

## **Man's Last Day in God's Court, Part 2**

Revelation 20:12-13

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We return tonight to the study of the book of Revelation. I just maybe could for a moment remind you folks that most people in the Christian world never study the book of Revelation. Most preachers never preach on the book of Revelation. Most commentators never write on the book of Revelation. So most people don't understand the book of Revelation. And that is sad. Particularly is that sad when at the very outset of Revelation in verse 3 of chapter 1 it said, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it for the time is near."

People who don't study diligently and understand the book of Revelation forfeit a blessing that is poured out by God on those who grasp this truth in the light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. And if ever there was a generation then who needed to read this, it is that generation which is nearest to the return of Christ. It's a sad thing to say but it's so true today that the book of Revelation is ignored on most fronts. People do not have interest in the book of Revelation. They're not looking at the future, they're trying to suck everything they can out of the present as if this was all there really was to concern them.

But the book of Revelation is a tremendous, profound statement on the return of Jesus Christ, the truth of which should be comprehended as much as possible by every believer. Of course there are things in the book of Revelation that are mysterious to us and incomprehensible, of course there are things that we cannot fully understand, no more than the prophet of the Old Testament wrote down his prophecy about the Messiah and could only partly understand its fulfillment because he was looking into a future and not being able to experience its fulfillment himself.

In all of prophetic literature that is yet unfulfilled there are certain things which are incomprehensible to us and difficult to interpret. And to be honest with you, the timing of these events is the most difficult thing of all, trying to put everything in a neat order, trying to line it all up in perfect chronology, trying to fix the time of all events in relation to all other events is a very challenging thing. But that's not the main thing. The main thing is to get the sweeping reality that in the future God is going to judge the world by that Man, the Lord Jesus Christ whom He has ordained and that He raised Him from the dead and that judgment is imminent, that judgment is coming, it is on the horizon. All of the events associated with that judgment are given in the book of Revelation. And then following that great judgment on the living in the world is the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and at the end of the Kingdom comes the Great White Throne Judgment, or the final judgment. And we're already at that point in the book of Revelation where we're into the final and last judgment. It's in chapter 20 verses 11 to 15, we're going back to that text for the second time tonight. We did it last Sunday night and I want you to see the great reality that is here given to us. We return to the most sobering and serious scene in all of the Bible because the Great White Throne Judgment is man's last day in God's court. It is the day in which all sinners who have ever lived in the history of the world will be

sent to eternal hell.

Let me read the text to you again. Verse 11 is the beginning of it. "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. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and books were opened, and then 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. 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. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire, and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

This is God's final judgment and I want to emphasize tonight very strongly that this is a very just judgment. It is a just judgment. It is a just judgment because God is just. Deuteronomy 32:4 says of God, "Just and right is He." In Job 37 verses 23 and 24 we read, "The Almighty, we cannot find Him out, He is exalted in power and He will not do violence to justice." God does not do violence to justice. He is just, therefore it says in that passage in Job, "Men fear Him." He will do what is just and guilty men fear His justice. God is a just judge and all His verdicts are true and all His verdicts are righteous, therefore men have good reason to be afraid to face Him with the record of their sin.

There are those who in reading a passage like this and understanding the coming judgment of God might say, "This is an injustice." But it is not for many reasons. First of all, God cannot but be just. Why? Because His holiness is the source of His justice. Holiness, absolute perfection, will not allow Him to do anything but what is right. He can no more be unjust than He can be unholy.

Furthermore, God's will is justice. God's will is the supreme rule of justice. God's will is the standard of equity. His will is wise, His will is true, His will is right. And God wills nothing but what is just and right and true. Therefore it is just because He is holy and He wills only that which is right.

Furthermore, God does what is just voluntarily. That is to say justice flows from the nature of God. Men may act justly because they are paid to act justly, or they are made to act justly for fear of loss of reputation or income. But God is not bribed, God is not forced, God is not just because society expects justice. He is not just because it enhances His reputation. He is just because it is His nature to be just. If the whole world cried for injustice, if men called for injustice, God would still be just and in fact that is exactly the case. A whole world of sinners calls for injustice, they don't want the just due to their sin, they don't want the reward that they have earned, they don't want to pay for their iniquity. They cry out for a God who is unjust, a God who looks over their sin and turns away and leaves them alone and they will not have it. No matter how they attempt to bribe God to be unjust, God will be just.

