

Where will you spend eternity?

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[0 : 00] chapter 20, beginning in verse 11 of that chapter. Revelation chapter 20, verse 11.

Then I saw a great white throne, and him who sat upon it. From his presence, earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. The sea gave up the dead in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And all were judged by what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. And then in the gospel of John chapter 5, beginning at verse 21. John 5, verse 21.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who 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.

I turn your attention to Revelation 20 and to begin with in the first 11 and 12 verse.

[2 : 41] Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.

Whether you understand the book of Revelation or not is beside the point. What is the point is that it guarantees a blessing to all who read it? Right at the very beginning in chapter 1, verse 3, blessed are those who read and keep what is written herein. It promises a blessing.

How are we to understand it? The 17th century minister of Selkirk, he had a view on this.

And he would have said it in broad Scotch, which I'm not going to attempt to do. But he said this, you can have a look at the vision of the resurrected Christ in chapter 1.

And then you can wander through the seven Kirks of Asia in chapters 2 and 3. But only a fool goes beyond it. Given that I'm in Revelation 20, well, you can judge.

[4 : 21] The reformer John Calvin, who wrote books or commentaries on all the New Testament books, except 2 and 3 John, did not write a commentary on the book of Revelation.

The way to understand it is to see that the book of Revelation is composed of seven visions, all of which have the same starting and finishing point.

The starting point you get in chapter 1, it's the vision of the ascended Christ. And the end of the vision is the coming again in glory of Jesus Christ, which will take place.

The seventh vision runs from chapter 20 to verse 22. And it concentrates on the vision of the final judgment and the books that were written.

So I want to look first of all at the writing of these books. In Revelation 13 and verse 8, we read this. Everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.

[5 : 34] So here's this book of life that's been written. I pray God that your name is in that book. How are we to understand it?

In verse 12, we read, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

One of the ways you can benefit from reading the book of Revelation is to understand that in its total, it has 404 verses. And of these 404, 280 of them are direct quotes or allusions to the Old

Testament.

And the allusion here is to Daniel 7 verse 10. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him. A thousand thousand serve him, and 10,000 times 10,000 stood before him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. So this final judgment is an awesome and majestic act by the God of history.

[6 : 57] But there's a different book. Another book was written, was opened, which is the book of life. That's referred to in Revelation 13, 8.

Everyone whose name has not been found written before the foundation of the Lamb, by the foundation of the world, in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. Now this book of life turns up, first of all, in the Old Testament.

In a chapter that deals with the reaction of Moses after the people had committed idolatry by creating an image which they worshipped.

And Moses responds to this like this. But now, if you will forgive their sin, but if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written.

The Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, him I will blot out of my book. Do you see what is happening here? Moses is concerned for his people that they won't be damned.

[8 : 18] Do we have that concern? The book of life is referred to only once by Paul in Philippians 4, verse 3, where he talks about together with Clement whose names are written in the book of life.

More particularly, it turns up in the book of Revelation, firstly in Revelation 3, 5. He who conquers shall be clad in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life.

The final prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, he talks about this book. And he says this, Malachi 3, 16. Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

The Lord heeded and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and thought on his name.

That's the book of life. But Revelation 20 also refers to other books. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

[9 : 36] The dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. So here is going to be a record of everything that men and women have done.

And these scriptures make clear that the God of all the earth will judge all of those. And the only way you can be exempt from that judgment so that it doesn't involve you and passes you by is to put your trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The sea gave up the dead in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And all were judged by what they had done. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

So our task is to make known this great gospel. We make it known by making known the great love of God.

God so loved the world. But he did it so that people would not come under the judgment of God.

[11 : 00] Jesus said to his disciples, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

He who does not believe will be condemned. What book are you in today? I want to think secondly about the examination of these books.

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and the books were opened. The sea gave up the dead in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead in them and they were all judged by what they had done.

So there's something in these books that's recording everything that people do. So what is it that's being recorded?

Let me suggest to you in the first instance that what's being recorded is your thoughts and your speech. Jesus in his teaching said this, I tell you on the day of judgment, men and women will render account for every careless word they utter.

[12 : 20] for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. Careless words, things which we have said which not only should we not have said but shouldn't have come into our mind.

Now, the way we can understand this slightly better is by relating to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount relating to the sixth commandment you shall not kill.

And he says this, this is how he introduces it. You have heard it was said to the men of old you shall not kill but whoever kills shall be liable to the judgment.

Now, there he's referring to two scriptures in the Old Testament that record the giving of the Ten Commandments, the standard by which all people will be judged in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 and additionally in Deuteronomy 16.

But then he goes on, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.

[13 : 42] Whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council and whoever says you fool shall be liable to the hell of fire.

All our thoughts, all our speech, we will answer for it on the day of judgment. But Jesus goes on in his teaching and he says this, by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

So, what are the words that will justify us, that will make us exempt of that judgment? Paul gives them in Romans 10.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For man believes with his heart and so is justified and confesses with his lips and so is saved. So, the words that will justify you and make you exempt of this awful and majestic day are the words of faith.

