

*A young woman, who had been brought up in a Christian home, chose to take the way of the world. Against the wishes of her godly mother, she insisted on keeping company with a wild crowd, who lived only for the passing moment. Time and time again, this young woman was pleaded with to turn from her ways and to turn to Christ, but she consistently refused.*

*Finally, she was taken with a very serious illness. All that medical science could do for her was done, and it soon became evident that her recovery was hopeless and death was staring her in the face, but despite her grave condition, she still refused to turn to God.*

*One night she awoke suddenly out of a sound sleep with a frightened look on her face, and she asked in a panic, “Mother, what is **Ezekiel 7:8-9?**”*

*Her mother replied, “**What do you mean?**”*

*She explained that she had a very vivid dream and thought there was a presence in the room who said to her, “Read **Ezekiel 7:8-9.**” Not recalling the passage, the mother reached for a Bible. As she opened it, her heart sank as she read the words – the words she then shared to her dying daughter:*

***“I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you.”***

*The daughter, with a look of horror on her face, sank back in her pillow exhausted, and in a few moments, she left this world.*

Typically, I start my messages with something light and humorous, but not this morning, for this morning we are going to peek into the future to see God’s last judgment – a judgment that is searing, and dreadful, and tragic.

Up to this point in John’s vision, Jesus had defeated His enemies and Satan was bound in the abyss for 1000 years while Jesus physically and personally reigned upon the earth with His resurrected saints and with those who survived the Tribulation period and were ushered into the kingdom in their mortal bodies. This was all seen by John, and after the 1000-years was completed, Satan was released for a short time to take one last shot at deceiving the nations, and afterwards, he was cast into the lake of fire to join the Antichrist and the False Prophet.

If you recall from last week, we talked about two resurrections – those that are resurrected before the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom begins, and then there are those who are resurrected after the 1000 years is completed. Well, in John’s vision, the 1000-years is completed and now it’s time for this last resurrection – a resurrection with a purpose – that being to bring the spiritually dead, before the highest court, for their day of reckoning with a holy and righteous God.

We are still in **Revelation 20**, and we will be looking at the last five verses pertaining to God’s final judgment, but before we dig in, I want to make a disclaimer of sort beginning with some encouraging words from Jesus in the gospel of **John 5:24**. Jesus said,

*“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.”*

As you know, for those who have truly placed their faith in Jesus Christ – their sins have already been judged and paid for in full, and in that sense, their judgment was completed at the cross. By His grace, Jesus followed the will of His Father and took upon Himself the penalty for sin, and therefore, to those who have placed their faith in Jesus, they will not be judged for sin; however, with that said, there will be a judgment for believers according to **2 Corinthians 5:10**, where the Apostle Paul tells us,

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad.*

So, there is a judgment for Christians, but it’s not judgment for sin. It’s not about salvation – rather, this is a judgment where the character of our actions and our motives are evaluated by the Lord for rewards. This is what Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 3**, beginning with **verse 10**,

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> If any*

*man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

In context, Paul is talking about building the local church, but there is also an application here for all true believers. There will come a time when Jesus evaluates the *quality* of our actions and our motives, and those actions and motives that don't measure up – those He considers to be worthless like wood, and hay and straw – they will be burned up in His scrutiny as though they never existed. And for those actions and motives that Jesus considers worthy and valuable like gold, and silver, and precious stones – they will be rewarded. As I related to you last week, what we do, and why we do what we do in this life has a bearing in the next.

So, I said all of that to say this, what we are about dig into this morning has nothing to do with true believers and their rewards. Let's keep that in mind, and if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 20** and we will begin where we left off with **verse 11**. In this verse, the Apostle John tells us,

**Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.**

John begins with the words “**Then I saw**” which tells us this is a transition into a new subject – a subject where the matter of sin comes before the Judge to be dealt with once and for all. Sin has been a problem since the day of Adam – it's been an open case, but now God is going to close it forever.

In his vision, John sees a **great white throne** – it's in the heavenly realm and God sits on it – more specifically, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who sits on it for He told us in **John 5:22**,

*“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”*

Jesus explained that the Father gave Him the authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Only Jesus can decide the fate of humanity, because He experienced life as a human, and yet He was without sin. In **Acts**, the Apostle Peter related that the Father had appointed Jesus as the Judge of the living and the dead, and later to the **Romans**, Paul said that God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Jesus is the Judge – for there is no one more qualified, and when His court is called to order, we are told the **earth and heaven** – referring to the sky, **fled away** from His presence. Just as God created the universe out of nothing – it will be uncreated and turned back into nothingness. It’s all gone, it no longer exists, and in our next chapter, we will find out why.

So, court is in session, and there’s literally *no* place to hide, and just so you know, there’s also *no* jury to sway, there are *no* public defenders, there will be *no* cross-examinations, *no* technicalities, *no* arguments, *no* time to change one’s mind, *no* excuses, and *no* appeals. There will be *no* place to stand except to stand before the throne of a holy and righteous God.

Then John continues with his vision and he tells us beginning with **verse 12**,

**<sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.**

In the process of seeing the universe dissolved into nothingness, John also sees the **dead standing before the throne** – standing before God.

These are people who take part in the final resurrection – the resurrection that comes after the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom is completed. These are the spiritually dead, the unbelievers, the lost people from all ages who were resurrected from the sea and the grave – both **great** and **small** and everyone in between.

