

Last Judgment Sunday
November 14, 2004
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Revelation 20:10-15 *“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

My dear fellow believers in Jesus Christ, who will stand uncondemned before God on Judgment Day because of what Jesus has done for us.

TV and media sure know how to pick up on people’s love for courtroom drama. Are you one of those avid watchers of Law & Order? Are you one of those addicted to the so-called reality shows like Judge Judy or People’s Court? Were your eyes glued to the TV during the OJ Simpson trial? Did you follow the recent trials of Kobe Bryant, Martha Stewart and Scott Peterson?

In this part of God’s Word (Revelation) we fast-forward to a certain day God has set in eternity. It’s the last day on earth better known as Judgment Day. That day has a courtroom drama flair to it. No one knows when this day will come. It could happen soon or it could be far off in the future. God alone knows, but he has said that day will come unexpectedly. That means we are to live each day as if it were or could be the last day. We need to live each day with firm faith in Jesus.

Now, I know there are all kinds of different and confusing teachings about the end times floating around. Lots of you have read the Left Behind series or seen the movies. Some of you listen to Christian Radio stations and are influenced by the teaching of Reformed churches on the end times. I want to give you a quick summary of what we believe the Bible teaches about the end times and the Last Day. The Old Testament has many references to “the last days.” They refer to the period of time that began when God entered our world as a baby in Bethlehem, crushed Satan’s head and destroyed his power over us with Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead before he ascended into heaven, and this era will continue until the time when Jesus comes again as King of kings and Lord of lords to judge all the living and dead. It is the New Testament era in which we are now living. Earlier in this chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation we

find one of the most misinterpreted parts of the Bible. We're told that after Christ's resurrection Satan will be bound for 1000 years. Some interpret this as a literal 1000 years, a period of time somewhere in the future known as the millennium when Christ will reign on earth. Like all numbers in the Book of Revelation this number is figurative and not a real fixed number. It is simply a long period of time. During this long period of time Jesus is ruling in heaven over all things on earth for the good of the church (Eph 1:19-23). And we, his believers, are reigning with him (Eph 2:6). At the end of the long period of time, the 1000 years, Satan is released. He will gather his forces of evil for one last ditch battle (The Battle of Armageddon – Rev 19:17-21) in which Satan will be decisively defeated by Jesus Christ and cast into the lake of fire with all his evil forces. Christ will return to earth in majesty and glory as King of kings and Lord of lords. His holy angels will accompany him. The trumpet will sound throughout the earth (1 Co 15:52). The dead in Christ will rise first (1 Th 4:16-17), then we who are left will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This is when the rapture will take place – at the end of all time right before the Last Judgment.

Then will come the terrifying destruction of the earth, as we know it, by fire (2 Pe 3:7-13). Believers will escape this wrath of God. All unbelievers will be destroyed together with the earth. It will be a fearful and terrifying day when they look for refuge and find none (Hos 10:8; Lk 23:30). The bodies of all the dead will be reunited with their souls.

And then comes the Last Judgment. Everyone will appear before the judgment throne of Christ to be judged and give an accounting for how they lived their lives. Books will be opened. One set of books records all the deeds of everyone's lives. It is a courtroom scene, only in this court perfect justice is given out. Then another book is opened – the Book of Life. Not everyone's name is written in this book. Let me ask you a question. Do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and do you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead for you? If you answered "yes," then your name is written in this book of Life. You are saved forever! And like Jesus once said,

REJOICE THAT YOUR NAME IS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE!

I. The Last Day Will Be A Horrifying Day Of Judgment For Those Whose Names Are Missing.

Every person who does not put their faith in Jesus as Savior will join the devil and all his evil forces in hell. They will be thrown into the lake of fire. This is called the second death. The first death is actually our natural condition, the one we were born into this world with. We were born with a sinful, unbelieving nature, which is the reason Jesus told us we needed to be "born again of water and the spirit" (Jn 3:5). That happens when the gospel works faith in our hearts through God's Word or the Sacrament of Baptism. If a person never comes to faith in Christ during his/her lifetime, their physical death will end with their second death – being cast into hell forever.

I've seen all the cartoons and heard all the jokes about hell, but hell is not a joking matter. The Bible has more to say about hell, its existence and condition, than just about any

other topic. Hell is a very real place of intense suffering and pain. Vs. 10 says, *“They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* Hell is not something to be taken lightly. Jesus described it as a place of outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of eternal decay where their worm does not die. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man died as an unbeliever and found himself in hell. Listen to the words he used to describe his condition: “in torment” and “in agony in this fire.” Words fail to fully describe just how horrible a place hell is.

The worst part about hell is you are forever separated from God, without hope of a second chance or a way out. There is no chance of an appeal. That’s why it is called the second death. It is forever. In physical death the soul separates from the body. The body returns to the ground, the soul returns to God who made it. In the second death, body and soul are forever separated from God for all eternity. Again, words fail to describe just how terrible and ugly this fate is.

Let’s go back to the scene described here once more. Satan has been thrown into the lake of fire. Never again will he tempt or harm anyone. He is removed forever. We are free from him. We see a great white throne and Jesus is seated on it. It is the throne of Judgment. And Jesus is the judge. The first time Jesus came into our world was not to judge the world, nor to condemn anyone. The gospel of John clearly teaches, *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (Jn 3:17)*. That was Jesus’ mission. He accomplished that by offering to the Father a lifetime of perfect obedience to his every command. He did that in our place. He finished his mission by taking from us the sin and the guilt and the punishment we deserved and offering his life as a sacrifice to pay for us and win us back to God. God accepted that sacrifice by raising Jesus to life on Easter and declared that we were fully forgiven, at peace with God, totally accepted and complete in Christ (Ro 5:1).

