

Judgment Day

Revelation 20:7-15

Of all the truths contained in the word of God, there is probably no truth that offends and terrifies the world like the truth of Judgment Day. Those with a guilty conscience are afraid to die precisely because they sense they are not prepared to meet God. They are not prepared for judgment. Those who have hardened their conscience are offended by the idea. The idea that there is a God in heaven who will hold them accountable for their sin and cast them into hell for their sin seems preposterous. It feels like an assault on human autonomy and a hateful denial of basic human goodness — and of course it is both. If judgment day is anything, it is a holy, divine assault on the fantasy of human autonomy and a devastating exposing of human evil. It will be manifestly clear on that day that there is “none who do good, no not one” (see Rom. 3:10).

The truth before us this morning is one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. We confess with the church around the world that Jesus “rose again from the dead...He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty” — *“from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”*

The world doesn’t mind the Christmas Jesus, the baby born in a manger. They don’t mind the Easter Jesus. Many will say they believe in this Jesus. It’s the Judgment Day Jesus that causes the offense. But this is who he is. The baby born of the virgin was the very Son of God and he has promised that he is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Every man, woman, and child will experience that day, that moment – and the judgment they receive on that day will determine their eternal destiny.

In chapter 20, Jesus is showing us what will happen at the end of time.

- Satan will be released for a short season to make war on the church.
- He will be suddenly defeated and cast forever into hell.
- The dead will be raised to stand before the great white throne of judgment.

I. The Destruction of the Devil (vv. 7-9a)

A. The Devil Released

20:7 *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison.”*

Two weeks ago, as we studied the first part of this chapter, we saw that when Jesus Christ came to earth, the Devil was bound for a thousand years. We saw that the “thousand years” was not a literal number but represented the age of the gospel. It is the time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ in which the gospel is being preached and the

nations are being gathered into the church. During this time the Devil is certainly active, but his power and ability to deceive the nations is curtailed as Christ is building His church. But at the end of verse 3 we were told, "**After that he must be released for a little while.**"

At the end of the gospel age there will be a short period of time when the Devil will be "released" and allowed to once again "deceive the nations" (v. 8). He will gather them for battle and attack the church (v. 9). Remember, this is spiritual warfare, not guns and tanks. Jesus is telling us that the world will seem to be controlled by evil. People will be increasingly under the power of evil.

Paul speaks of this in **2 Timothy 3:1–4**:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

During this time, the Devil, will specifically "gather the nations" in order to attack the church of Jesus Christ. They will "surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city." Jesus tells us that "their number is like the sand of sea." In other words, the church will seem to be completely powerless and hopelessly overmatched. All the world will be against her. Many will be put to death. All will suffer to some degree.

Why does Jesus tell us these things?

1. He wants us to be prepared! Events like this could shake our faith. But Jesus tells us that these things are going to take place, all by his own sovereign purpose – so that when it seems like the Devil has triumphed, when we are scorned and derided, persecuted and placed in prison, we don't have to wonder what's going on! Jesus told us that this would be our experience in the world, and we know the outcome!
2. He wants us to be assured! Jesus wants us to have the confidence in the face of persecution and death that, no matter how mighty the Devil seems, his doom is sure. Remember a few weeks ago, when I asked what difference it would make if before you watched the big game, you were told the final score? You could endure the setbacks with confidence. You know the final score. Jesus is telling us the final score. No matter how much evil the Devil brings, we know the final score. One little word shall fell him. In a moment the Devil will be defeated and destroyed.

B. The Devil Destroyed

In verse 9 we have what is possibly the shortest rendition of a battle in all of human history. We are told that the army of evil “marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, **but fire came down from heaven and consumed them.**” And that’s the end. The defeat is sudden, dramatic, and complete.

This is often how the Lord works his saving power. Boys and girls, do you remember the story of the Red Sea? One moment the children of God are in peril of being destroyed. Pharaoh has rallied his army — the greatest military power in the world of that day — to attack them. The Israelites are caught between the Red Sea and the oncoming army with no place to escape. And then the sea miraculously opens for them. And the next thing you know, Pharaoh’s entire army is dead, drowned in the water of the Red Sea, swept away by the judgment of Almighty God. That was a foretaste of the final destruction of the Devil. In verse 10 we are shown the end:

***20:10** And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

And that is the end of evil in God’s world! Jesus wins! The Devil is a defeated foe and will one day soon be an eternally destroyed foe. Simply gone; never, ever to be seen again in God’s new world.

But it is not only the Devil who will be judged – so will those who followed him.

II. The Judgment of Men

***20:11** Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.*

This is Jesus coming to judge the living and the dead. We are told a few things about the judgment of that day.

