**Revelation**

*Lesson 38 – Revelation 20:11-15*

* In this section of Revelation, part of the 7th and final cycle in the book, God appears in a scene of final judgment.
* We have seen this talked about and described earlier in Revelation. **Revelation 11:18** – “The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” **Revelation 14:7** – “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come…”
* Those who believe the church has been raptured by this point, believe that this judgment is for the wicked and those who do not believe during the 1,000 years of Jesus’ reign on earth. Christians have already received their reward at the rapture. But as I’m going to argue, this is a general judgment of both righteous and wicked at the end.

*The Great White Throne Judgment*

1. John sees a great white throne and “Him” who is seated on it. The throne is “great” in comparison to the thrones of the saints in verse 4. The throne is white representing purity or holiness. God’s judgments as we’ve already seen in Revelation are true and just. There’s nothing impure or unclean about God’s judgment. He’s sitting on the throne, demonstrating His authority and right to judge. He is the King and holds absolute power over His subjects. **Matthew 25:31-33** – “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.” **Daniel 7:9-10** – “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat;….the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.”
2. This judgment is described in terms of cosmic upheaval – the earth and sky are described as fleeing from the presence of God. The fierceness of God’s judgement is so intense that all of the created world tries to run away from Him. **Revelation 6:14** – “The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.” **Revelation 16:20** – “And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.”
3. John then sees all people standing before the throne – great and small. Notice that it doesn’t say the righteous dead or the unrighteous dead. The distinction made is not between one’s relationship to God; the distinction is between types or classes of people. “Great and small” is a Hebrew way of saying 1 extreme, the other extreme, and everything in between. So all of mankind is pictured standing before the Almighty Judge of the universe. All individuals who have ever lived are in front of God in their resurrected bodies. **2 Corinthians 5:10** – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” **Romans 14:10** – “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;”
4. And there are 2 books opened up by the Judge. One book is a record of all the works which every single person has ever done. The other book is called “the book of life.” This book contains the names of those to whom God has given eternal life. **Daniel 12:1** – “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” **Revelation 17:8** – “…And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel…” **Revelation 13:8**  - “all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” These books are symbolic representations of God’s “memory” if you will. It’s a reference to His omniscience. He knows everything that has been done by every single individual who has ever lived. He knows the things you did and thought that even you can’t remember.
5. But notice that the attention in this section is primarily on judgment. The “book of life” brings attention to those who are excluded from it. And the dead from the sea, and from the grave, yield their dead so they can be “judged.” Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (v14), as well as anybody whose name is not written in the book of life (v15). The preoccupation of this section is on judgment, even though both judgment and vindication take place at this great white throne judgment. **Matthew 25:32-33** – “Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.”
6. Putting all of Scripture together, here’s what appears to take place at this judgment. After Armageddon, we immediately have the final judgment. All people stand before God as Judge in their resurrected bodies. God looks at a person’s deeds in one book, then checks the book of life for their name. If their name is found, they are placed at the right hand of God. If their name is not found, they are placed at the left hand of God. Everybody gets judged according to their works. **2 Corinthians 5:10** – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” **Matthew 16:27** – “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” **John 5:28-29** – “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” But the difference in the works is based on the work of Christ. His work in the place of our works is what saves us.
7. How do we understand the relationship between “judgment by works” and “justification by faith alone”?
   1. “Free Grace” // Hyper-Grace View – justification is by faith alone and works play no role whatsoever. Faith is merely a mental assent and does not require any obedience to Christ at all.
      1. In this view, a good tree can product nothing but bad fruit and still be considered a good tree.
   2. Roman Catholic View: justification is a life-long process that includes sanctification. Our works play a crucial role in our salvation so we are saved by faith + works which include participating in the Roman Catholic sacramental system.
   3. Federal Vision (Unorthodox Reformed View) – “Initial justification” is by faith alone. “Final justification” is by works. Or, “Get in by faith, stay in by works.”
      1. In this view, justification ends up being by faith + works and sounding very close to the Roman Catholic View without the sacramental system
   4. Orthodox Reformed View – James basically states that there are 3 groups of people in the world – unbelievers, those with “dead faith”, those with “saving faith.” True, saving faith evidences or demonstrates itself by good works. A good tree produces good fruit. So when it says that we are judged by works at the end, it means that God sees our deeds that we did and knows the deeds of those who are truly saved vs. the deeds of those who merely “professed” faith, i.e., those with “dead” faith. Our works will demonstrate whether our profession of faith was true or not. Think of Abraham. He believed God and it was credited to Him as righteousness (justification by faith alone). But Abraham demonstrated true faith rather than mere profession of faith by offering up his son Isaac on the altar (James 2:21). Abraham was saved by faith and demonstrated that faith by works. Therefore **at the final judgment, our works will vindicate whether we had true saving faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Our works are corroborating evidence of our justification by faith alone.**
8. Death, Hades, and unbelievers are now thrown into the lake of fire and join the 2 beasts and satan who are already there. For unbelievers, death is temporary punishment, but now the lake of fire is permanent and everlasting punishment. Hence it is called “the second death.” This is the “death of death” is John Owens puts it. The state of being separated body from soul where never happen again. This state of being separated, called Hades, will never be experienced again. They are personified as beings who are also thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is conscious, unending punishment.

Believers

1st Death 1st resurrection

Neither Both

(bodily) (Heavenly reign)

Unbelievers Believers believers

2nd Death Unbelievers 2nd resurrection

(Lake of Fire – Rev 20:14) (new body)

**Revelation 2:11** - “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” **Matthew 25:41** – “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” **1 Corinthians 15:26** – “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

**Message for Us**

1. If you are worried about whether your faith is dead or alive, that’s probably an indication that your faith is alive. Those who profess faith but have merely “dead faith” are essentially hypocrites. You know within yourself and your own conscience will testify to you about whether or not you are a hypocrite. If you know yourself not to be a hypocrite, you have nothing to worry about and do not need to fear the great white throne judgment.
2. What spares you and me from experiencing the second death in the lake of fire, is the blood of Jesus Christ. He makes the difference between eternal life and eternal punishment. The life we experience is life in Christ and life through Christ because we believed upon Christ.
3. God will one day judge the whole world in His holiness. We must uphold a high biblical view of the holiness of God. The downplay of sin and the downplay of the existence of hell in our modern society can be accounted for by not understanding the holiness of God.
4. “In your flesh, you will see the Judge on that last day. We will all be there in our bodies before the judgment throne of Christ, to give an account of what we have done with our lives. Christians will not escape the scrutiny of God. The Bible says that we will all be called to account at the great white throne. If the sins of believers will be recalled in that day, however, it will only be done in the context of God’s amazing grace to His own glory. We will not be condemned, because Christ is our Savior; nevertheless, we will be there. That ought to wake us up as Christians. We can’t sit back comfortably and say, ‘Well, I’m a Christian; this coming day of judgment has nothing to do with me.’ That’s not true; we will all be there.” –Joel Beeke
5. “What a comfort it is to know that if you have truly repented and believed in Christ alone for salvation, you may stand without dread when God opens the book of your life, for He will read only “Christ” on its pages.” –Joel Beeke