Justice is the perfection of the divine nature. God never has done anything unjust and He never will. His justice has been wronged, but never has His justice done wrong. God is just. He sets the standard. He carries it out.

And those who refuse to deal with their sin in the way that God has presented through the gospel of Jesus Christ, those who do not repent and reach out for divine grace, will experience justice. That is a just punishment for their sin. As in the case of Israel who rejected God's mercy and grace, God

says to them in Hosea 13:9, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself." Psalm 81:11, "Israel would have nothing to do with Me." Jesus said, "You will not come to Me that you might have life." He said, "You will die in your sins because you believe not on Me."

In other words, man makes a choice and justice acts. Genesis 18:25, way back in the very beginning in the book of Genesis, says, "The judge of the earth will do right." And ultimate and final justice is the right and true and holy and righteous expression of God against sinners who will not repent and receive the grace of forgiveness. And it is that final justice that we are reading about here in Revelation chapter 20, the final act of a holy, righteous, just God who is giving men exactly what they deserve and exactly what they have chosen.

As I said last week, the absence of detail is surprising. The words are starkly plain. The message is as inescapable as the judgment. It's clear, it can't be missed. And the judgment that is described here is called the great white throne judgment, for obvious reasons, it is the same judgment that is called the resurrection to everlasting disgrace, or the resurrection to everlasting contempt, that's Daniel's title for it. It is also called by our Lord Jesus the resurrection to damnation. This is that event, when all the ungodly of all of human history are raised and brought before the final tribunal to be sentenced to eternal hell.

Now there are four elements in this text that we're looking at. Let's go back over number one, only briefly enough to make one very important point. First of all is the scene. And in verse 11 and then just into verse 12, the scene is presented. "I saw a great white throne, Him who sat upon it from whose presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them, and I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne." That's the scene.

The judge is God in the person of Jesus Christ. We made the statement, of course, that God and Christ are one and God is certainly the judge of all the earth, but He has committed that judgment to Christ. And so the judge is God in the form of Jesus Christ.

And you'll notice that the scene takes place in the absence of earth and heaven as we know it. There's a great white throne, God in the form of Christ sitting on it, and from the glorious, divine presence, earth and heaven disappear and no place is found for them. This is the uncreation. They go right out of existence. Just as God brought them into existence they go out of existence. And as I pointed out last time, this must mean uncreation. This doesn't mean alteration or reconfiguration, it means they disappear into non-existence. Scripture says heaven and earth will pass away, and it is here that the fulfillment is described.

Now science verifies this in a most fascinating way. Remember last time we looked at 2 Peter chapter 3 and in that text Peter writes that when this event takes place, the Great White Throne Judgment, the final expression of God's wrath, the ultimate aspect of the day of the Lord, heaven and earth will pass away. Earth and heaven will flee and no place will be found for them. Or to borrow the words of Peter, the elements will melt or dissolve.

Now let me talk about that for a moment from the scientific side so that you can see the rationality of this. Peter tells us that the elements will be dissolved. Now remember, the Kingdom has ended and that is the end of time. We are now on the brink of eternity when there will be, according to chapter 21 verse 1, a new heaven and a new earth because the first heaven and the first earth passed away

and there's no longer any sea. And then we enter into the eternal state, time is no more. The thousand-year Millennial Kingdom is the end of time. And the elements will dissolve.

When God closes the book on time the universe as we know it has to come to an end. You say, "Why is that true?" Time and creation began together because scientifically you cannot have creation without time. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Let's go back to Peter's word "elements." Peter uses a term in the Greek that means the basic units. The basic parts of matter. Elements refer to the basic components of creation, matter. And do you know what matter is? If you have a scientific background you know this, let me give it you simply...matter is particles in motion. Most of what you see is space. It's hard to believe that, even harder if you try to go through it. It looks solid. But it is not. Matter is particles in controlled motion. You learned that way back in your science classes somewhere.

Listen carefully, science says motion requires time because if something moves from one place to the another there has to be time. It's here and it's there and the fact that it was here and there demands the passage of time, even it's only a fraction. You cannot have matter unless you have time because you can't have motion unless something can move from one place to another, and it can't move from one place to another unless there's a passage of time. No time, no motion...no motion, no matter...no matter, no elements...no elements, no creation.

