

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 10-6-13 PM NOTES
"THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT"
REVELATION 20:11-15
#30 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Revelation"

Revelation 1:19 (NKJV) "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

Revelation 1:14-17a (NKJV) "¹⁴ His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."

I. The Judge (v. 11)

John 5:22 (NKJV) "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son."

John 5:27-29 (NKJV) "²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Acts 17:31 (NKJV) "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

2 Peter 3:10-13 (NKJV) "¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Revelation 21:1 (NKJV) "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."

II. The Defendants (vv. 12a, 13a)

- Out-and-out sinners will be there.
- Self-righteous people will be there.
- Procrastinators will be there. **2 Corinthians 6:2b (NKJV)** "Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation."
- Unsaved church members will be there.
- Those who have never heard the Gospel will be there.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NKJV) "Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV) "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

Luke 16:23a (NKJV) "And being in torments in Hades..."

III. The Evidence (vv. 12b, 13b, 15)

A. The Book of the Law

Romans 3:19-20 (NKJV) “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.”

B. The Book of Works

Matthew 12:36-37 (NKJV) “³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Mark 12:38-40 (NKJV) “³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, ‘Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.’”

Matthew 10:14-15 (NKJV) “¹⁴ And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”

Luke 12:47-48 (NKJV) “⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

C. The Book of Life

IV. The Sentence (vv. 14-15)

Hades is the temporary place of punishment for everyone whose name is not written in the book of life.

A summary of what Jesus taught about Hell: 1) Hell is real. 2) Hell is separation from God. 3) Hell is for the “accursed ones.” 4) Hell is eternal. 5) Hell is fire. 6) Hell is a prepared place. 7) Hell is eternity with the devil and his angels. 8) Hell is inevitable if you have never come to Christ. 9) Hell is inescapable once you are there. 10) Hell is avoidable if you will repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

“The dying of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most awakening sight in the world. Why did that lovely One that was from the beginning the brightness of His Father’s glory, and the express image of His person, degrade Himself so much as to become a small ‘corn of wheat,’ which is hidden under the earth and dies? Why did He lie down in the cold rocky sepulcher? Would Christ have wept over Jerusalem if there had been no hell beneath it? Would He have died under the wrath of God if there were no wrath to come? Oh! Triflers with the Gospel—and polite hearers, who say often, ‘Sir, we would see Jesus,’ but who never find Him—go to Gethsemane, see His unspeakable agonies; go to Golgotha, see the vial of wrath poured upon His breaking heart; go to the sepulcher, see the ‘corn of wheat’ laid dead in the ground. Why all this suffering in the spotless One if there is no wrath coming on the unsheltered, unbelieving head?”

—Robert Murray McCheyne

“Think lightly of Hell, and you will soon think lightly of the cross...”

—Charles Spurgeon

Matthew 7:22-23 (NKJV) “²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

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What we read about in this text is the last event in time before God brings about a new heavens and a new earth and eternity is ushered in. As we near the end of our study of Revelation, let me take you back to the outline of the book that was given in **Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)** “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” In chapter one of Revelation we saw the things which John had seen – the revelation of the resurrected Christ. An example of what John saw is in **Revelation 1:14-17a (NKJV)** “¹⁴ His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” The glory of the resurrected Christ was so great that John fell at His feet like a dead man would fall.

The second part of the book of Revelation deals with “the things which are”. This speaks of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. These churches were both literal and representative. They were not fictitious churches. They were real churches with real Pastors and real problems, but they also represent all churches. The things that God commended and rebuked in these 7 churches are the same things that He commends and rebukes in churches today. The final section of Revelation is chapters 4-22 – “the things which will take place after this”. These events revealed to John were in his future and are still future to us. We saw a 7 year period of great tribulation where God’s wrath is poured out on the earth in unprecedented ways. After the church is caught up to be with the Lord in the air, a Satan possessed man rises to power and eventually becomes a virtual world ruler. This man is called “the beast” and also “the antichrist”. In the last 3 ½ years of that great tribulation, he unleashes a brutal persecution on those who are saved during this time of tribulation and upon the Jews. As the armies of the world gather in Israel at a place called Armageddon, Jesus Christ returns to the earth with His saints and destroys the armies of the antichrist by Himself. The antichrist is then thrown into Hell. Satan and his demonic hoards are incarcerated in the bottomless pit – the abyss. In chapter 20, the Lord Jesus establishes His literal kingdom here on earth for 1,000 years. It will be inhabited by the saved of all the ages that will be raised in the first resurrection. It will also be inhabited by those who were saved and not martyred in the great tribulation and especially a large number of Jews who will be saved at the coming of Christ. After the 1,000 years, Satan is released from the abyss and leads a short rebellion that will reveal the true unregenerate heart of those born during the millennium to mortal parents. When that rebellion is put down by the Lord sending fire from Heaven to devour them, the devil (and by implication his demons) are thrown into the lake of fire which had been prepared for them. That brings us up to Revelation 20:11-15 – the Great White Throne Judgment.

