

Text: Rev. 20:11-15

Title: "The Great White Throne Judgment"

Time: 11/18/2018 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you ever wanted to crawl into a hole somewhere and hide? During one of my first band concerts, I held my horn by the tuning slide and dropped it while filing up on stage in front of the entire auditorium. I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide.

More recently, I showed up late to the championship game of my Jr. high team. I and the players I was responsible to bring to the game arrived just in time to accept the second-place trophy after the game. I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide.

Our passage describes a scene from which the entire heaven and earth will want to crawl into a hole and hide, and there will be no place for them to do so (v. 11). What could possibly make the whole universe feel that way? The sight of a great white throne and Him who sits upon it will make the whole universe feel this way, but there will be no place to hide.

Along with creation, providence, salvation, and revelation, judgment is one of the five great categories of the mighty works of God by which He glorifies His holy name. It is uniquely the category of His works that is described as His *strange work* in Scripture (Isa. 28:21, "For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act").

What makes God's work of judgment His strange work? I would mention two things in this regard.

First, I think judgment is God's strange work because it is uniquely foreign to the pleasure of His nature. There is a

sense in which God creates, plans, provides, saves, and reveals Himself to His own glory because He takes great pleasure in doing so. Judgment is the one work He does, in which, the Scriptures tell us explicitly, He takes no pleasure.

Ezek. 33:11, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Judgment is a strange work of God in that it is uniquely foreign to His sense of pleasure.

The second sense in which judgment is a uniquely strange category of God's works is that it is a work that He must do given certain circumstances.

We normally think of God as the one who never must do anything. He did not have to create, to work the plan of providence, to save anyone, or to reveal Himself to anybody. In the great white throne we see His greatness and His goodness. He is great (His throne is great, v. 11), and He is good (His throne is white, v. 11), and He could be both great and good without ever creating, planning, saving, or revealing. But because He is great and good, judging sin is a work He must do. So, in that way also, His judgments are His strange work.

From beginning to end, the Bible is an account of God's work of judgment in response to man's sin. At the beginning God told Adam and Eve, "in the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). He made good on that promise. When

Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually and began to physically.

In the middle of the biblical record, God judged man's sin on the cross of Calvary in the person of His precious sinless Son, Jesus Christ: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). His work of salvation had to be also a work of judgment, so that He could be the just Justifier of those who call upon Him by faith for salvation. To do His work of salvation, He had to do His work of judgment on the cross of Calvary.

And here at the end of our Bibles and at the end of time, in our passage this morning, we have God's final act of judgment – the last time He must do this strange work. It is called "The Great White Throne Judgement," and I want us to see three things about this work of God this morning.

I. The final judgment will be a universal judgment (vv. 11-12a).

Illustration: I saw a news story that made me admire a video game (which had never happened before), albeit probably not enough to play it. The game is called *Foldit*, and it was developed by an assistant professor of Computer Science at Northeastern University. The object of the game is to add or subtract from a protein molecule in such a way that it interacts with a toxin molecule to neutralize it. It is like finding the right piece to a life-saving puzzle. Evidently, the game has been helpful in AIDS research in the past.

Application: Bible prophecy tells us much about the future, but it does so in the form of a life-saving puzzle. The great white throne judgment is an important piece in this life-saving puzzle. Some things are very clear to us about this judgment at the outset:

- This is a judgment that comes after the 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth called the millennium (20:1-9).
- It is also a judgment that comes after the final judgment of Satan (20:10).
- It is a judgment that no one can run from (vv. 11).
- Finally, it is a judgment that begins with a resurrection (20:5, 13).

It is this last point that is the key to escaping the consequences of being found guilty at this judgment. The resurrection this passage speaks of is what Daniel called the awakening of “some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2), and it is what Jesus referred to when He warned about “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

The good news here is that these passages in Daniel and in the Gospels do not speak of a single resurrection, but of two.