But when Christ comes to earth again, he will come as Judge of all people who have ever lived on the face of this planet. Paul taught that in a sermon he preached in Athens, *“For he [God the Father] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31)*. See also John 5:22-23, 27-30. Jesus earned this right because he suffered, bled and died to rescue all people. That was the reason for his first coming to our world.

As we look at the Son of God seated on the great white throne an awesome scene takes place. Standing before him is a sea of people, too numerous to count – all the people who have ever lived – great and small. We’ll see presidents and popes standing next to pimps and pushers; CEO’s next to janitors; generals next to privates. Whatever status we had in this life means nothing before the Judgment seat of Christ. Like the cross, his Judgment throne is the great equalizer among men.

This is when the books are opened. First comes the book of deeds. Can you imagine every sinful thought, every hurtful, unwholesome word, every evil action recorded and then read back? Now, I want to clear up some wrong thinking about judgment day a lot of Christians have. Ask most people and they will tell you they are really afraid of Judgment

Day and owning up to their past life. What they don't realize is this: only the evil deeds of unbelievers are recorded in those books and read back on the day of judgment as evidence of their unbelief and willful rejection of Christ. That's why judgment day will be such a dreadful day for them as the book of Hebrews (10:31 – read 26-31) says, *“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* That's the fate unbelievers will experience.

It will be just the opposite for believers. Only the good deeds we have done in our lifetime are recorded in these books and will be read back as evidence of our faith in Christ (read Matt 25:31-46). But what happened to all the bad things we've thought, said, and done in life, and all the good things we were supposed to do but didn't, you ask? All those sins – every single one – have been erased and blotted out by the blood of Jesus. Like God said through Isaiah (43:25), *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”* Imagine that! You hear the Word of God. Your conscience condemns you. The Holy Spirit convicts you as guilty of so many sins. You look at the cross and the price Christ paid for your crimes and sins. In humility you are moved to repent and confess your sins to God. You don't make excuses for them. You don't try to cover them up. You stand naked before God and confess everything. And God says to you, *“Not only do I forgive you **all** your sins, I have also blotted them out, erased them from my memory. I have forgotten them forever.”* Just like we are told in Psalm 130:3-4, *“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”* That is one of the most incredible truths about Christianity. God removed all the bad from our past and accepts only the good because of Jesus' bloody sacrifice on the cross. And that is what everyone will find out on Judgment Day.

II. It Will Be A Day Of Great Joy & Deliverance For All Who Trust In Christ.

Death and Hades (the place where the dead dwell) are thrown into the lake of fire to join the devil and all his evil allies. Death, which is our last great enemy (1 Co 15:26), was defeated by Jesus when he rose from the dead. Death will no longer touch us with its cold, clammy hands. Everything that ever harmed us in life is now gone forever.

A second book is opened. It is the Lamb's Book of Life. Suddenly you hear your name read _____, and the Savior says to you, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”* (Mt 25:34). What a day of joy that will be for you and me! That's why Jesus reminds us that if we are still alive on the day he returns not to look down in fear, but to look up for our redemption is drawing near (Lk 21:28).

So what does all this mean for you and me right here and now? Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is the realization that we very well might die first before Jesus returns. And when that happens we immediately face the Lord and are judged as it says in He 9:27, *“man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”* And since none of us knows when the day of our death will come, we need to be prepared for that day with a rock-solid faith in Jesus Christ. That point was driven home to me rather forcefully. Are

you ready to die? Are you ready to stand before God? Like the prophet Amos said, *“Prepare to meet your God.”* We can’t dink around with God’s gift of faith. We can’t pretend we have no time for God in our lives, no time to worship him, to pray to him, to read his Word. Again the book of Hebrews asks a very chilling question, *“how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (2:3).* Trusting in Jesus is our only means of escape on the day we die, our judgment day.

The second thing that comes to mind is something the apostle Paul once said, *“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Co 5:11).* Since we know how bad that day will be for unbelievers we want to do everything we can to save souls now while we can. We will overcome whatever fears we have that would hold us back from sharing what we know about Christ and the way of salvation with others who don’t know him. We will get involved in the playing field of life, in other people’s lives, instead of remaining a passive Christian, just existing but contributing little to nothing to the rescue mission of the church. We will want to give all the money we can to make sure the gospel gets sent out into all of the world. We will do whatever it takes to persuade men and women that Jesus is the world’s only hope, the world’s only Savior, their only hope, their only Savior. Like Jesus said, *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (Jn 9:4).*

The Last Judgment is not something for us to fear, but look forward to. Thanks to Jesus and all he has done for us, we can not only look forward to that day, but we can treat each day now as if it were our last, and work as hard as we can to make sure that more and more names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, right under our own name. Amen.

Personal Application Points:

1. Write a Spiritual Growth Plan to make sure your faith remains firm and strong at all times. Questions to ask yourself are: How often will I go to church to worship God and feed my soul? How often will I receive Lord’s Supper for my personal forgiveness and to strengthen my faith? How much time will I set aside daily to read my Bible? How much time will I dedicate daily for my personal one-on-one worship time with God and for prayer? How much time will I set aside weekly for an in depth study of God’s Word either on my own or in a Bible Class?
2. Write a list of all the people you personally know who don’t know Jesus as their Savior. Start with members of your family, then relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, casual acquaintances, etc. Start praying for them. Figure out how to tell them in your own words what Jesus means to you, and especially what Jesus has done for you (on the cross, with the empty tomb, and personally in your life). When you get the opportunity, share that message simply and honestly with them. Then pray later that God works that message into their hearts by his Spirit.
3. Decide that you will be a partner with God in his redemptive mission. Plan your giving to support his work. Get involved in the church’s ministry in some area that challenges you, excites you and uses your talents. Sit down with a pastor for help in this area if you need to.