I. The Judge (V11)

What we find in verses 11-15 somewhat resembles a courtroom scene. The righteous judge is on a great white throne. While there are similarities to a courtroom scene today, there are some differences. There will be no debate over the fact that all who stand before this throne are guilty. There is a prosecutor, but no defense. The evidence will be submitted, but there will be no rebuttal or cross-examination. There will be a judge, but no jury. When the sentence is pronounced, there is no appeal. All will be found guilty and the guilty will be punished with no possibility of parole for all eternity.

Notice the description of the throne. It is the great white throne. The adjective “great” refers to the greatness of the Judge who sits on the throne. It is also great because of the magnitude of the judgment that takes place there. The description “white” speaks of the purity, holiness, and justice of the one on the throne. The fact that it is a throne speaks of the authority and sovereignty of the one who sits there.

Who is the one seated on the throne? The text doesn't tell us, but based on what the occupant of the throne does, He is obviously deity. I think that when we compare Scripture with Scripture, it is obviously the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says in **John 5:22 (NKJV)** "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son". **John 5:27-29 (NKJV)** "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." **Acts 17:31 (NKJV)** "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." The one who sits in judgment with absolute authority and absolute power is the one with the nail prints still in His hands. What a reminder to those who have rejected Him and now will be judged by Him of the price He paid to provide a salvation they have rejected.

What does **Revelation 20:11 (NKJV)** mean when it says "...from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them"? This speaks of what some theologians call "the uncreation of the universe". This phrase is referring to what will happen immediately after the judgment of the unbelieving dead is carried out. It is using poetic language to describe the destruction of the current earth and atmosphere. Even though the curse on the earth that came as the result of sin coming into the world was lifted during the millennium, there will still be the taint of sin on it. The heavens and the earth will be "uncreated". We read of this event in **2 Peter 3:10-13 (NKJV)** "¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." That explains what **Revelation 21:1 (NKJV)** means when it says "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."

II. The Defendants (V12a, 13a)

Those being judged at the great white throne are those who are raised in the second resurrection. Let me be very clear about the resurrection of the dead. There are two resurrections as we saw in the last message. The first resurrection includes the saved of all the ages. There are different phases of that first resurrection that take place at different times, but all the phases are lumped together and called the "first resurrection". The first resurrection includes all the saved of all the ages. The saved that are raised at the first resurrection **do not** appear at the great white throne judgment. Their eternal destiny is already determined. They will have their works judged for reward or loss of reward at the *bema* of Christ (the judgment seat of Christ), but they will not be judged for their sin at the great white throne judgment because Jesus took their judgment for sin on the cross. The second resurrection is the resurrection of the lost. The lost of all the ages will be raised up to appear before the great white throne to be judged. Their spiritually dead souls and spirits are united with resurrected bodies that will take them into Hell. They are described as the "small and the great". Hell is an equal opportunity provider for the spiritually dead. The small refers to the earth's nobodies and the great refers to the people considered noble and important while they were on the earth. Adrian Rogers gives five categories of people who will be at the great white throne judgment:

1. Out-and-out sinners will be there. They are the ones who hate God and His church. They shake their fists in the face of God, and could have as their theme song, "I Did It My Way".
2. Self-righteous people will be there. They think that they are too good to be condemned. They are moral, help the poor, and serve in places like the homeless shelter. They fail to see that the worst form of badness is human goodness when human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth.

3. Procrastinators will be there. This group thought about being saved but they just kept putting it off. **2 Corinthians 6:2b (NKJV)** says “Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.”

4. Unsaved church members will be there. These folks will be somewhat religious but have no relationship with the Lord. They will profess Christ, but they won’t possess Christ.

5. Those who have never heard the Gospel will be there. For them, as we will see in a moment, the judgment will not be as severe. They will however stand without excuse before Christ at the great white throne. They will have rejected the light of creation and conscience. Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15 tells us that all men have the light of creation and conscience that screams out to them, “There is a God”. Had they responded to the light they had, God would have given them more light as He did with Cornelius and Lydia in Acts 10 and 16.

Are you in any of these groups? **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NKJV)** “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified.”

In verse 13 we see that Death and Hades will deliver up the dead that are in them. At the great white throne judgment, the earth will open up its graves to give up the dead. Those who died at sea will have the sea give up their bodies. From the snowy mountains to the desolate deserts, from the tropical jungles to the populous cities, all the unsaved dead will rise. While death has the body, Hades has the souls of the unsaved. When a saved person dies, they go immediately to be with the Lord. **2 Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV)** “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” The lost go immediately to Hades. This is not the final abode of the lost, but it is their abode until the great white throne judgment. We see in Luke 16 that Hades is a place of torment. **Luke 16:23 (NKJV)** “And being in torments in Hades...” The unbelieving dead will be given some kind of permanent body equipped to exist for eternity in the torments of Hell. It will certainly be different from the resurrection body of believers, but it will exist throughout eternity. Make sure that you have an accurate picture of this great white throne. The unbelieving dead of all the ages will stand in some type of body containing their conscious souls and dead to God spirits. They wait before the great white throne to hear the evidence presented against them and to hear of their eternal abode.

