

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

## **The Final Judgment**

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**Revelation 20:11-15**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to Revelation 20:11-15. I want to set the scene for you and provide some necessary context but I want to state at the outset that there is no way to do that without wading into a bit of controversy. The first 10 verses of Revelation 20 are the most hotly debated verses in the Bible for many Evangelicals. There are other passages that would divide Evangelicals from Catholics or Evangelicals from Liberal Protestants but among Reformed Evangelicals there is no more divisive section of text than Revelation 20:1-10. I have no intention of providing a detailed summary of those differences this morning, if you want to hear about that you can download the audio to The Book of Revelation Message 14 on the website. This morning I just want to give you the briefest of summaries and that only in order to set up the text we are looking at regarding the Final Judgment. The three main camps within the Evangelical World over the last century would be Historic Pre-Millennialism, Dispensational Pre-Millennialism and Amillennialism. Essentially the debate comes down to how you understand the first 10 verses of Revelation 20 which describe a Millennial or Thousand Year Reign of the saints with Christ upon the earth. My understanding of the history of this church is that they have had Lead Pastors who were Historic Pre-Millennialists and also Lead Pastors who

were Amillennialists but have never had a Lead Pastor who was a Dispensational Pre-Millennialist so I will limit myself to a discussion of those two views. Both viewpoints are faithful to the Biblical text and either would be considered an orthodox and historic Christian viewpoint. Essentially it comes down to this, the Amillennial group would understand the thousand year reign in a symbolic sense. They would say that as Christians die here on earth during the church age they are resurrected spiritually to the throne of Christ where they reign with Jesus over the unfolding of history. The thousand years is thus symbolic for a long time, but not forever. They would thus say that the final judgment takes place immediately after the Second Coming of Jesus which ends human history upon this earth in its present shape and form. That is an entirely Biblical viewpoint, though it is not mine.

The historic or Classic Pre-Millennial viewpoint which I hold and many other pastors in the history of this church have held, is that after the Second Coming there is a literal reign of Christ upon the earth in which we share. The purpose of it is to show what the righteous reign of God looks like to people who have never experienced it. It is to show forth the glory of God's ways to all his creation. After that there is a Final Judgment where all the acts committed in creation by angels and humans are judged by the Lord.

So whether you believe that the Final Judgment comes immediately after the Second Coming or whether you believe it comes after the Second Coming after the Millennial Reign, both viewpoints converge at verse 11 and it is there that we pick up our story. I apologize for the complicated introduction, but there is simply no other honest way of preparing you for this text. Let me read to you now from God's Word:

<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before <sup>4</sup>God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. <sup>13</sup>The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. <sup>14</sup>Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup>And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

There are a number of questions which naturally arise from this text and we will attempt to deal with them by God's grace in the order that they are presented. The first question relates to the identity of the Judge who presides over the Final Judgment.

## Understanding The Text:

### 1. Who is the Judge who presides over the Final Judgment?

All throughout the Book of Revelation there is some intentional ambiguity about this person. In Revelation 5 for example we see:

<sup>13</sup>And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
**And to the Lamb**, forever and <sup>ε</sup>ever!” (Revelation 5:13. NKJV)

Then later in Revelation 7 we see a great multitude crying out:

“Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, **and to the Lamb!**” (Revelation 7:10. NKJV)

The point being made seems to be that God The Father and The Lamb are somehow the same and yet distinct in some way. Therefore we are perhaps best to say that God in Jesus Christ is the Judge who presides over the Final Judgment. Indeed this is how the New Testament generally talks about this issue. Paul says bluntly in 2 Timothy:

<sup>1</sup>I charge *you* therefore before **God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge** the living and the dead <sup>ε</sup>at His appearing and His kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1. NKJV)

Paul likewise says in Acts 17:

He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31. NKJV)

We can say with confidence therefore that God in Jesus Christ is He who sits on the throne to judge the living and the dead.