These are the ones who claimed they were essentially “good people” and believed that God is good for some – just not them. They didn’t need Him. These are the ones who were convinced their good deeds would outweigh their bad deeds – assumed that God grades on a scale, grades on a curve, and they would be okay. These are the ones who played church, who said they were Christians, but it was in name only – for their hearts never changed. These are the ones who allowed pride to keep them from receiving Christ because they were too worried about what others might think or say. These are the ones who knew they were lost, who knew they needed Jesus, but kept saying “maybe tomorrow” until it was too late and there were no more tomorrows. These are the ones who claimed to be children of

God, but yet, they continued to live their lives as if there was no God. They lived their lives as if God never really mattered. These are the ones who rejected Jesus – they rejected their salvation, they rejected God’s love, they rejected His forgiveness, they rejected His mercy and grace, and here, they are all summoned to court in resurrected bodies to stand in the presence of God.

Throughout life, they sought independence from God, they kept their distance from Him, and now they find themselves in His presence – face to face – and sadly, it’s for their judgment.

Notice that John tells us he sees **books** in his vision – two sets of books – books of **deeds** that record of every action, every word, every thought, and every motive, and then there is the **book of life** – a book that records faith, for it contains the names of those who were saved by faith and trusted in God alone for their salvation. If you think about it, the appearance of the **book of life** during this judgment is proof that access to God is by faith alone. For if salvation could be gained by works, then the books recording their deeds would be enough. But they are not enough, and for those whose names are not written in the **book of life** – they will be judged by the contents of the books of **deeds**.

This is a good place to remind you of an important truth – a truth for those who think they are not “bad people” and have nothing to worry about. For those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, in order to be found “not guilty” by God and to qualify for heaven, every single entry in the books of **deeds** needs to be filled with nothing but good stuff. God’s standard is absolute perfection, and if God finds just one single sin recorded in the book – it’s a *guilty* verdict. Listen to what we are told in **James 2:10**,

***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.***

In context, Paul was talking about the royal law, a law that rules over all the rest – that being to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. It’s a law that commands us to do what love requires us to do. God the Father gave this law, and Jesus showed us what it looked like, and we are commanded to live it out – to love God and to love others, and to break this law is like breaking all the laws. Like a pane of glass, if you break it at one point, you break the entire pane; likewise, if you break just one of His commands, no matter how small and trivial you think it is, ultimately it is disobedience against God, it makes a person a sinner, and the verdict will be the same – guilty.

By God's grace, Jesus took our guilt and the penalty for sin that comes with it upon Himself on the cross, but for those who do not trust Him – for those who reject Him, they get to bear their own guilt and the penalty for their sin, and beginning with **verse 14**, that penalty is described for us. John says,

**<sup>14</sup>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

This is pretty self-explanatory. This is the consequence for all who are found guilty of sin. There are no short sentences, no probation, and no diversion. It's to the **lake of fire** for all eternity.

*Now, you may say, "Wait a minute. How can any sin deserve judgment in the lake of fire for eternity? If God is good, how can He punish like this?" Consider this scenario: Suppose a middle school student punched another student in class. What happens? In my days, the student was given detention after school. Suppose during the detention, this boy punches the teacher. What happens? The student gets suspended from school. Suppose on the way home, the same boy punches a policeman on the nose. What happens? He finds himself confined in juvenile detention. Suppose some years later, the very same boy is in a crowd waiting to see the President of the United States. As the President passes by, the boy lunges forward to punch the President. What happens? He could be shot dead by the Secret Service.*

In every case the crime is precisely the same, but the severity of the crime is measured by whom the crime is committed against. I think we forget that all sin is ultimately against God Himself, and **what comes from sinning against God?** It's the lake of fire.

Now, this brings up an interesting question. As we've already covered, we know that for believers there are various rewards given to us. We know there are various roles and responsibilities we might be assigned depending on our faithful service in this life.

Using that same idea, **could there be various degrees of torment in the lake of fire according to sin? In other words, for example, would a person who is playing church, but is really lost, be tormented the same as Adolf Hitler?**

Let's look at **Matthew 11:20-24**.

*<sup>20</sup> Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

*<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.*

*<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”*

So, based on what we just read here, those words “*more tolerable*” would appear to indicate there will be various degrees of punishment and torment. Everyone will get exactly what they deserve – God will be fair, but of course that’s still not very comforting since the destination remains the lake of fire.

God offers a simple choice – *fairness* or *forgiveness*. Take *fairness* and you get exactly what you deserve. Accept *forgiveness* and Christ pays the price for your sin and your name is written in the book of life.

*In 1829, a man named George Wilson was arrested for robbery and murder in a US mail heist. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. Some friends intervened on his behalf and were able to obtain his pardon from President Andrew Jackson. But when told of this, Wilson refused it saying he wanted to die.*

*Well, the sheriff didn’t know what to do – how do you execute a man who has been officially pardoned?*

*An appeal was made to the President who perplexed turned the matter over to the Supreme Court, and Chief Justice John Marshall gave this ruling:*

*A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends on its acceptance by the person implicated. Anyone under the sentence of death would hardly be expected to refuse a pardon, but if it’s refused, it’s no pardon. Thus, George Wilson was executed while his signed pardon lay on the sheriff’s desk!*

In the same way, God has offered His gift of salvation to every person through His Son Jesus Christ – a gift that not only provides a pardon from condemnation, but it offers eternal life; however, this gift must be personally accepted by faith to be personally experienced in this life and in the life to come.

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