

The Final Judgment

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[0:00] Please bear with my singing for just one moment. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you.

Happy birthday, dear Gertrude. I was curious if anyone would finish the song. Right? We know that happy birthday has four lines. And if we only hear three, we're not satisfied. There's no happy birthday resolution without the final line, happy birthday to you. Well, Revelation chapter 20, verses 11 to 15, is kind of like that final line to happy birthday. If the final judgment was not in our Bible, it would be like living in eternity, waiting for and never hearing the final happy birthday line sung.

The issue of sin must be resolved. Or otherwise, life is not satisfying.

[1:23] Judgment must come. And Revelation 20, 11 to 15, this great white throne judgment, is God's last needed act against sin.

God resolves it. The issue of sin, this issue that has been wreaking havoc on creation since the beginning, nearly.

And God will leave no loose ends. There's no possibility of sin kind of rearing its ugly head ever again, kind of reemerging from the tomb.

There will never ever again be any sort of move on the part of God's enemies to take His throne, to do violence to Him or His church.

Because with the final judgment, sin is no more. It's God's resolution to sin.

[2:23] And you're maybe sitting here saying, well, that's all well and good, Matt. But how does this apply right now here today? Maybe you're in the room today, and there's just a person who immediately comes to mind, and you're just like, oh, I'm so glad that person's going to get his.

She's going to get hers. That you're struggling to love an enemy, and you're just, oh, God, please bring this day now. I really want it here now. How does the final judgment help you love your enemy?

Or maybe, I'm guessing all of us fall into the second category too, where the final judgment, there's names and there's faces of people near and dear to our hearts.

And when we think of the final judgment, we're heartbroken. Because there's friends and family and neighbors and sisters and brothers and all the rest in our lives who we know right now, if they were to face this judgment today, they'd be in trouble.

Because they've rejected Jesus. They're living for themselves. Does this final judgment give us any way forward? How we're to see through what God is telling us to move towards our loved ones with the gospel?

[3:45] Because God does resolve sin. We know that. So how do we make sense of this? How does this passage help us today?

Why do we have to sit here and kind of think about something that's so uncomfortable for us? If you're like me, you start thinking about hell, you start thinking about judgment, and it becomes very uncomfortable very quickly.

This is hard. But far from this text just kind of being this unnecessary topic that we can sweep under the rug or we can kind of ignore until a later time, the final judgment matters very much for us today. And though we're not going to be able to deal with every single tension that this passage is going to present, the goal for us today is to provide some ways how this text can shape our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with others around us, particularly for those who don't know Jesus.

So that's our goal. We're going to try and show how this final judgment matters and how we relate to Jesus day in and day out as his disciples and how we relate to a lost world who is on a one-way

street to hell apart from receiving the gospel.

[5:09] Here's the claim of this passage. I almost don't even need to say it. You heard it read. You know what it's about. But let me try and summarize it. Jesus will carry out the final judgment on each and every person.

And those whose names are not found in his book of life will spend eternity in the lake of fire. Jesus will carry out the final judgment on each and every person who has ever lived.

And for every single person who's ever lived, whose name is not found in Jesus' book of life, he or she will spend eternity in the lake of fire. That's what this passage very clearly tells us.

And so today we're going to walk through it by asking four questions. Four questions of this passage. And as we're answering these questions, we're going to try and deal with some of the tensions.

And we're going to try and apply it again as it relates to our faith and our following of Jesus and how we interact with those around us. So four questions.

[6:20] Question number one from Revelation 20. 11 to 15. What does John see? Of course, that may seem like stating the obvious, but let's walk through it again.

Put simply, John sees the final judgment. This is, on the one hand, the tragic end of a staggering number of individuals who did not repent, who spent their life in war against the Lamb and the Lamb's people.

But on another hand, it's sin's last breath. After thousands of years of wreaking havoc, from Lucifer's war for the throne in heaven, to the wickedness in the days of Noah, when God was sad that He even made man, to more modern examples of things like the Holocaust, thousands of years of havoc.

Thousands of years of havoc, and sin breathes its last breath. It's the last chapter. The book is closed.