Another question that is sometimes asked when reading this text is:

## **2. How many “Final Judgments” are there?**

Some of us grew up with coloured charts in the back of our Study Bibles that spoke of multiple judgments; judgments for the nations and Bema Judgments for believers and so we wonder why we see only one Final Judgment in the actual text of Scripture. The truth is that it is the only the Dispensational Pre-Millennial crowd who has taught multiple Final Judgments and to the best of my knowledge that has never been taught from the pulpit of this church and so we will not beat a non-existent dead horse any further into the proverbial ground. The vast majority of Christendom over the 2000 years we have been reading this text has seen only ONE final judgment at which all God’s moral creatures render an account.

Thirdly we might then ask:

## **3. Who will face this Final Judgment?**

Who are these moral creatures who must give an account? Firstly we can easily discern from Scripture that unbelievers will have to stand before God in Christ at this Final Judgment. Our text in Revelation 20 declares unambiguously:

I saw the dead, small and great, standing before <sup>f</sup>God, and books were opened. (Revelation 20:12. NKJV)

Great and small means everybody. Rich or poor, famous or common, king or pauper, all men stand before the Final Judgment of God Almighty. The Apostle Paul in Romans 2 declares:

<sup>5</sup>But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who “will render to each one according to his deeds”:<sup>f</sup> (Romans 2:5-6. NKJV)

There are a lot of people on this earth who believe they are getting away with something. They think there is no one who sees or that there is no one who cares, but they will learn on that day that they are wrong. God sees everything. He keeps a very detailed record and he repays each person according to their deeds. What this means is that there are degrees of punishment. Not

every unbeliever's experience of eternal condemnation will be the same. Paul Bernardo's experience of hell will be very different than dear old atheistic cookie making Aunt Ethel or for that matter than the person who knew very little about the Gospel. Jesus said so himself in Luke 12:

<sup>47</sup>And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. <sup>48</sup>But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. (Luke 12:47-48. NKJV)

This verse seems to suggest that the people who are subject to the lowest levels of hell are those people who grew up in Christian homes, heard the Gospel, went to church and still walked away from the offer of God's grace and kindness. Moms and dads, this verse needs to inform your urgency when sharing Christ with your children.

The second group who will face the Final Judgment is the believers – all those whose names are written in The Book of Life. Some Christians resist this teaching and they say: “Does not the Apostle Paul say that we do not face Final Judgment?” Well let's look at that. Paul says in Romans 8:

<sup>1</sup>*There is therefore now **no condemnation** to those who are in Christ Jesus,*<sup>£</sup> *who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1. NKJV)*

That is a statement about the outcome however, it says nothing about whether we are subject to the process and indeed elsewhere Paul makes it very clear that he believes all people, saved and unsaved will stand before the Judge on that day. He says later in the same letter:

For **we shall all stand before the judgment seat of £Christ.** <sup>11</sup>For it is written:

*“As I live, says the LORD,  
Every knee shall bow to Me,  
And every tongue shall confess to God.”*<sup>£</sup>

<sup>12</sup>So then **each of us shall give account of himself to God.** (Romans 14:10-12. NKJV)

Clearly then ALL PEOPLE believers and unbelievers shall give account before God, no one is exempt. However, for saved members of the covenant community the Final Judgment is not a matter of condemnation, it is a matter of reward. In the same way that there are degrees of

punishment given to unbelievers, so there are degrees of reward given to believers. Paul speaks of this also in 1 Corinthians 3:

<sup>12</sup>Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup>each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup>If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15. NKJV)

Paul says that depending on the quality of your ministry you will be given rewards. Some people who do nothing of eternal value will enter heaven essentially like naked men escaping from a fire. They will be saved, but they will enter with nothing. Others will receive rewards, Jesus said much the same thing in his parables of the talents. There are degrees of punishment for unbelievers and there are degrees of reward for believers.

If we are all going to stand before judgment then we all want to know exactly what it is that will be disclosed on that day. I used to have nightmares as a kid thinking about this one so I know we need to talk it through. Will your mother see all of the bad things you have done on this earth, that is really what we are asking isn't it?