So when time ends, creation as we know it ends and you cannot have in the universe anything made up of particles in motion. So, when the Word of God says heaven and earth passes away, when the Word of God says the elements dissolve and the universe goes out of existence, it is because time ends. Time began at the same time creation began. When time ends, creation goes out of existence.

So the creation is uncreated. And somewhere in timeless, spaceless presence, the great white throne appears. And before it, the dead. And I marked last time for you the note that there are no living people remaining because there's no where to be alive, that is in physical form. There's no earth left. There's no universe, nothing's left. Everything is uncreated. So the godly have all been translated to the glory of God's presence and the ungodly are all gone out of the universe as we know it. And now they appear, all the ungodly in this scene.

Now terms that the Bible uses to describe the place of the dead are familiar to us. If you study the Old Testament, do you remember a term Sheol? That's really the Hebrew equivalent of a New Testament term Hades. It is a place where the dead go, the ungodly dead. All the ungodly dead of all human history have gone into a place called Sheol, or Hades. It is where their eternal souls have been since they died. People who died in the time of Adam or people who died today are right now in a place called Sheol or Hades, and they're there in their eternal souls. Their bodies have not been raised. The bodies of the ungodly are all over this globe in various states of disarray and dissolution. Some of them utterly gone from existence, their bones having disintegrated into the dust.

So the bodies of the ungodly remain somehow in the dirt or in the bottom of the sea, or wherever. But their souls are in Hades. But Hades and Sheol, follow this, apparently are only a temporary place. They are not the eternal hell, although they are a place of torment because you remember when the rich man died in Luke's gospel, immediately when he died he was in torment, remember that? So that the Hades of the present order of the universe is a place of torment, remorse and anguish, just like the eternal hell, but not the eternal hell.

So all the ungodly of all the ages, their spirits are in Hades. But that's only temporary. And you see in verse 13 here death and Hades give up the dead. Why? Because verse 14 says, "Death and Hades go out of existence, they are thrown into the lake of fire." So what you have here is the end of the universe, as we know it, including somewhere in this universe a place called Sheol or Hades, a place of punishment and a place of remorse and a place of pain and a place of terror. And it's ultimately eliminated with the elimination of this universe in favor of a final place called hell.

The scene then is really incredible. As the universe dissolves, Hades and the grave dissolves with it. And all the bodies then come out because Hades is emptied of the spirits and the bodies are emptied out of the universe as it's uncreated, and actual resurrection bodies are created for the ungodly dead. That's why it's called a resurrection unto damnation, or as Daniel called it, a resurrection unto contempt. It is a resurrection. And the difference between the Hades of suffering now and the eternal hell is that the Hades of suffering now is the suffering of the soul, whereas the suffering of hell will be the suffering of the soul in a resurrected body. They will be body and eternal...soul rather and eternal body fitted for the eternal hell.

And so the scene gives way to the summons as all the ungodly from all of human history are called before the judge. This is the second feature then in this astounding vision, the actual calling and gathering of all these criminals from creation on to uncreation. They come from the Old Testament age, the New Testament age, the time of Tribulation, the time of the Kingdom and they are summoned from their cells. For since death they have been tormented in the place of punishment until they are sent finally to the permanent and eternal hell with resurrected bodies fit for eternal suffering.

Look at verse 13, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them." There's the summons. This has to happen, by the way. The sea has to give up its dead because in chapter 21 verse 1 it says there's no longer any sea. The sea is uncreated and out of that sea before it goes out of existence comes forth all the resurrected bodies of the ungodly. And I think the sea is mentioned here just to let us know that the ones we would assume to be the most difficult to raise are raised. They might have been chewed into little pieces by the great white shark, but they'll be raised. God doesn't need to find all the pieces to put them back together, He'll bring forth a resurrection body for all the ungodly. All whoever drowned, all whose bodies ever drifted out to sea and sunk, all who ever fell overboard, all whoever died in the universal Flood, all who went down with the Lusitania(?), the Arizona, the Titanic and all the rest, all that ever perished in the sea will be brought out. And then death and Hades, or death and the grave, simply referring to every other place where the dead are, every grave including Hades itself where their spirits are, are going to yield up the dead. Up they come body and soul, resurrected body and soul. The sea and the grave and Hades are seen as voracious monsters that have swallowed the bodies of all generations and are now forced to disgorge their victims.