It's done. This is the resolution that all of creation has been groaning for since Genesis chapter 3. And this is the final move before the new heavens and the new earth come down.

[7:47] The place where God will dwell with His people forever. And no detestable thing will ever enter into it. This place that is free of sin and free of death. So John sees the final judgment.

It's both tragic and wonderful. That's the first question. John sees the final judgment. But then we have to ask, who's there?

Who does John see at this judgment? Well, if you look in verse 11, the first person that John sees is the one on the throne. Notice he's on a great and white throne.

It's great because it's unrivaled. This isn't one throne among many thrones. This is the throne of thrones. This is the only throne at the end of time when judgment comes that matters. And it's white because of a few reasons.

This word white in Revelation, it speaks of purity. It speaks of holiness. It speaks of wisdom. So the judge on this throne, on this great white throne, he sees everything perfectly.

[8:58] He knows everything that each person has ever done. There's nothing that escapes his vision or his knowledge or his justice. That makes him uniquely qualified to judge the nations.

He will judge everybody with equity and with fairness. There's no need to wonder at the end of this judgment whether God was just and fair and right. It's because of who he is.

But who is this? So is this, are we talking about God the Father here? Are we talking about the Son, Jesus? Jesus? When Revelation, the one on the throne is always seen as the Father, the Ancient of Days from Daniel chapter 7.

However, the Lamb, Jesus, is always seen in the midst of the throne. And he's always the one kind of carrying out the judgment. Remember back to chapter 5, it's the Lion of Judah.

He alone, who is worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals and to carry out judgment. So rather than saying it's, well maybe it's the Father, maybe it's Jesus, it's yes. It's a both and.

[10:07] The Father and the Son are united in this judgment. In John's Gospel, Jesus says that the Father judges no one but has given all judgment into the hands of the Son.

So the first person John sees is God on his throne. But then of course in verses 12 and 13, we see those who are standing before the throne, those who are being judged.

And notice how John describes them. Four times in verses 12 and 13, they are referred to as the dead.

I saw the dead, great and small. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books. Verse 13, the sea gave up the dead who were in it.

Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them. They're also described as great and small. Of course, we're not talking about seven foot basketball players and three foot six, nine year olds.

[11:14] The great and small is referring not to a physical stature but to the rich and powerful and mighty and influential and celebrities and those who are poor and insignificant, those overlooked by the world.

John wants us to see in this description, great and small, that no class or social status of people escape this judgment. This judgment involves everyone.

And I find it so interesting that everybody's standing before the throne but no words come up in this passage. Nobody's pleading for their lives.

The judge is not seen speaking here. So what's going on? We don't even really have enough to speculate. But it seems that these dead are just standing there waiting for God to pronounce the judgment.

And notice too where they're from. These dead, where did they come from? Well, it tells us that they're coming out of the sea, they're coming out of death and Hades, that these places are surrendering the dead that they've been housing somehow for any number of years.

[12:30] So we're probably wondering, are Christians here too? It's hard to be certain. I'm not totally decided one way or another but I want to say a couple of things and then give you my best sense of who is at this judgment.

First, we know from 2 Corinthians 5 verse 10, Paul says that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So Paul is saying even Christians someday will stand before Jesus and give account of our entire lives.

But then we also know, right, that because we are in Jesus, because we are followers of Jesus, Romans 8 verse 1 tells us, there is therefore now no condemnation. So there is not a true born again Christian on planet earth who needs to fear standing before the judgment seat of Christ because being in Christ they are forgiven and the judgment was, the wrath was poured out on Christ so that we might have life.

But that being said, I do not think that Christians are in the depiction of judgment here in Revelation 20. Three reasons why.

when the dead seems to be a really strange way to refer to Christians. Seems a strange name to apply to a believer, right, because though we die, we live.

[14:06] Those who, those Christians who died when we see them in the book of Revelation, they're always seeming to be alive spiritually, speaking to God or singing His praises like the martyrs under the altar in chapter 6 or in the song of Moses from chapter 15.

Also, another reason why I don't think Christians are there is because of the places that are giving up the dead. Death and Hades, if you remember back in chapter 6, death was the one on the rider of the pale horse.