III. The Evidence (V12b, 13b, 15)

As the judgment commences, the Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, opens the books. What books does He open? We know that there will be at least 3 books because in verse 12 he speaks of books and another book. I am assuming that there may be more, but the Lord didn’t see fit to tell us what they are. Let me share with you what I think these books are. I am only dogmatic and sure about the third one.

A. The Book of the Law

The Bible says in **Romans 3:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” I believe that our Lord will open the book of the moral law of God and proclaim the law in all of its applications – lust is adultery, hate is murder.

B. The Book of Works

This book contains every sinful thought, deed, and word. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:36-37 (NKJV)** “³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” When the book of works is compared to the book of the law, every sinner will be aware of their sin and their deserving of judgment. All will have to confess that they have sinned and come short of God’s glorious standard. God’s justice will vindicated when the book of the law is compared to the book of works. God’s justice requires that all sin must be paid for. If Christ’s payment on the cross is rejected, then each person must pay for their own sin.

While no one will be saved by their works and no one is more or less lost based on their works, I do believe that works make a difference in the severity of judgment in Hell. Hell won’t be the same for

everyone. One of the most heinous sins that a lost person can commit is to reject the light of God's truth. I believe that those who reject more light are going to be judged more harshly than those who may have only had the light of creation and conscience. As for degrees of punishment in Hell, the Bible is very clear. **Mark 12:38-40 (NKJV)** “³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, ‘Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.’” These religious leaders had so much light from the Scriptures and yet they were evil. Their condemnation will be greater. **Matthew 10:14-15 (NKJV)** “¹⁴ And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” **Luke 12:47-48 (NKJV)** “⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

C. The Book of Life

I am sure that this is one of the books because it is named in verse 12. The book of life corresponds to the custom in ancient cities of having a registry that contains the names of all the citizens of the city. The book of life will contain the names of the elect who have repented of sin and savingly believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the scene will be that after comparing the book of the law to the book of works, one final book is looked in. It will be the book of life and their names will not be there. The evidence against the lost at the great white throne judgment is conclusive. They are condemned eternally. It is not the absence of good works that condemns a person; it is the absence of their name in the book of life.

IV. The Sentence (V14, 15)

The evidence is irrefutable; the verdict is rendered and now the sentence is quickly carried out. Death here is used to mean the grave. Hades as we saw is the temporary place of punishment for everyone whose name is not written in the book of life. The sentence for every person who appears before the great white throne is eternity in the lake of fire, the final hell. Using today's justice system as an illustration, Hades would be like the local jail where a person is taken until sentenced, and the lake of fire would be like the state or federal penitentiary where the full sentence is carried out. I believe that the Greek word Gehenna is the same place as the lake of fire in Revelation 20:15. The lake of fire may currently exist, but if it does, it is empty until the great white throne judgment. Its first two occupants will be the antichrist and the false prophet. After 1,000 years Satan and his demons will join them, and after the great white throne judgment, everyone who appears there will join them.

Let's talk for a moment about the unpopular topic of Hell. The word Gehenna is found in the New Testament 12 times. Eleven of the twelve times it is used, it was Jesus who said it. Jesus spoke more about Hell than anyone else in the Bible. Don Whitney, a seminary professor at Southern Seminary gave a brief summary of what Jesus taught about Hell: 1) Hell is real. 2) Hell is separation from God. 3) Hell is for the “accursed ones”. 4) Hell is eternal. 5) Hell is fire. 6) Hell is a prepared place. 7) Hell is eternity with the devil and his angels. 8) Hell is inevitable if you have never come to Christ. 9) Hell is inescapable once you are there. 10) Hell is avoidable if you will repent and believe in Jesus Christ. What the Bible teaches about Hell leaves no room for universalism which says that everyone will eventually be saved. Also, the Bible leaves no room for annihilationism that teaches that the lost after a time of punishment are annihilated and thus cease to exist.

Oh how the truth of Hell ought to impact us. One of the godliest pastors who ever lived was the Scotsman Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843). Listen to what he said about Hell. “The dying of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most awakening sight in the world. Why did that lovely One that was from the beginning the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person, degrade Himself so

much as to become a small 'corn of wheat,' which is hidden under the earth and dies? Why did He lie down in the cold rocky sepulcher? Would Christ have wept over Jerusalem if there had been no hell beneath it? Would He have died under the wrath of God if there were no wrath to come? Oh! Triflers with the Gospel – and polite hearers, who say often, 'Sir, we would see Jesus,' but who never find Him – go to Gethsemane, see His unspeakable agonies; go to Golgotha, see the vial of wrath poured upon His breaking heart; go to the sepulcher, see the 'corn of wheat' laid dead in the ground. Why all this suffering in the spotless One if there is no wrath coming on the unsheltered, unbelieving head?" [Quoted in Danny Akin's sermon on Revelation 20:11-15]. Charles Spurgeon said, "Think lightly of Hell, and you will soon think lightly of the cross..."

CONCLUSION

Judgment is real; Hell is real. Are you certain that you are not going there? **Matthew 7:22-23 (NKJV)** ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Make certain tonight!