given power to deceive and

rule the whole world.

And just when it seems that all hope is lost ...

That “time” will be followed by what Old Testament biblical prophets and New Testament writers called *The Day of the Lord*

...

... the moment when Jesus visibly appears to judge the world and set things right.

And when that is complete, *The Age to Come* will begin ...

... which when God renews, restores, and regenerates our world to be what He intended from the very beginning ... which is what we talked about last week.

And I know I hammered this hard in that message, but I'm going to do it again today because it is so important to be clear about this part of “the end” – *The Age to Come*.

It's important because so many of us who follow Jesus have, for one reason or another, come to believe that the point of being a Christian is "going to Heaven when you die."

Yes, if you're a Christian and you die, your spirit will go to be with Jesus.

But that is not your final destination. That is not the ultimate end game.

What God has planned is far more interesting, far more exciting, far more motivating than a disembodied spiritual existence after your body dies.

That's why Paul once wrote:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." 1

Corinthians 2:9 (NIV)

Paul's not talking about Heaven when he says that. He's talking about life in the *Age to Come*.

And that's really, really important to understand.

So, if you missed last week's message or didn't understand it the first time, you should really, really take time to go back and watch, listen to or read it.

Anyway, that's last week's message so I'll stop.

What we're going to focus on today is that point in the big picture when Jesus comes back to judge the world ...

- Which includes everyone living at the time ...
- As well as everyone who has ever lived ...

- Which, obviously, includes *you* ... and me.

This is why I say ...

- That *you (and I) will experience something* very personal and profound when Jesus comes back.
- That there will be an individual and private moment in that big picture of “the end times” that will shape your experience going forward into eternity.

We’re all going to have our own personal “end time” experience ... otherwise known as *Judgment Day*.

So, let’s talk about that.

Surprising Facts

And let's start out with two facts that are probably going to surprise you, especially if you haven't spent much time reading the Bible or studying this subject.

1. First of all, there are actually two Judgment Days.

Or maybe a better way to say it is that there are *two separate experiences of judgment* that we know of from the scripture.

And we'll look at both of them in this message.

Second – and this is *really* surprising ...

2. In both judgments, people get what they get based not on what they believe but on *what they have done* (their “works”).

Let me say that again.

Judgment Day for every single person who is living or who has ever lived (including you and

including me) is going to be based on “works” not faith.

Now, if you’ve been a Christian for any length of time and, especially, if you’ve been part of this church for any length of time, I’m sure you’re thinking ...

“Wait a minute Preacher Man. I’m not a theologian or a Bible scholar but I am positive that is *not* the Gospel.

“I am positive that is *not* the good news of salvation in Christ and that is *not* the good news of the Kingdom of God.”

After all, didn’t Paul write that ...

... when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. Titus 3:4-5 (NIV)

And didn't he write that ...

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

“And, Rick, don't you yourself often say “it's not about what *we* do but about what *Jesus* has done for us?””

“I don't know why you're saying this about Judgment Day being based on what we've done, because it's pretty clear that salvation is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone*.”

Well, the reason I'm saying it is because Jesus himself said it – and more than once.

For instance, in the final words of the final book of the Bible – the Book of Revelation, we read this statement from him.

He said ...

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to ...

... his or her faith?

No, that’s not what Jesus said. He said ...

“I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

Revelation 22:12 (NIV)

In other words, on Judgment Day, people are going to get what they get based not on what they believe but based *on their “works”* – based on what they have done.

There’s no mistaking what Jesus is saying in this.

Now, I should probably confess that I’m intentionally trying to stir up a little bit of

controversy here – and maybe even a little angst ... so let me be very clear.

- I really do believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There is no doubt about that.
- But on Judgment Day, everyone will be judged based on works not faith.

Somehow, according to what Jesus and the Apostles said and wrote, both of those things are true at the same time.

The question is ... how?

Two Judgments

The answer lies in the first of the two surprising facts we're talking about: that there are actually *two* judgments that take place as part of *The Day of the Lord*.

The first judgment – and not that these are in chronological order although some biblical interpreters think that they might be.ⁱ

For what we're doing today this is “the first one” only because I'm talking about it first. 😊

The first judgment is actually mentioned several times both by Jesus and by Paul.