He's an agent of God's judgment who goes out to kill a quarter of the world. And the sea, though sometimes just refers to that physical body of water over there, many other times in Revelation speaks of this place of chaos, this place of evil that God must subdue.

And in chapter 17, the sea is referred to as all the nations that the prostitute is seated upon and is seduced and influenced away from God. And then in chapter 20, it seems that there's a distinction between those who have been raised with Jesus to participate in this thousand years and those who remain dead until the end.

If all of the Christians are raised to reign with Jesus, then that stands to reason that those who are left are non-Christians who will be raised to judgment. And immediately before our text this morning, we see the defeat of Satan, which seems to flow right into the defeat of all those who have aligned themselves with him.

[15:43] So that's my best sense of who's at this judgment. The judge and all of those who die apart from Jesus Christ. Before we answer the fourth question of, well, how is judgment carried out?

What are the criteria? I want us to focus on this third question of what is this lake of fire? It's important that we actually get a clear sense of what this place is.

because people want to distort it, they want to make it sound like it's less than what it actually is, that it's a different kind of judgment than what the Bible talks about.

So let's just ask the question, what is this lake of fire? In chapters 19 and 20, we see that this is a place where the beast, the false prophet, and their boss, Satan, are cast forever.

the anti-trinity is thrown into the lake of fire. And if you look in verse 10 of chapter 20, you see that they will be tormented their day and night without end.

[17:02] In chapter 14, verses 9 to 11, this torment occurs in the presence of God's holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb Himself.

God is still there and it's horrible. I think this is one of the things that should help us when we're talking to non-believers.

I'm guessing you've heard people talk about, well, I just can't wait until, you know, hell's going to be this huge party, right? And if I can just get there, then I'll be free of God and rid of all of His shackles and all of these Christians trying to tell me to abide by these rules.

And God's still there. This is not a place that you escape from God, that you somehow are set free and liberated to kind of do everything you want. And we can't let people walk around this planet thinking that's true.

We must tell them, no, Jesus is still there and you will be in torment. You will have no rest there. You will have no freedom from God.

[18:11] God will be there. Don't make the mistake of thinking this is a party. But it's not just the anti-trinity who will be in the lake of fire tormented day and night.

It's also all of those who worship the beast and receive its mark. They are there too. And Revelation has been giving us this very clear understanding over and over again that there are only two camps of people.

You are either sealed by the lamb, bound for the new heavens and the new earth in the presence of God forever, or you are marked by the beast.

And will spend eternity apart from the grace and mercy and kindness and glory of God, the one you were created to love and worship. Only two kinds of people.

You're either sealed by the lamb or you're marked by the beast. And this text in the book of Revelation tells us that the lake of fire, which we could also describe as this is hell, right?

[19:30] Just so we're clear, this is hell. It is a real place of everlasting torment. Jesus in Matthew chapter 25 says that God has prepared it for the devil and his angels.

And we see in Revelation 14 that it is those people who die apart from faith in Jesus Christ that they will go there too. And it's a place that Jesus himself says is a place of eternal punishment.

my shoulders just kind of droop and drop when I say these things. I think it's right that this should be uncomfortable for us.

There's no easy way to talk about something that is so final and so scary to think about. God. But what we know about God can help us deal with the discomfort.

It's not going to eliminate it. I don't have any pill. Just take this and the discomfort will go away. But what we know about God can help. Hell is God's idea.

[20:50] This is not some human notion that we've conjured up to try and get people to obey rules through fear tactics and manipulation. God has created this place for the devil and his angels.

It's God's idea. We know that God is holy. We sang it this morning. He's holy which means that he's entirely distinct and he's not corrupted by sin and he's not influenced by anything bad or detestable.

It's why in verse 11 of our text the earth and sky flee from him and there's no place found for them. Because the one on the throne is so holy that the creation itself that's been corrupted and stained by sin just flees from his presence.

There's nowhere for him to go because God is holy. And God is good. God is good.

We know that he will not do anything contrary to his nature. And we know that he's good. And if you need to wonder if he's good or not just look to the cross. You see the slain lamb, God's escape route from this judgment.

