

Joel Breidenbaugh (Revelation 20:11-15)

**Intro.** Americans seem to be enamored with the drama of a courtroom, for we have had plenty of TV shows focusing on it—*Perry Mason, L.A. Law, Law & Order, The People’s Court, Boston Legal, the Firm, Matlock, Judge Judy* & more. People watched the news for months during the trials of people like O.J. Simpson (if the glove doesn’t fit, you must acquit) & Casey Anthony. Because of this interest, it should come as no surprise that many Christians are fascinated about God’s final courtroom. As we continue our series from Revelation 20-22 on “The Dragon, the Lamb & Eternity,” we look at the last few verses of Revelation 20 on “The Great White Throne Judgment.”

Theme: Final judgment

Background: Prior to this passage, we have seen the return of Christ, along with the resurrection of His people; we have also seen the overthrow of the Antichrist & false prophet, both of which were thrown into the lake of fire & then Satan, the dragon, was cast there after his final revolt.

➤ 6 Important Questions to Ask to Understand & Apply This Text:

**1. Who is sitting on the throne? (20:11)**

- “great”—the highest throne in the universe
- “white”—purity, holiness & victory, but it also signifies divine justice

Illus: I got a technical foul called on me as a basketball coach yesterday, because I was trying to help out poor officiating—no one will get to argue the officiating of God & His judgment

**a. Either God the Father (4:2; 7:10; 19:4; Romans 14:10; Daniel 7:9-10)**

- Elsewhere in Revelation, the One sitting on the throne is God the Father

**b. Or Christ the Son of God (Matthew 25:31; John 5:22-30; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1)**

- Throughout much of the NT, we see that God the Father will hand the final judgment over to the Son, so He may be in mind here

Illus: Whoever sits in this final judgment, it is clear there will be nowhere to hide from the Lord—“nowhere to run to, baby, nowhere to hide” (Martha & the Vandellas in 1965 & more recently by the Warriors in 2011)

**2. Who will be judged? (20:12-15)**

- “small & great” (20:12)—those who amounted to little in society’s eyes as well as the rich & famous of society—no one is too great to escape God’s judgment nor is anyone too insignificant to go unnoticed

Illus: Not only will Hitler, Stalin, Bin Laden & the likes be there, but so will atheists & members of other world religions & cults & even unconverted Baptists

**a. Either all unbelievers (20:12-15)**

- The focus in this passage seems to be on the unbelievers, because it highlights the judgment & appears to deal with those who take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection
- The universal scope of this judgment is shown in the reference to the sea, Death & Hades all giving up their dead

**b. Or both believers & unbelievers (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:5)**

- Elsewhere, Scripture speaks of both believers & unbelievers being judged—while these may occur at different times, it is possible they occur at the same time
- While the judgment of unbelievers is the greatest stress in this passage, the inclusion of the book of life appears to speak of a general judgment of all mankind

**3. What are the books of deeds? (20:12-13)**

- One of these books will be God’s Word (John 12:48), but it includes other books (Daniel 7:10; 12:1-2)

Illus: A court transcriptionist records various legal proceedings, including the testimonies given in a trial—at the Great White Throne Judgment, not only will all the words you have spoken reappear, but so will the things you have done

- Judgment by works is common in the Bible (Psalm 62:12; Jeremiah 17:10; Daniel 7:10; Romans 2:6; 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17)
- All throughout the New Testament, Christians are commanded to do good (Matthew 5:14-16; 6:1; John 3:21; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 2:10; 4:12; James 1:22; 1 Peter 1:14; 1 John 2:6; Hebrews 13:16)—while doing good alone won't save you, a genuine faith in the Lord demonstrates itself in doing good
- As believers, your sins are forgiven, but what you do as a Christian will be displayed either as precious stones & metals or as wood & hay—the fire purifies one & burns the other—don't you want to give back as much as you can to the Lord who gave you His all?

#### **4. What is the book of life? (20:12, 15)**

- This book of life is referenced often in the Bible (Exodus 32:32; Deuteronomy 29:20; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27)
- It is the Lamb's Book of Life (13:8; 21:27)!

Illus: When someone writes a book, they include an acknowledgements section for people they are thankful for in helping them complete the project. Your name may never show up in someone else's book, but as long as it shows up in the Lamb's Book of Life, that's all that matters!

- There are 2 main views to how people's names are written in the book of life
  - a. Arminians believe everyone's name is written in there & those who fail to trust Christ are blotted out
  - b. Calvinists believe God records only the elect; the elect demonstrate their election by receiving God's gift of grace through repentance & faith

#### **5. What is the lake of fire? (20:14-15)**

- It is the second death—the final death—the place of eternal punishment
- Death is a state & Hades is a place (the abode of the dead)
- Hell is a reality (Matthew 18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:46; Mark 9:46)—it is a place of continual dying
- Many people don't like to believe or talk in hell these days, but we don't have the liberty to change the truth just because we don't like it—God didn't consult us when planning out His righteous judgment of sinful humans
- Death is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-55; cf. Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4)
- Hell was created for the devil & his angels (Matthew 25:41), but all who fail to trust in Christ will end up in the lake of fire with the devil & his followers

Illus: Just as we have degrees of punishment in our society—every crime doesn't get life in prison, but some do, while other crimes receive penalties or short jail or prison terms, there are also degrees of punishment in hell (Matthew 11:21-24; Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:5; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)—so a moral unbeliever won't receive as severe a punishment as Hitler or Bin Laden, but all cast into the lake of fire will be there for eternity

#### **6. How does this apply to me? What do I need to do?**

- The Bible says all have sinned & fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) & there is none who does good, no, not one (3:12) & the heart is deceitful above all things & beyond cure, who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)—thus, you need to repent from your sins & trust in Jesus Christ as your only hope
- As a believer, you also need to build on the foundation of your salvation by doing good works for the Lord & His people

**Conc.** Some of you enjoy a good drama on TV involving the courtroom & the legal system. But there's a big difference between our courtrooms & legal systems when compared with the Great White Throne Judgment, for “there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal” (Wiersbe, 1080). It will be too late to ask God for mercy or to try to repent, but here's the good news—it is not too late right now! All you have to do to escape being cast into the lake of fire for all eternity is to repent & trust Jesus. There's an old song by A.B. Simpson that says, “What will you do with Jesus? Neutral you cannot be. Someday your heart will be asking, What will He do with me?” Don't wait. Trust Him today.