This is that which was spoken of in verse 5, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." At the end of the thousand years, at the end of time, at the end of creation as the dissolution of the universe occurs, it yields up all the bodies and souls of the dead and they have to come before the throne of God. They are raised to judgment.

Hades, again, is the state. It is a state rather than a place, it is a state where souls suffer, where unrighteous souls suffer until they are raised to the great white throne in final sentencing to the place

called hell. Hades is a general term. In fact, the NAS translators wisely left it untranslated. It is a general term describing the abode of the dead spirits of those who are separated from God and punished, it is like a criminal being kept in jail until final sentencing, and off to the penitentiary. Hades is the New Testament word for Sheol, the grave. Hades appears ten times in the New Testament, Sheol sixty-five in the Old. It is the place in contrast to paradise, contrast to Abraham's bosom, the place where the righteous dead have gone. Hades is a state, really, it's a place for souls, it's a state of souls in which they are punished while they wait their final sentencing and their final experiences that last forever in the place called hell.

Just to remind you of that Luke 16 passage, it says in verse 23, "In Hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment." Hades is a place of torment. It is the headquarters, frankly, of wickedness, the headquarters of evil because it is the place where wicked and evil people dwell. In fact, when Jesus said He would build His church He said the gates of Hades couldn't prevent it. And what He was referring to there is death itself.

All the places then that hold the unrighteous dead, both body and spirit, are going to yield them up. The grave, Hades, death, the sea, I think he's just sweeping it all up. There's no more sea to keep them. There's no more earth to act as a grave. There's no more death to hold them. There's no more Hades to imprison them. The whole universe is uncreated and everyone comes to the great white throne.

And it says then in verse 13, "And they were judged, everyone one of them...everyone of them." No one will be excused. All the unrighteous dead of all the ages will be judged there.

So we see the scene and we see the summons. Thirdly I want us to notice in this text the standard. And this is a very important thing to understand. What is the standard by which they are judged? Well, it's an absolute standard. And we see it in verse 12, we see it in verse 13, and we see it again in verse 15. Look at verse...first of all, verse 12, the end of the verse, they're judged there, "according to their deeds." Verse 13, the end of the verse, "They were judged every one of them according to their deeds." It is the judgment of deeds, first of all. And then in verse 15 is added, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

But let's start out, first of all, with "according to their deeds," both in verse 12 and in verse 13. God has kept perfect and comprehensive records of every person's life. In fact, at the end of verse 12 it says they were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. That is to say that God is going to act justly right off the absolute and perfect record of everything that every person has ever done. It's all in the books. Omniscience has recorded it all. God has kept perfect, complete, flawless, comprehensive records of every person's every thought and every person's every word and every person's every act done throughout their entire life. And sinners are going to be judged on the basis of their deeds, measured against God's perfect standard.

And what is God's standard? Matthew 5:48, "Be ye perfect." First Peter 1:15 and 16, "Be ye holy even as your Father in heaven is holy and perfect." Or Galatians chapter 3, where the Apostle Paul sets again the perfect standard, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them." If you've ever broken one law one time, you are cursed. People will have the record of their works held up against the standard. "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Be ye holy for I am holy." If you have ever one time broken one law of God, you are cursed, you are damned for violating the perfect standard. And Romans 3:23 sums up the

condemnation, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

So the whole world is going to be judged according to their deeds. The ungodly are judged and we know again that this is the ungodly because believers will not be judged and sent to hell according to their deeds, because our sins have been covered by Christ. We will be rewarded on the basis of service rendered toward God, but that is for rewards, not for condemnation. The ungodly because they have not turned to Christ have left themselves to be judged by their works. Whether they kept the law perfectly, whether they were as perfect as God, as holy as God or not, if they never violated any of God's standard, if they were as holy and perfect as He, they'll be all right. But no one meets that challenge. They will be judged on their thoughts. Luke 8 and verse 17, "For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light." God is going to bring every secret of every heart right into the open on the day of judgment. In fact, Romans 2:16 calls it "the day when God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

It will not only be a judgment of thoughts to see if people are perfect, but it will be a judgment of words. Matthew 12:37, "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

It will also be a judgment of acts. Matthew 16:27, "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and recompense to every man according to his works."