[22:06] God is good. He's provided a way or else none of us would have hope. He's good. And so by faith we must submit any of the discomfort, any of the things hard to stomach about hell, we must submit him to what we know about God.

He's just, he's holy, he's good. This is his idea. It probably shouldn't make sense in our little human brains how this all works out.

But we must trust him. We can't do the opposite. So there's a way that folks at different points in time will do something like since God is love, hell can't be what so and so is saying it is.

If God's love, he would not create a place like this. Right? But our text, it's right here. We can't escape it. God is love and God did create a place like this.

We have to be able to hold these things together. And where we don't see how they meet, we say, God, I trust you. You're good, you're holy, you're right, you're just. This is hard, but I believe you.

[23:19] I trust you. There's no other way that we can move forward faithfully and honestly if we believe that this text is true. And if it helps, I was doing the math a couple weeks ago and realized that by God's grace, I had had the opportunity to preach over a hundred sermons downstairs at our homeless breakfast on Sunday mornings.

And most of those sermons, I have spoken of judgment. I've spoken of this terrible place that unrepentant sinners will spend eternity.

It is not getting easier to preach that. It's not. In fact, it's getting harder as I get to know people and I see their faces and I recognize their great need, even more than they do.

It doesn't get easier to say hell is real and you need to repent. It's necessary, right? If we believe that this Bible is true, we must say these things to people.

We must warn them to flee from wrath. There's no other hope than to flee to Jesus. So the lake of fire is a very real place that God will send the devil and his angels and every person who does not repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ.

[24:49] So the final question, how are the dead to be judged? We can see this in a couple of verses, in verse 12 and in verse 15. The short answer is that books are opened.

And these books are described as being in accordance with what each person had done. This phrase shows up twice, once in verse 12 and once in verse 13.

The dead are judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. This is really a depiction of God's exhaustive knowledge and his instant recall of each and every person's life.

I kind of imagine that each person has a book and God's perfect memory bank of saying this so-and-so, it's got your full name, your date of birth, your vitals. So-and-so, this is his or her life.

God knows it perfectly and has no trouble recalling each and every deed, thought, motive of our hearts. And that's why verse 15 says that if the name isn't in the book of life, they're thrown into the lake of fire because when each one's works stand alone, they only serve to condemn us.

[26:15] They don't give us life. We aren't justified, we aren't granted salvation by what we have done. It's by grace alone, through faith in Jesus alone.

So that's how the dead are judged, but then notice this other book shows up. This single book appears, not books plural, but book in verse 12.

Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. This book is distinct, it's unique, it's unlike these many books, that we could say are books of works.

In this book elsewhere in Revelation, we see that it belongs to the lamb who was slain. It's Jesus' book. In chapter 13, verse 8, we see that it was written before the foundation of the world.

The ink in this book has long since dried. I think it's fair to say that this book is highly valued by Jesus.

[27:32] Not because of its exquisite binding and the goat skin leather it's made of and the gold foil pages and the beautiful calligraphy on it. It's highly prized by Jesus because it contains the names of those that

Jesus has bought with his own blood.

This book is precious to our Lord because if we are followers of Jesus, our name is in it.

Is your name in this book? If it is, then worship the lamb. If your name is in this book, it's because Jesus died that your name would be in this book.

If your name is in this book, it's because Jesus endured the Father's wrath so you would escape the lake of fire. Can't you just imagine the joy on Jesus' face to read your name from this book?

It cost him so much. And he did it in love to spare us from this lake of fire.

[28:48] our name must be in this book. It must be in this book. If you've trusted in Christ, that his death saves you from wrath, that he is your righteousness, then your name's in this book.

It should bring gratitude and worship to us, church. Remember, your name's in the book. We have a great Savior who's able to save us from the lake of fire.

But not only does this help us to worship God for what he's done, right? So now we're getting into this relationship with how does this help us in our relationship with Jesus today?

right? One, it should produce this overwhelming gratitude. God spared me from that? Hallelujah.

But it also strengthens us to persevere and to one day finally conquer.

conquer. We belong to the land. Jesus is making all things new. And when judgment comes, we will stand in him.