#### **4. What will be disclosed on that day?**

The good news is that your mother is a sinner too and she will likely be very concerned with the state of her own soul on that day and will not be paying too much attention to your life at this point, but nevertheless we must ask exactly what will be disclosed on that day and who will see it.

From earlier teachings of Jesus we know that everything we have ever said, even in secret will be revealed on that day. Jesus said in Matthew 12:

<sup>36</sup>But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. <sup>37</sup>For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:26-27. NKJV)

The Bible teaches that your words tell the truth about your heart. If you have truly received Christ that will be reflected in the way you talk to your wife, it will be revealed in how you talk on the phone. Do you lie when people call you or invite you somewhere? Do you say: "Oh I'm

sorry he's not home right now" when in fact he is home but he just doesn't want to talk? How we talk proves who we are and our words will be looked at in full on the day of judgment.

The Bible also says that all of our deeds will be disclosed on that day:

Fear God and keep His commandments,  
For this is man's all.  
<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every work into judgment,  
Including every secret thing,  
Whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, NKJV)

The Bible says that we are what we do and what we say, or rather, our deeds and our words tell the truth about our hearts. God will assess the state of your heart by assessing your deeds and your works.

Finally, the Bible says that God will also disclose and assess our inward motivations, we see this in 1 Corinthians 4:5:

<sup>5</sup>Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and **reveal the counsels of the hearts**. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5, NKJV)

God will even look at why we have done the things that we have done, whether good or bad. Some people do good things for bad reasons. They help the poor to show others how wonderful they are. Jesus said in Matthew 6 that such people have had their reward and will receive none from God. The truth is, sinners with depraved hearts do all things – even their good things – out of selfish and prideful motivation. We cannot please God in our hearts until God has healed and renewed our hearts. Such things cannot be seen by you or I, but they are known to God.

Now all of that being said most Christians, myself included are very eager to know to what extent our sins will be displayed for all the world to see. I am sure I am not the only one who has wondered whether his mother or grandmother will see a tape of all their sins. Now on the one hand let me say that Christians are not to live in shadow. We are to confess our sins to one another and so be healed of guilt and shame and fear. But neither are we to be paralyzed by our past. No one in this place has come to Jesus in a straight line. No one in this place was saved because they were wonderful. Even on the other side of the cross we have all battled the flesh,

we have all stumbled and whoever in this place says that they haven't is a liar and the truth is not in them. So there really is nothing to hide. I am a sinner. I'd rather you hear from me today than find it out on that day. I am a sinner. James Housser is a sinner. Jody Cross is a sinner. Jil Koller is a sinner. Bill Fyvie is a sinner. Even June Fyvie – though I struggle to believe it – if the Scriptures are true than JUNE FYVIE is a sinner. We are all sinners so we need not be ashamed if we are in Christ. He knows our frame, he knows that we are dust, that's why he came so that he could live the life that none of us has lived! So be at peace if you rest in Jesus. But still we do want to know don't we whether our moms will see our sins in full display. The Bible seems to provide some relief from that plaguing question. Isaiah 43:25 has God promising:

*"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;  
And I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25. NKJV)*

Hebrews 8 says:

<sup>12</sup>For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins <sup>£</sup>and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Hebrews 8:11. NKJV)

Perhaps the most comforting of all is Psalm 103:12:

As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12. NKJV)

In view of all of that I think it is fair to say that for believers, Christ examines our words, our deeds and our motivations only in order to show forth the saving work that has been done in our hearts – he examines the fruit only to justify his declaration that we have been truly saved, he examines our motivations only in order to show forth the glory of God in a formerly fallen heart and to reward and to bless out of his abundant kindness. He does not seek to shame us, indeed he has forgotten our sins and will call them to mind no more. They are covered in his blood and buried beneath his cross and they are well and truly gone. Thanks be to God.