God is going to judge every thought and every word and every action. And no one can claim ignorance. Romans 1 says, "Every man is without excuse." Why? "Because that which may be known of God is in him and around him." He is without excuse of Romans 2:14 and 15, "The law of God is written in his heart and he has a conscience to lead him to the truth." No man can claim ignorance because Christ is the light that lights every man that comes into the world, John 1:9. The knowledge of God, the knowledge of the truth about God, the knowledge of right and wrong, the knowledge of Christ in some very primitive way, all of that is in the heart of every man who if he follows that knowledge will come to the truth. So they'll be judged according to their deeds and no one will claim ignorance successfully.

Back to verse 12. Early in the verse it says, "And the books were opened...and the books were opened." That's taken right out of Daniel 7:10. In the vision of Daniel chapter 7 you have the same scene really. The prophet Daniel saw the very same thing that John saw. He saw this time of judgment. He saw the throne, the Ancient of Days taking His seat. He saw the angels coming around the court sat," he says in verse 10, "and the books were opened." The very same statement that John makes.

What are those books? The record of every thought and every word and every deed of every sinner. It can't be the righteous, their sins are remembered no more, buried in the depths of the deepest sea, no longer in existence. The sea is gone and everything buried there with it. But of the ungodly, every sin is remembered, every sin is in the books of the unrepentant.

The record, by the way, for each person will be unique and so will the punishment. That's an important thing to think about. Hell is not like some great big hole where everybody gets thrown into the same place with the same level of torment. No. Every person's life will be evaluated uniquely and every person's punishment will be consistent with that unique evaluation.

For example, and I need to explain this cause it's very important to understand there are degrees of punishment consistent with degrees of sinfulness. In Matthew 10 verses 14 and 15, it says the words of Jesus, "Whoever does not receive you nor heed your word," He's talking to those He sends out to preach, the Twelve, "whoever doesn't receive you nor heed your word as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly 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." In other words, when the people who died, when God buried Sodom and Gomorrah under fire and brimstone, when those people are raised to stand before the great white throne judgment, and the people of some town or some village that rejected the preaching of the Apostles are raised and they stand there side by side, the punishment that comes to Sodom and Gomorrah will be more tolerable than the punishment that comes to those who rejected the gospel, or the preaching of the Apostles.

So there is a more and a less tolerable punishment, fitting the level of sin. However, I might hastily add it's only the degree to which you gnash your teeth, the degree to which you feel the pain and remorse in the pangs of conscience and the fire of judgment.

In the eleventh chapter of Matthew, again verse 22, "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." He's talking to the town of Chorazin, the town of Bethsaida. "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades for if the miracles that occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." You see, there are degrees of toleration in punishment.

In Mark's gospel, as you come over to chapter 12, you find another indication of this in verse 38. In His teaching Jesus was saying, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like respectful greetings in the market places and chief seats in the synagogues...that's their spiritual hypocrisy...they want places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for appearance sake offer long prayers...this line comes next...they will receive greater condemnation." There is a greater and a lesser condemnation.

In Luke chapter 12 you find the same truth again reiterated in another fashion through means of a story that Jesus tells, a story about a master and his servants. And it says in chapter 12 verse 47, "That slave who knew his master's will and didn't get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes. The one who didn't know it and committed deeds worthy of a flogging will receive but a few." Hell will have few lashes for some and many for others.

Hebrews chapter 10 adds another passage to these. It says, "Of how much greater punishment shall the one be thought worthy who has trodden underfoot the Son of God and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing?"

In other words, if you hear the gospel and reject it, you have a greater judgment than one who didn't hear it. There will be greater and lesser degrees of punishment in hell. And so the record is kept of every person's life so that the judgment and the punishment can fit the iniquity.

If a person is to remain unconverted, listen to what I say, the sooner he dies the better. The less he hears, the better because the longer he lives and the longer the list and the books becomes and the

more he hears and rejects, the greater the punishment.

Why? Romans 2:5, "By your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are piling up wrath against yourself for the day of wrath." You're just accumulating it. And so I say if the sinner is to remain unconverted, the sooner he dies the better, the less he lives the better. Every day the sinner lives, every evil thought he has, every unholy pleasure he enjoys, every ungrateful breath he breathes, every selfish act, every gospel word rejected, every divine truth spurned adds to his eternal punishment.