[30:12] For a little while longer, for a little farther in this journey of life, we press on. We have persistence and perseverance and endurance to conquer and overcome because Christ has conquered and overcome for us.

So that's how this text helps us relate to Jesus now. Final judgment should fill the Christian's heart with gratitude. My name's in a book. Jesus purchased me by his own blood.

And it should give you great courage and strength to persevere and press on in this journey of life because God is doing away with sin. New Jerusalem is coming.

How does it help us as we interact with others? How does the final judgment help me interact with my enemy?

Maybe you've got this long standing hurt. Maybe it's a long past way that someone sinned against you, this deep wound that just doesn't go away and you're just aware of it.

[31:32] Or maybe it's an ongoing thing that you're just being mistreated and abused in some way, whether it's verbal or even with violence or whatever else. How do you how does this help us with that kind of person, my enemy?

We know what's coming, right? So we've heard God say, vengeance is mine. I will repay. Let me just encourage you, do not callous over.

Do not harden your heart toward that person. We have this awful way, right, of repaying in our hearts, right?

Maybe we don't, maybe someone slaps us, we don't slap them back, but in our heart we're slapping them anyway. We can do this with individuals, we can kind of in our hearts and say, you're going to get yours, bub, and just harden over.

It's not how this text helps us treat our enemy. We can do the same thing toward whole groups of people, right? Guessing some people in the room struggle with how am I supposed to show love toward the gay and lesbian community for example?

[32:52] How am I supposed to love people who are so clearly opposed to God and his stance and view on marriage? How do we avoid saying they're going to get what they deserve and just kind of harden our hearts?

Well, we look to Jesus, right? We know when Jesus looks at sinners, he has compassion on them, right? The sheep without a shepherd and he goes toward them in love.

He doesn't excuse sin, he never condones that, but he moves towards people, he moves towards his enemies or we'd all be toast. So we soften toward our enemies because judgment is not yet and God will repay.

so we soften and we develop compassion and love because the enemies of God will be judged and they need the gospel, period.

We move towards enemies and love with the good news that Jesus loves enemies enough to die for them. There's still time for sinners to repent so compassion rules the day for those of us who

follow Jesus.

[34:08] us. That's costly but it's right. So we preach Christ hoping that some of even our enemies would repent so that they would be spared while we trust that if they do not repent God will definitely repay them in the end.

It's his to judge. then I saved our loved ones for last.

When we think of judgment and we have faces and names of friends and family who we know need Christ, who we know need to repent, it can be tempting for us to soften this, to try and maybe even apologize for God or excuse this and kind of say well it's kind of, we can't.

We can't ignore it because it's difficult. We can't ignore it because it's right here. God's just told us over and over and over again of judgment.

So we can't sweep it under the rug, we can't ignore it, think it'll go away because it's not, it's coming. It's coming on those near and dear to us. So it ends up being quite unloving for us to ignore or to soften it because our text makes it so clear that it's coming.

[35:41] So in counting others more significant than ourselves, we deal with the discomfort that we feel because we love other people. We want them to be rescued so we keep going day after day after day, we keep pressing into the discomfort because our loved ones need the gospel.

Final judgment helps us to soften towards others and to bravely and fearfully and sacrificially go towards other people. Let it put courage in your heart, friend, to be compassionate and to share Jesus with non-believers whether they're enemies, whether they're strangers, whether they're near and dear loved ones.

both because we believe the gospel is big enough to welcome even enemies into the kingdom and because we believe it's mighty enough even to save those most near and dear to us regardless of the life they're currently leading.

Jesus is going to carry out the final judgment on each and every person. and those whose names are not found in his book of life will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

We need this. We need this to be good disciples of Jesus and we need this to go toward others in love before it's too late.

[37:13] So let's pray together and ask for God's help to do that. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father we thank you for your word.

Even the hard word. Even the uncomfortable word and we ask God that this would serve each one of us today. You would help us.

Help us to relate to Jesus in light of the final judgment and help us to go towards others in love and compassion because of it. God we ask for help as a church.

We ask for help as individuals whether it's because we're afraid or we're angry or anything else.

God would you get our hearts right when we think about judgment? Would you receive glory through our response to it?

Help us we pray in Jesus name. Amen.