There is the first resurrection in Daniel for the Jewish people and martyrs of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 20:6, Dan. 12:1-3). That happens prior to the millennial kingdom and after the Great Tribulation. It means that none of the true believers of Daniel’s people, Israel, have any part in what we speak of here. Nor will those who lost their lives because they refused to take the mark of the beast and worship his image.

Jesus also mentioned not only the resurrection of damnation, but also “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29). He would later assure the apostles of His church to not let their heart be troubled, because He was going to prepare a place for His church, come again, and receive them to Himself, that where He is there they may be also (John 14:1-3).

So, this life-saving puzzle of future resurrections has at least three pieces. There is (1) the resurrection of the true church prior to the Great Tribulation, (2) the resurrection of true Israel after the Great Tribulation, and (3) the resurrection of

everyone else who is still dead at the end of the millennium in our passage.

It is in that sense that this final judgment will be universal. It will capture everyone who is still dead.

What this means is that, unless we have a part in the other resurrections, we no more have the capacity to escape this judgment than we have the capacity to escape death. Heb. 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." There is no escaping God's work of judgment. But we do not have to be part of this final resurrection and judgment. We can chose a different resurrection. The choice is ours.

II. The final judgment will be by the books (vv. 12b-13).

Illustration: The Lord Jesus grew up in a region in which most people rejected His saving gospel. In Matthew 12 He pronounces some specific woes upon these towns (Matt. 12:14-42).

In those woes He says something fascinating about the final judgment of those who were rejecting His gospel – he says that the Ninevites and the Queen of the South would stand up in the midst of that judgment and condemn them, because they repented of sin and believed for salvation at the preaching of Jonah at the counsel of Solomon, and yet those towns rejected the preaching and the counsel of the One who was greater than both Jonah and Solomon.

Application: I believe that these comments of the Lord about the final judgment of Corazin and Bethsaida in their rejection of Christ as the Savior help us make an educated guess about the content of these books that guide the final judgment of the lost in this passage.

I think they are the books of the Bible, and what the Lord is going to do in opening them is that He is going to point out how the work of the Queen of the South was repentance and faith, and that the work of the Ninevites was the same. And then He will point out how the work of the sinner is unbelief and the stubborn refusal to repent of sin and turn to Christ.

Jesus also told these towns that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in this judgment for them, because they had greater opportunity to repent and believe than did Sodom and Gomorrah. The more opportunity to hear the gospel we reject in unbelief, the more harsh the consequences of this judgment will be.

Praise the Lord for that other book. It is the book of life. Scripture tells us that it is the Lamb's book of life. Simply put, the Scriptures are clear that like the Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah, we are written in the book if we belong to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 3:5; "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels"; 1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith").

Those who overcome are not blotted out of the book; those who are born of God and believe overcome.

Is your name written there? Do you belong to the Lamb? Have you repented and believed like the Queen of the South and the Ninevites, or do you reject Christ's offer of salvation in the unbelief of His home towns?

III. The final judgment will be final (vv. 14-15).

Illustration: I told you a few weeks ago about a video on the news page of the Washington Post I saw that showed a fire-fighter's recording of a burning sulfur mound in Worland, Wyoming. Evidently, the fire was caused by the remains of a Texas Gulf Sulfur Plant that operated in the 1950's. The video is available on line, and the burning sulfur does indeed form a windblown lake that is burning.

Application: The fire-fighters in the video were waiting for the fire to burn out. As awful as that scene was, we can be assured that it is not still burning today. The California wild-fires we have been reading about in the news recently have been awful and destructive, but at least they burn out in time, and people can rebuild and live safely until another fire comes.

The lake of fire we read about in this passage is God's final work of judgment – the last one He must do. Jesus told us that hell is a place where the worm does not die, nor is the fire quenched. Scripture clearly warns us of God's punishment of unbelievers in resurrected bodies, which is conscious, eternal, and fiery. God warns us, but many tragically have rejected God's warning choosing this end for themselves.

Conclusion: The night I was born again, repented of my sin, and in faith asked Christ to save me, was an evening I heard this warning faithfully preached from this passage. I have tried to do that for you today. Perhaps this will be your day of salvation.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*