Here's how Paul talked about it in one his letters.

He wrote:

We make it our goal to please him (meaning Jesus), whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

And that little phrase “home in the body” was actually a saying in that day and time which simply meant “being alive.”

In Greek thought, to be alive meant you were at home in the body. If you were dead, you were away from the body.

So, what Paul is saying here is “living or dead, our goal is to please Jesus.”

And here’s why:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NIV)

On Judgment Day, whoever Paul means by “we” is going to get what they get based not on what they believe but based *on their “works”* – based on what they have done.

Now, here’s how Jesus talked about this same

judgment.

He said ...

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.”

Luke 14:12 (NIV)

Instead, he said ...

“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

*Luke
14:13-14 (NIV)*

Now, remember, we talked about this last week: how, when Jesus comes back, all those who believed in Him and have died will be raised to

a new life in a new body that will never die.

That's "the resurrection of the righteous."

By the way, this past week someone asked me a really good question about this resurrection.

They wanted to know "*if a Christian is cremated, will they still be raised? After all, they won't have a body anymore.*"

The answer is "yes" because, at some point in time, even people who are buried don't have a body. From dust we were all formed and to dust we all shall eventually go.ⁱⁱ

So, whatever happens to your body after death – whether it happens over decades or in a cremation, if you're a Christian, God promises to renew, restore, and regenerate you.

Anyway ... the important thing to notice about what Jesus says here is that it's "the righteous"

who are judged.

Now, hang on to that thought – we’ll come back to it in a bit – as we look at the second judgment.

This one we learn about from *The Revelation According to John* (or the Book of Revelation).

John writes ...

*I saw a great white throne and
him who was seated on it.*

Who is Him? John doesn’t say.

Some interpreters think it’s God the Father.
Others think it might be Jesus.

In any case, John says ...

*The earth and the heavens fled
from his presence, and there was
no place for them. Revelation
20:11 (NIV)*

... which is a great example of “apocalyptic language.”

It’s intentionally vivid and graphic and extreme but *not to be taken literally*.

And we know that because “the earth and heavens” can’t literally *flee*.

Instead, the point ... and what John is saying ...

... is that what is about to happen in front of this throne is so terrible and terrifying that everyone and everything in the universe wants to run and hide in fear; to become invisible before God if that were somehow possible.

But it’s not, because John continues:

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another

book was opened, which is the book of life.

*The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.
Revelation 20:12 (NIV)*

Now, are there literal books somewhere that literally contain a record of everything people have done?

Probably not.

But that doesn't change the point that somehow God has a way of keeping track down to the smallest detail.

After all, when you think about ...

- The record that “Big Tech” has of everything you do online ...
- And everything that traffic and security

cameras are able to “see” you doing

- And everything that Alexa and Ring and whatever else are able to “hear” you saying within your own home ...

It's not too hard to imagine that God can do all of those same things ... and more.

So, however it happens, at this particular moment on the Day of the Lord, whoever John is writing about is terrified ...

- Because God knows everything they have done.
- And because of what's about to happen because of what they have done.

And what *does* happen, John says, is that ...

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 (NIV)

And if that sounds horrible and terrifying to you, that's because it is.

But what I want you to notice here – and this is a little strange – is that this final judgment is based not only on what these people have done.

It's also based on the fact that their names were not written in “the book of life.”

Ok, that's *a lot* of biblical data and it's a little confusing but, hey, this is the end times we're talking about.

So, what do you expect?

Let's try to put it all together and see what it means.

**At one judgement – the Judgment Seat of Christ – people are “repaid” and “rewarded.”
But, at the other – the Great White Throne Judgment – people are condemned ...**

... “thrown into the lake of fire” which may not be literal given that, again, this is apocalyptic language.

However, given that it *is* apocalyptic, we should assume that whatever it is, this is a fate worse than anything imaginable.

But that’s really not the issue – at least not for today.

The issue is ... who are these people at these two judgments on the Day of the Lord?

From what we’ve read, I think it’s pretty clear that ...

It is *Christians* who will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

When Paul says “we” in his letter, he is speaking of himself and the people to whom he was writing – believers in Jesus living in the first century city of Corinth ...