A. It is Unavoidable

The great white judgment throne is inevitable and inescapable. Every single person who ever lived will stand before it. Notice verse 13:

***20:13** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged.*

The ancient world saw the sea, particularly the bottom of the sea, almost as another world. It was unreachable. You couldn’t be more lost to this world than to die and sink to the abyss at the bottom of the sea. But Jesus tells us that the sea will give up its dead. The bodies of all men will be brought to life. No matter if you are cremated or buried at sea, no matter if your

body simply becomes dust and scatters to the wind – every person will be present and accounted for on the day of judgment.

B. It is Just

As Jesus takes his seat, we are told that "books were opened." This is the moment of judgment. The judge is seated on the great white throne. The dead are brought before him, and now the evidence is presented. That is what the books are — they are the record of every life.

This is not literal, but it shows us that every thought we entertain, every word we speak, every motive of the heart, every act we ever perform is all recorded. The evidence presented on that last day will simply be the evidence of the life that was actually lived.

20:12 The dead were judged by what was written in the books, *according to what they had done.*

20:13 *"They were judged, each one, according to what they had done."*

The book of evidence that will condemn you was not written by God. Rather, it is the book that was written by the thoughts, words, and deeds of each person. You wrote the book. The Judge is just reading from it. No one will be able to say, "That isn't true" or, "That wasn't me." Their own conscience will convict them as they are shown the evidence of their life.

This is one of the great deceptions of the Devil – that there is no link between what we do in this life and how we spend eternity. That we can say what we want, think what we want, sin as we want – with no eternal consequences to consider. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. What happens in secret places of your mind can't hurt you. If you are only sinning like other people are sinning, you won't have to suffer a penalty.

It's a lie from the Devil. What happens in Vegas is written down in a book. What happens in the secret places of your mind is recorded and kept for the day of judgment. Though you may be a perfectly normal sinner, every sin is an offense against God and will testify against you on the day of judgment.

Matt. 12:36–37 *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

C. It is Irrevocable

20:15 *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

On the day of judgment, there is no plea bargaining, no reduced sentence, and no appeals process. All those who are found guilty will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Again, I don't believe John is describing a literal lake of fire. It's symbolic. But as we've asked before, symbolic of what? It is symbolic of eternal misery and torment under the just wrath and judgment of King Jesus. The lake of fire is the "second death," eternal separation from the favor of God. Jesus wants us to understand that every person who stands before the judgment throne to be tried on the basis of their own life will be lost.

Notice, there are two different books in our text. We've already talked about "the books" – the books of evidence written by the sinful thoughts, words, and acts of men. But there is another book called "the book of life."

20:12 *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then **another book** was opened, which is the book of life.*

III. The Book of Life

What is this book, the book of life? It was first mentioned way back in chapter 3.

Rev. 3:5 *The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.*

The book of life is the book written **not** by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds but by God's saving thoughts and God's saving words and God's saving deeds. The book of life is a book written before the foundation of the world. It is the book that contains the names of all those the Father chose to save, all those who were given to Christ to be redeemed. It is the most precious book in all the world, for everyone whose name is written in the book of life will NOT be judged on the basis of their sinful deeds but will be judged on the basis of Christ's saving deeds!

The great division on the day of judgment will not be between good people and bad people. The Bible says that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (see Rom. 3:10). The only difference on that day, is whether or not your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. That is the thing that determines where you will spend eternity.

So, the ultimate question for your life and for your eternal destiny is this: is your name written there? When the book of life is opened, will your name be found there?

I think a common answer is, "I hope so." But many of us aren't sure. But nowhere in Scripture are we called to hope for the best when it comes to Judgment Day. That is the answer religion gives: do your best and hope for the best.

But that isn't the message of the gospel. The gospel gives a clear command followed by a clear promise: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!"

John 5:24 *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Rom. 10:9–13 *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" ...¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

There is a way to know that your name is written in the book of life. Confess your sin. Trust that God has sent his Son Jesus to make atonement for your sin. Accept the great invitation of the gospel: "Come all you who thirst, come to the water" (see Is. 55). Submit your life to the loving lordship of Jesus Christ, believing in his name, living for his cause, and you can know that you will never be condemned!

Rom. 8:1, 34 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

What a joy the day of judgment will be! **John Calvin** points out that every Christian will find that the Judge is the very One who loved them and gave his life for them. The Judge is our Redeemer!

"Hence arises a wonderful consolation: our judgment is in the hands of Him who has already destined us to share with him the honor of judging! He does not mount His judgment seat to condemn us! How could our most merciful Ruler destroy His own people? How could the Head of the church scatter his own members? How could our great Advocate condemn his own clients?"

Do you see, if you are in Christ, if you have confessed your sin to him, then your sin is forgiven, your guilt is pardoned. There is not a single thought, word, or act that will have the power to condemn you – for when Jesus forgave you, he forgave it all.

Every true believer can anticipate with great eagerness the day of judgment because there will be no condemnation there – only Jesus who gave his life for us.

But to those who have confessed, loved and served the Lord below
He will say, "Come near, ye blessed. See the kingdom I bestow.

You forever, shall my love and glory know."