

Judgment Day *Revelation 20:11-15*

Revelation 20:11-15 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Introduction

When some people consider Christianity, the first thought that comes into their mind is a preacher preaching a hell-fire and brimstone sermon, condemning everything in his sight. Often unbelievers will claim that the reason they cannot embrace Christianity is because of its teaching concerning hell. In fact, some theologians of modern day have attempted to completely explain away the concept of hell. One such theologian is a man by the name of Rob Bell. He is well known for his book *Love Wins* in which he attempts to explain away hell. At the beginning of his book Bell writes:

Several years ago we had an art show at our church. I had been giving a series of teachings on peace-making, and we invited artists to display their paintings, poems, and sculptures that reflected their understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker. One woman included in her work a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, which a number of people found quite compelling.

But not everyone.

Someone attached a piece of paper to it.
On the piece of paper was written: "Reality check: He's in hell."

Really?

Ghandi's in hell?

He is?

We have confirmation of this?

Somebody knows this?

Without a doubt?

And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know?

Of all the billions of people who have ever lived, will only a select number "make it to a better place" and every single other person suffer in torment and punishment forever? Is this acceptable to God? Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this or even allow this, and still claim to be a loving God?

Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life?

For Bell, the thought of a loving God condemning humans to hell for eternity is unthinkable. Because they cannot conceive of God condemning people to hell many theologians attempt to

suggest different understandings of hell and the fate of humans (both Christians and non-Christians).

Universalism — all people will go to heaven regardless of what they believed or did in life

Annihilationism — unbelievers will go to hell but not for eternity; they will eventually cease to exist

Spiritual Punishment — hell is the separation of man from God, not literal torment in a real place

Metaphor — hell is simply a metaphor for the challenges we face in life

Regardless of what the world feels about eternal punishment, what does God say about it? And why does God speak so often about hell? The reason most people refuse to believe in the reality of hell is because they have a wrong view of God and Who He is. As R.C. Sproul once said, “The greatest weakness in the church today is we don’t know Who God is and we don’t know who we are.”

John makes it clear in this passage from Revelation that there is coming a day of judgment. The holy justice of God will surely one day descend upon all the children of disobedience—none shall escape. *So, flee from the wrath to come and embrace the One who can enter you into the Lamb’s book of life.*

I. THE SCOPE OF THE JUDGMENT

THE THRONE. John makes it clear that he is an eyewitness to the reality of the coming judgment: “I saw..” The first thing he sees is a “great white throne” (v. 11). This large, majestic throne signifies the eternal judge of all. His throne is white—symbolizing His pure and righteous judgments. The throne also symbolizes His authority. Scripture repeatedly describes the Lord as the King of glory and His throne sits supreme. When anyone comes before the throne of the Holy One—into the presence of the One Who is pure—they immediately become aware of their unworthiness and their wickedness. Consider, for example, Isaiah:

Isaiah 6:1–7 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

THE JUDGE. The One who sits on the throne is the embodiment of holiness and truth. His steady gaze pierces through even the densest of masks. The Scriptures tell us that everything in

heaven and earth seeks to flee from the gaze of the Almighty. Even as Adam and Eve sought to flee from the face of God in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:7–8), so does everything in heaven and earth seek to flee from the judgment of the Holy One of Israel. When faced with the holiness of God man's natural inclination is to veil himself from the piercing gaze of the Lord. His Holy nature evokes fear in the hearts of the profane. Why atheists exist? Why do people refuse to acknowledge the Creator and His authority and rule over them? Because they do not wish to retain God in their thoughts. They hope to escape the reality of God's justice. The irony of those crying out for social justice in our day is that while they long for a human justice here on earth, they currently seek to escape the ultimate cosmic justice of God. Yet the assurance we are given in Scripture, is that no one will escape the judgment of God. There will be found no cave, no mountain, no large rock behind which they can escape the face of God.

You may think that you can escape the judgment of God. In fact, you might believe that because God has not struck you down you are therefore going to escape His wrath (or worse that you think He endorses your sin). Yet we all can be assured: the one who refuses the gospel to his or her dying day will most assuredly see the dreadful day of judgment—at which point it will be too late. But it is not too late yet! You can and indeed *must* repent of your sin and turn to Christ! There, you will find peace with God and forgiveness of your sins. You will know the sweetness of Christ and lasting, indestructible joy that can only be found in Him.

II. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE JUDGMENT

THE DEFENDANTS. Who will stand before this tribunal? Who will be the defendants in this heavenly courtroom? “Both small and great” (i.e., both the least important and the greatest people). They are the dead—not just in the realm of the dead but also because they are in the realm of spiritually dead. They do not partake of the first resurrection. They stand before the Righteous Judge who opens books (which records their works, v. 13). The judgment will be based on what the unbelievers did.

Perhaps you are wondering: *Why are they judged by their works instead of whether or not they embraced Jesus Christ and His atoning work?* Here is where we get to an important distinction in Scripture and the study of theology. The death of Jesus on the cross was not the only thing we needed for our salvation. We also needed Jesus to actively live out the perfect, righteous life which God's Law demands. Now at the great exchange at salvation we are given the perfect life which Jesus lived while He is given our lives filled with sinfulness. Though we as Christians sin, our lives are pleasing to God because of Christ! The unbeliever does not have the righteousness of Christ—therefore everything he does is evil in the sight of God. Therefore, when God judges him on the judgment day those works will be laid bare and compared to the righteous Law of God—and he will be condemned.

THE COURT. The books are opened. The court is called to session. The Judge sits upon His great white throne from which He will listen to the cases brought before Him and render righteous judgment. What is recorded in these books? Apparently these books contain the works of each person standing before the bar. The Omniscient One sees all things. There is nowhere we can flee from his presence (Ps. 139:7–12). If Martin Luther's statement is correct (namely, that

we live all of life “before the face of God”), then each of us must give account for our actions. For Christians, our Lord will see the righteousness of Christ and we will enjoy the presence of God forever! Unbelievers will stand before God without any righteousness to speak of and will have no reason to deny that His verdict will be just.

III. THE FINALITY OF THE JUDGMENT

No one will escape the judgment. And no one will escape the verdict. All who are guilty before the Lord will face the reality of their own choice.

“Scripture sees hell as self-chosen; those in hell will realize that they sentenced themselves to it by loving darkness rather than light, choosing not to have their Creator as their Lord, preferring self-indulgent sin to self-denying righteousness... Those who are in hell will know not only that for their doings they deserve it but also that in their hearts they chose it.” (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 271–72)

There will be some in the Lake of Fire weeping while there will be others will be gnashing their teeth in rage. But the one thing they both will know: their sentence will be just. Their names were not in the book of life. “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (v. 15). These are the saddest words—no one will escape on that day. The judgment will be final and unlike prisons today, no one will escape.

Conclusion

No one person will escape the judgment of the Almighty. Christian’s know that their sins were judged by the Righteous judge at the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus faced that judgment for us! But those who are unbelievers will one day stand before the judgment bar and God in swift justice will consign all those who refused the gospel to experience His eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire. *So, sinner—flee from the wrath to come and embrace the One who can enter you into the Lamb’s book of life. And Christian, rejoice that your Redeemer endured the wrath of God for you!*