## **5. Are we then saved by works?**

It is possible that somewhat might have read Revelation 20 and they may have heard what we have said so far and they might become confused enough to ask: are we then saved by works? It is clear that we are judged by our works, the text says that plainly, but are we then saved by



works? The answer to that of course is no. Let me show you a quote from the well known Evangelical scholar Robert H. Mounce who comments on this very question:

The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a man's actual relationship with God. (Robert H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation)

Every good tree bears good fruit. Jesus examines our fruit only to show forth that we have been made good by his work in our hearts. Let me be very clear. It is by grace we have been saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves – even the faith to believe was a gracious gift of God, not of our works lest any man should boast. We are saved by the perfect work of Jesus Christ applied to our account by the faith he himself birthed in our hearts. Now our sin ledger is empty. All our sins have been blotted out and in their place only one line remains: PAID IN FULL. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!

## **6. What is the final state of unbelievers?**

What happens then to those whose sins have not been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ? What is the fate of those who have rejected God's kindness and have lived lives of rebellion and unbelief? The Bible tells us unambiguously:

<sup>15</sup>And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15. NKJV)

Earlier in the Book of Revelation we are told:

<sup>11</sup>And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:11. NKJV)

That is often referred to as the most fearful verse in all the Bible. It teaches quite clearly that the fate of those who have rejected Christ is eternal, conscious, torment. It is forever. It is conscious. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man knew he was in hell. Jesus often spoke of hell as being a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth – those are Jewish expressions for conscious expressions of regret and sorrow. It is not soul sleep. It is far worse than that. Hell is forever and it is real, or God's Word is a lie.

## **7. What is the final state of believers?**

The final state of the believer is the perfect opposite and is presented as such throughout Scripture. In Jesus parable of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25 he ends by saying:

<sup>46</sup>“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46. NKJV)

This eternal life is described in two chapters worth of glorious detail at the very end of your Bible. Let me provide you with just a few snapshots of the glory that lies ahead:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. <sup>4</sup>And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4. NKJV)

<sup>1</sup>And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. <sup>2</sup>In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. <sup>4</sup>They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5. NKJV)

Amen.

Those are the questions that arise naturally from within this wonderful and fearful text but there are also questions which arise in reaction to it and we will end this morning by considering those.

### **Responding To The Text:**

People will sometimes wonder as they reflect on this text why the Final Judgment is even necessary.

#### **1. Is the Final Judgment necessary?**

If God already knows all things, and if the souls of people upon their deaths go already either to heaven or to hell, why are we resurrected unto Final Judgment? Why not just let death be the great and final separator? This is actually a good and necessary and thoughtful question. As we read Jesus’ parables of the final judgment such as the parable of the sheep and the goats it is very clear that people are already known as sheep or goats before the final judgment. Why then this

drama? The answer to that is the answer to almost every why question we ever ask. For God's glory.

What is the chief end of man, my friends? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. Every human being ever created was created to glorify God and every human being ever created will fulfil that purpose. Their life will be displayed to the glory of God. In those who have persisted in wrong doing, God will be glorified by the display of his justice in their life and in their eternal condemnation. In those who have humbled themselves to repent and embrace his mercy, he will be glorified in the display of his forgiveness and grace. Listen to me my friend, you will be a canvas for the display of God's glory, one way or the other. Humble yourself today and respond to the call of the Gospel and you will be a display of his goodness and his mercy. Harden your heart today and you will be a canvas for a display of his justice. Every man, woman and child will glorify their creator on that day.

Lastly we must ask of this text what we ask of every text: how then shall we live?

## **2. How then shall we live?**

To the unbeliever my answer is simple. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Humble yourself while it is still called today. Cast yourself upon the mercy and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Tremble before him.

Kiss the Son, lest <sup>4</sup>He be angry,  
And you perish *in* the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him. (Psalm 2:12. NKJV)

To the believer I would simply quote the Apostle Paul:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2. NASB)

Live grateful – obeying the Lord out of gratitude and love; live graciously forgiving others as those who have been forgiven much; and live with gravity as those who know the awful truth and

the fearful reality of Final Judgment. For indeed, our God is a consuming fire. Jody, will you come and lead us as we worship the Lord together?