I could sum it up by putting it this way. When God allows the sinner to prosper, he is not making things better for him, he's making things worse. Even time spent trying to earn salvation while rejecting grace only adds to the ultimate punishment. Therefore the unsaved religious in Christianity will suffer the hottest hell. The unsaved religious in Christianity will suffer the hottest hell because they have trampled on Christ and by means of self-righteousness attempted to attain salvation. They know the most therefore they suffer the greatest. All sinners in hell will be completely miserable but not equally miserable. The punishment fits the crime. And each crime brings the eternal judgment according to the nature of that crime. That's why the books were opened. The judgment fits the record and God is absolutely and exactly and precisely just.

And then verse 12 says, "And another book was opened which is the book of life." Another book was opened. This book is not unlike another kind of book in ancient times. They had books in which they kept the record of criminals, we have them today, don't we? If you have a criminal record, it's on file, stored up in books until we went to computerization. Computers today fulfill the function of books. The criminal record is there.

In ancient times they had those books and they put the records of the criminals in the books. And every unregenerate person in the history of the world stands as a condemned criminal before God who has kept a perfect record of his sins. But ancient cities also had another book, it was typical of ancient cities to have not only a book in which they listed the record of the criminals, but they had another book which was the book of the names of loyal citizens. They had a register for the city and if you were a loyal, upstanding, good and noble person, you were in the book. You were not listed with the criminals, you were in the book of the loyal. And John sees at this particular scene in timelessness and spacelessness, at the great white throne, there is also a book with the name of loyal citizens.

This book has been referred to in the past. Daniel makes reference to it. In Daniel 12:1, "When the time of distress comes...he says...everyone who is found written in the book will be rescued." All the noble, all those written in the book of life, "And they will awake to everlasting life."

Even Malachi talks about such a book. Malachi 3:16, "Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another when they heard about judgment and the Lord gave attention and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the Lord." He put their name in His book and He said they'll be Mine on the day that I prepare My own possession and I'll spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him and distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who doesn't.

God has a book. In that book are the names of His own, the names of those who believed in Him, who were loyal to Him, who were faithful to Him, who came to Him for grace. And Jesus said this, to

His disciples in Luke 10:20, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." This is a special book. It's the book that lists those who belong to the Lord, those who are the loyal faithful servants of God. And he says the book was opened which is the book of life.

This book contains the names of those who will not die the second death. It contains the names of those who will live. The book of life, by the way, has already been mentioned in Revelation 3:5, Revelation 13:8, Revelation 17:8, it will be mentioned again in chapter 21 verse 27 and chapter 22 verse 19, this book of life.

What is this book? It is just that. It is the listing of those who will have eternal life, the listing of those who belong to God. Philippians 4:3, Paul talks about the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. Hebrews 12:23, "To the general assembly, the church of the firstborn, who are written in heaven." It's the heavenly book recording the names of the redeemed. And you remember, don't you, that God wrote those names before the foundation of the world. It is a list of the elect...the list of the faithful, the list of the redeemed of all the ages, all who had their sins forgiven because they've come to Christ.

But the dead, it says, verse 12, were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. The implication is that none of their names were in that other book. It was there but their names weren't. And the rest of the dead, all who gather there, all who are not a part of the first resurrection, the resurrection unto life, all who were not a part of that are gathered and all the dead had to be judged out of the things written in the books according to their deeds. The implication, because their names were not in the book of life.

Some of them are going to be startled. This is the day...this is the event in which the Lord is going to hear, "Lord, Lord, have we not done this...and done that...in Your name?" And He says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity."

Over fifty times in the Bible the standard for eternal judgment is presented as deeds, works. And the dead are judged according to their deeds, all of which are recorded. It says it again at the end of 13, "According to their deeds." The sinner can either plead guilty while he is still alive in this world, acknowledge his guilt, repent and ask God for a complete pardon by grace based on the substitutionary death of Christ or he can go to trial after he dies. It's his choice. But that trial will be on the basis of his having kept the standard of God perfectly. He will fall short and hell awaits. The pardon is there for the one who pleads guilty and comes to receive the grace and forgiveness of Christ. So you plead guilty now or later. You plead guilty, cast yourself on the mercy of a gracious judge, or keep pleading innocent and some day you'll stand before God and be pronounced guilty.

The final comment on the judgment standard is in verse 15. "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." You see, the only hope to erase the record of damning sins is to have your name in the book of life. The only hope to escape the final trial is to have come penitently, acknowledging your guilt, crying out to a merciful God to forgive you for Jesus' sake, and having your name written in the book of life.