... men and women who were considered “righteous” in God’s sight not because of their works or anything they had done but because of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

On the other hand, at the Great White Throne Judgment, it is *unbelievers* who will be judged.

We know that because John tells us that their names are not written in the Book of Life ... meaning they have not been given eternal life.

And they have not been given eternal life because they have not been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

As John writes elsewhere:

*Whoever does not believe stands
condemned already because
they have not believed in the
name of God's one and only Son.
John 3:18 (NIV)*

Now, I have spent a lot of time walking you through this because I want you to see and understand that regardless of where you stand with God – regardless of whether you're a Christian or not ...

There is going to be an individual and private moment that will shape your experience going forward into eternity.

You are going to stand before God and God is going to deal with you “according to what you have done.”

For Christians

So, let's talk for a few minutes about what that looks like for Christians.

And again, I should say that I know all of this might sound strange or even shocking because many pastors and teachers (including me) go to great lengths to emphasize that ...

Salvation – being made righteous before God – isn't about how good we are. It's about how good *Jesus* is and how He took our place on the cross as the atonement for our sin.

And we need to do that because so many people believe that salvation is about their “works” – or all the good things they do.

“Do enough,” most people believe, “and you're in.”

However, because we try so hard to correct that

misperception, we sometimes give the impression that *everything* is about grace.

But it's not.

Instead, the truth is that ...

Getting to participate in the Age to Come is all about grace. What you have when you get there is all about works.

What we experience at that point is dependent on our actions in this life which is why Jesus tells us about it!

For example:

“When you do good to those who cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

For example:

*“At the renewal of all things,
when the Son of Man sits on his
glorious throne ...*

*... everyone who has left houses
or brothers or sisters or father or
mother or wife or children or
fields for my sake will receive a
hundred times as much and will
inherit eternal life.”*

Matthew 19:28-29 (NIV)

For example:

*“Store up for yourselves
treasures in Heaven where
moths and vermin do not
destroy, and where thieves do
not break in and steal.”*

Matthew 6:19-20 (NIV)

For example:

*“Well done, good and faithful
servant! You have been faithful
with a few things; I will put you*

in charge of many things.”
Matthew 25:23 (NIV)

For example:

- Enduring persecution because of your faith
- Loving your enemies
- Secretly giving to those in need
- Praying in secret
- Financially supporting those who work to advance God’s Kingdom
- Even giving a cup of cold water to a child

All of those things, Jesus, said will be rewarded in the Age to Come.

But it’s Paul who gives us what is probably the

most vivid account of what the experience is going to be like for those who belong to Jesus.

He begins by saying ...

No one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

In other words, Jesus is the base.

His work and our faith in his work is what “gets us in.” It’s what saves us and brings us into the Kingdom of God both in the here and now and also in the life to come.

But then Paul says ...

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each

builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 (NLT)

Wow, what an image!

Paul's point is that you and I, if we are believers in Jesus, we're going to get in. But we are building something for the next life by what we do in this life.

And whatever it is we're building is going to be tested with fire (apocalyptically speaking). And whatever remains after that fire, that's what we have. That's our reward.

And this only makes sense because whenever Paul writes about salvation being by grace, he immediately follows with the reason for which God saves us.

Paul, you said that it's by grace we are saved through faith, right?

Yep.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

And God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done but because of his mercy?

Yep.

This is a trustworthy saying.

And I want you to stress these

things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. Titus 3:8 (NIV)

So, it only makes sense that when it's all said and done, the question at the Judgment Seat of Christ is ... *did you do those good works?*

- Did you invest your time, talent and treasure in the people and causes that God loves?
- Did you work at your job as if you were serving the Lord and not just your earthly boss?
- Did you do it for the Lord and not just a paycheck?
- Did you try to bring glory to God by being the light so that others could find Him?
- Did you try to forgive as you were

forgiven?

- Did you freely give what you had been freely given?
- Did you try to make the most of what you had instead of whining about what others had that you did not have?

On Judgment Day, if you're a Christian, there's going to be a very personal and profound moment between you and the Lord where He is going to ask you (and me) to give an account.

It won't be about condemnation or salvation or your eternal destination.

It will be about your obedience and sacrifice in this life. It will be about your rewards: *what you will have* in the Age to Come.ⁱⁱⁱ

Now, one of the things I've heard whenever I've spoken about this before is "well, Rick, this all might be true and I'm sure it is."