[15 : 01] I believe. But there are also words that will condemn. And if we turn to the Last Supper as we have it in Matthew's Gospel, we read this, that as they were eating, Jesus said, truly I say to you, one of you will betray me.

And so the disciples responded, they were sorrowful and began to say to Jesus, one after another, is it I? Jesus answered, he who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, he will betray me.

Now, given that all of them had dipped their hand in the dish, there's clearly a sense in which all of them were going to betray Jesus.

How do you betray Jesus? You ignore what he says. But Judas turns up and he says, is it I? Jesus says to him, you have said so. Go to the garden of Gethsemane. And Jesus rises from prayer and Judas comes with the temple police.

[16 : 21] and marches up to Jesus and says, Hail Master. But that's not the word of faith.

That's the word of betrayal. And we're all possible to betray what Jesus teaches us, how we relate to one another, how we relate to those that are outside the faith, how we should pray for them.

Make sure you don't betray him. Job 15 verse 6 says, Your own mouth condemns you and not I.

Your own lips testify against you. Finally, the sentence of the books, 13 to 15. The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And if any man's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

[17 : 38] This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

How are we to understand this, this lake of fire? If you remember back to the Falklands War, 20 years ago, you may remember seeing images on your television of the Sir Galahad having been attacked by the Argentinians and it was on fire and so was all the sea around it because of the spillage of oil.

And I've been trying to find an image of that, but haven't found an image that's really successful. But Chris is going to put something up on the screen now, which in fact is not a lake of fire, but it's a sea of fire.

Now this image is only mentioned here in the whole of the Bible, but it was mentioned and very well known in the Middle East.

It occurs in an Egyptian document called the Book of the Dead, which started off life somewhere about 1500 BC, roughly the time of Moses.

[19 : 02] It was still in use when Jesus was on the planet in AD 30. And it's a composition of a series of magic spells composed by religious priests.

And its intention was that these spells would aid the deceased through the passage of the underworld until the person that was dead reached the abode of the great gods.

So this concept of the lake, the pool of the sea of fire, it details it as a region of the final judgment of the condemned.

But it's not just belonging to the mythology of ancient Egypt. It's here in the Bible. And this image that's on the screen is the nearest I can get to it.

Now, Jesus said this in Matthew 18 verse 9, If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

[20 : 14] The term in Greek is Gehenna, which is a transliteration into Greek of two Hebrew terms which describes the valley of the sons of Hinnom, which was outside Jerusalem to the south.

this valley contained a perpetually burning incinerator which burned the bodies of the most atrocious criminals together with all the rubbish of Jerusalem.

So, Jesus in his teaching is not just illustrating what this is going to be like, he's talking about a real place and a real event.

And there's a story told in Luke's Gospel, chapter 16, about two men. One, a rich man who is nameless, and the poor man whose name is Lazarus.

And concerning the rich man it says this, the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades, another term for the board of the dead, hell itself, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom.

[21 : 37] This business of Abraham's bosom is just a Hebrew way of talking about the secure abode of the rest of the just in the final day.

Is this a parable? Or is it a real event? The reason that the rich man ended up there, that is, in hell, was that he showed no mercy or kindness to Lazarus, which was contrary to the teaching of the Ten Commandments.

This rich man, what was he concerned about? He was concerned about his bank balances. He was concerned about his style of life.

What he should have done was to be concerned with the poor. What are we to do? Jesus says this, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

This idea of being ready, the gospel teaches Jesus Christ will come again. I don't know when that's going to be, and neither do you.

[23 : 05] And all the people who down the ages have speculated, they've all come with one thing, they're wrong. Because what the Bible is teaching is this, we have to work in preaching the gospel as if his coming is 10,000 years away.

But we have to be ready in case it happened today. now supposing in your lifetime Jesus Christ does not come, what then?

The word of the gospel is you also must be ready for the moment you die that's his coming for you. the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. So the gospel call goes out, repent and believe in the gospel.

Because if you do repent and you do say I believe in Jesus Christ and you do confess him with your lips there's no final judgment for you.

[24 : 31] What is it Paul says in Romans 8 verse 1? There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

And supposing this morning we're all in that bracket. What can we learn from this? we can learn that outside of the walls of this church in this community and many other communities like it there's the needy the poor the unloved we're asked to identify with them to love them to speak them into the gospel repent and believe in the gospel.

So the book of Revelation closes like this blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and they may enter the city by its gates.

He who testifies to these things says surely I am coming soon amen come Lord Jesus are we ready are we active what are we doing with God's word for the poor the unloved the outsiders the homeless the hopeless the prisoners the lot that's what we'll give an answer to on that final day let's pray mighty God our heavenly father we humble ourselves before your word and we would want to take it into our hearts to act on it to have the burden of a lost place upon our hearts and minds to be driven to love them as indeed you love them so hear our cry in

Jesus name amen we sing weary so to as to as James know all the book will h layers