Some on that bench standing before the throne of God are going to ask, "Is my name there? Is my name there indicating that my sin has been forgiven, that my sin has been covered by the

righteousness of Christ through faith in His death? Am I in the book of remembrance? Am I among the listed, loyal, submissive subjects of the King of Kings? Am I numbered among the holy children of God who wear the robes of heavenly righteousness?" Sadly, none of the names are there. They chose to go it on their own, face the tribunal of God rather than plead guilty and receive mercy and a pardon through Christ.

People talk like that so often. "I'm a good person, I think when I get there I've done enough good things for God to let me in." Oh what a tragic deception that is. Either you come now, recognizing your sin, that you are cursed, you have fallen short, you are not perfect, you are not as holy as God, as perfect as the Father in heaven, you have violated the law and you plead for forgiveness and mercy and you receive the gift of grace now or you go to trial and are eternally damned. The folly of sinners is that they choose to face the tribunal of God rather...and plead innocent, rather than plead guilty now and receive a pardon through Jesus Christ.

So, you see the scene and the summons and the standard by which they are measured. That leaves us with one other great reality, and I'll save it till next time, the sentence itself--the sentence itself. What is the lake of fire? And what does it mean to be thrown into it?

Just to make sure we cover what the Spirit of God would want us to say tonight and in this message, the lake of fire is eternal punishment. There's more detail than that, and we'll look at that next time. But suffice it for this moment to know it is eternal punishment. And that's what everyone receives who rejects the grace of God in Jesus Christ. What a foolish thing, what a horrible thing.

And you say, "Why would a loving God do this?" Well, because a loving God is also a just God. "Why would a loving God do this?" It's not that a loving God has done this, that it's a sinning person has done it. In order to get to the lake of fire you have to reject God whom you come into this world knowing, at least by the revelation that is in you and around you. You have to reject moral law which is written in the fabric of your heart. You have to reject conscience, the divine warning system given to every human being. You have to reject the revelation even of Christ that is in the world. You have to reject the gospel, you have to reject the free pardon. You have to pass through a lot of gates to get to the lake of fire. You have to reject the sweet words of Scripture, "That God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." You have to reject the kind invitation, "Him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out." You have to reject the words of the Apostle where he says, "The gift of God is eternal life, though the wages of sin are death." You have to reject the wonderful promise that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. You gave to step on the body of Jesus Christ. You have to walk past the open tomb. It's not a question of the justice of God, it's a question of man and woman loving sin and buying the delusion that in the end you'll be good enough. Don't blame God. Hell is for people who forever will have no one to blame but themselves. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, as we think about this, it is so overwhelming to us that words fail. We...we look at our own lives, first of all, and we're just overwhelmed with gratitude. We feel like bursting into a doxology of praise to thank You for saving us. At the same time, Lord, we feel so grieved, distressed deep down, sick at our stomachs to contemplate the terrible end of the ungodly. No wonder the Apostle John in seeing this felt bitterness in his stomach, no wonder Paul said, "Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men." O God, how can we hold back, how can we not call men to repentance? How can we not plead with sinners to avoid the judgment? If we can, we are indeed callous, and cold,

uncaring, not at all like Christ who sat over Jerusalem and wept because they were lost. And not at all like You, for You cried through the eyes of Jeremiah at lost people. Father, help us to understand what's coming. Help us to understand what is coming, not just in the final judgment but in the moment of death for every ungodly person for they enter into the temporary Hades of suffering, only to be ultimately transported to the final hell.

Father, we ask that You would make us thankful on the one hand, and zealous to proclaim the saving gospel of a gracious, loving God who calls and calls and calls and calls, though sinners will not hear. We like Paul have been given the ministry of reconciliation, to cry out to people to be reconciled to You through Christ. We thank You that You've made it possible and that You offer any sinner who will acknowledge his guilt a pardon and a resurrection of life rather than a resurrection to the great white throne. May these truths sink deep into us and give us a fresh new zeal for those outside who are headed for such a terrible, terrible future.

And, Father, we know that this ministry is the thing for which the church exists on earth and the reason we live. Give us opportunity, O God. Open doors so that we can share the pardon that is available in Christ. And we ask these things in His great name. Amen.

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