"But honestly, I'll be happy just to be there. I'll be happy just to have escaped the Lake of Fire. I'll be happy just to be a street sweeper in the renewed, restored and regenerated earth."

"So, whether or not I get any rewards really doesn't matter to me."

And I get that. I understand why a Christian might think that.

But at the same time, if Jesus tells us about this over and over – and he does ... and if Paul tells us about this over and over – and he does ... it must really matter!

It must really matter a lot more than we think it does.

And so, if you're a Christian, I want to strongly encourage you today ... to get busy serving the Lord and to make the most of the opportunities you have in this life.

Only one life, "twill soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.

What you do *now* is going to matter *then*. And *then* is going to last a lot longer than *now*.

So, if you're a Christian be good and do good *now* so that you can have what is good and enjoy what is good *then*.

For Unbelievers

Of course, if you're not a Christian, strange as it may seem, that's exactly what you should *not* do.

At least not before you deal with the far more important issue.

Remember that terrifying scene John paints for us at the Great White Throne?

- One set of books recorded everything that people did.
- But another book – the Book of Life – just had names in it.

John said that if a person's name was not written in the Book of Life they were judged and condemned.

And you know what condemned them?

Everything that was written in those other books – the record of everything they had done.

**At the Great White Throne Judgement,
people get what they get based not on what**

**they believe but on what they have done
(their “works”).**

Just like what happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Except that what these people believe isn't about Jesus. It's about themselves.

What they believe is “I'm a pretty good person. I try to do what's right. I haven't killed anybody.”

“I mean, I haven't paid all that much attention to God but I'm a moral person. I recycle. I donate to PETA.”

“So, I think I'm Ok. I think I'm good enough.”

And I get why people might think that – that they're good enough.

I get why some of *you* might think that you're good enough.

But if everyone could see – not the books that God has on you ...

- If everyone could see the record that “Big Tech” has of everything you do online ...
- If everyone could see what traffic and security cameras “see” you doing ...
- If everyone could hear what Alexa and Ring “hear” you saying within your own home ...

I don't know, I think you might be at least a little embarrassed at what would be revealed about who you really are.

Because you're really good at appearing to be really good even when you're not really good.

And I don't mean that as a slam against you because I'm the same way. We all are. It's the

human condition.

We all tell ourselves that we're better than we really are. But Google and Alexa know the truth.

And so does God.

So, when it comes to your judgment day ... your personal and profound moment with God ... it can go one of two ways.

Listen very closely to what I'm about to say because, if you're not a Christian, your eternal destiny depends on it.

When you stand before God at the end of time, you can try to justify yourself ... in which case, the books will be opened and all of your sin in all of its pride and pettiness and perversity will be revealed.

And you will be judged based on that.

And your end might not be a literal lake of fire, but it will be something so terrible that there is no better way to describe it; something you definitely don't want to happen.

Or – and this is your other choice – you can make sure that your name is written in the Book of Life so that you don't even experience the White Throne Judgement.

Question obviously is ... how do you do that?

It's very simple. As simple as ABC.

- Admit you're a sinner
- Believe that Jesus died for you and rose again
- Come to Him and follow Him.

Let's pray.

God, for those of us who are Christians ... let us live a life that is worthy of your calling. Let us live a life that pleases you and brings you glory and lays up treasure in the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

And I pray, God, that you'd give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to know the needs in front of us so that, one day in the future You'd say to us, "You fed me, you visited me, you clothed me!"

And we'd wonder, "When did we do that?"

And you'd tell us, "What you did to that guy or that gal you were actually doing it to me."

God some of us are thinking, "I don't want to wind up at the Great White Throne on Judgment Day."

"So today, I confess that my works are not good

enough and my sin disqualifies me from entering into the Kingdom. And I have no hope other than Jesus who has made a way.

“And so I receive You, Jesus and accept what You have done on the cross and in your resurrection to forgive ALL of my sin.”

Endnotes

ⁱ See Revelation 20:5-6

ⁱⁱ See Genesis 3

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://www.epm.org/resources/2014/Jun/18/do-you-think-loss-rewards-heaven-will-be-permanent/>