

Hell – Revelation 20:11-15

How many of you like to take a nap on Sunday afternoon? Boy, I sure do. Well, follow along on this little scenario and at the end I want to ask you a question. Let's say you go have some lunch after church and then you go home and get settled and sit down in your favorite La-Z-Boy chair. You turn on the game on the TV and start to watch but pretty soon you fall right to sleep. You start to dream some weird dreams. (Are there any other kind?) And in your dream you start to feel a pressure on your chest. There is a pain in your arm and you want to wake up but you can't. And then nothing but peace and darkness. You open your eyes and realize that your heart attack was fatal and you are now standing before God Himself. Let that sink in for a minute. One minute you're watching the Rangers play some ball and the next minute the Creator of the universe is looking you in the eye. Are you ready for that? Does that scare you? I don't care who you are. I think it ought to scare you. In **Revelation 1**, John tells of his vision of God and he says, "*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*" Isaiah had a vision in **Isaiah chapter 6** and he said, "*And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined!'*" It makes me think of the Mercy Me song, "I Can Only Imagine". I can only imagine what I am going to do when that day comes and I am standing all alone and your face is before me. I'll tell you I can't imagine not falling down as though dead and not thinking "*Oh, no, I'm ruined.*"

But **Romans 8:1** says, "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" And I know I am in Christ Jesus as are all who believe in Him and call upon His name and follow Him and yet I can't comprehend standing up before holy and almighty God, the sovereign King of kings. I love to ask this question, "*If you were standing before God and He asked you why He should let you into Heaven, what would you say?*" And while we know that this isn't exactly how it happens, I think it's a great question that we all need to answer today, right now, because we are not guaranteed another breath. Being raised in the church, I have come to expect people to answer that question in the "right" way by saying that they have put their faith in trust in Jesus or that they accepted Jesus into their hearts or that they asked Jesus into their lives. But I think the best I have heard it put was from someone I was talking to while back in jail who had not been in church and didn't know what the church thought he should say. But he simply said, "*Oh, I guess I would just have to say that Jesus did it for me because I couldn't do it.*" Oh, yes! Yes! That is exactly the right answer and how refreshing to hear it put that way! Jesus has paid the price I couldn't pay. But it is a decision that we have to make in this life because if we wait to make it when that day comes, it will be too late. But I said earlier that is not exactly how it happens. So, when we close our eyes for the last time here and open them on the other side, what does happen?

Do we haggle with God about our worthiness to enter Heaven? Can we talk him into it? Or do we all just get to go? Do you ever think about how all this ends? And what happens next? Does St. Peter show us the way to get our white robes, wings, harps and halos? Or is there more to it? I want to look today at one of the very first things that happens to all of us after we die by looking at 2 different passages. There is a passage that applies to unbelievers and a passage that applies to believers. Turn first to **Rev. 20:11-15** and then we will look at **2 Cor. 5:10**. Contrary to what some people believe, there is not one final judgment that includes both believers and unbelievers. Instead, non-Christians are judged separately from Christians at a judgment commonly referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment. (Perfect Ending, R. Jeffress, p. 172)

Let's read that in **Revelation 20:11-15**. "*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*"

I want to quickly look at 3 things in this somber passage. I want us to see Who, how and what. Who is the judge? How will He judge? And what will be the judgment? First, let's see Who is the Judge. **Verse 11** just says, "*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it.*" So, who is the "Him"? Well, scripture makes it clear that the Judge at the Great White Throne Judgment will be Jesus Christ. **Matthew 19, John 5 and Acts 17** all state this clearly. The ones being judged here are the ones who rejected Jesus in life and now they must be judged by Him. Now, some will see that and think that's a good deal because they have heard that Jesus was always loving and kind and forgiving and He's probably

a pushover because He loves everyone and would never send somebody to Hell. Well, I have to warn you, we are seeing Jesus in a different light here. **Matthew 25** tells us that Jesus will tell those He judges, *“Get away from me! God has cursed you! Go into everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels!”* You might think you are getting away with rejecting Jesus. You may go all your life feeling pretty smug about being your own man, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and never relying on anybody else but in the end, the One you reject will be your Judge. Now let’s see how He judges. What is the standard by which Jesus will judge? Look at **verse 12**. *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.*

Books, plural. That is the standard. And what books? Well, **John 12:48** tells us that God’s Word, the Bible will be there. *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.”* What a shame to be judged by a book most have never read. There will be the Book of Life, in which every believer’s name has been written since before the creation of the world. There will also be a book containing all the works that the unbeliever has ever done. And once again, the unbeliever’s hopes will go up as he sees the title of that book thinking that’s a good thing because his good deeds have outweighed his bad deeds in his mind. We know from **Ephesians 2:8-9** that is faulty thinking though. That says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”* So why would Jesus consider the works, good and bad, of unbelievers? Well, that is basically what the unbeliever has always wanted, right? They want to be judged by their works, not by their faith. But what they don’t realize is that they will be judged according to the standard set by Jesus, not by other people. **Acts 17:31** says, *“For He (God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man (Jesus) he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”*

We have seen Who is going to judge and how He is going to judge. Now let’s see what the judgment is for the unbelievers. **Verse 15** is pretty clear about that. *Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Do you believe that? I ask because I was surprised when I went online to look at different surveys done about people’s beliefs about Heaven and Hell. Numbers were all over the place but I was shocked at how many Christians didn’t believe in eternal Hell. The Bible is clear and Jesus Himself talked about it several times. You can look in **Matthew 18, 23, and 25** for that. Yes, God is love but He is also just. What kind of judge would you have if you went to court, guilty of murder, and the judge said, *“Aw, you know what? I like you. Don’t worry about that murder charge. You’re free to go.”*? And since God is righteous, Hell is proof of His righteousness. He doesn’t want anybody to go to Hell. He doesn’t send them there. They send themselves when they reject Jesus. We all know **John 3:16** but the two verses that come after that are powerful as well. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* I know we have had a lot of verses to look at and we’re not done yet but I have some good news as well. Let’s look at **2 Corinthians 5:10**. And while this is good news, a careful read will show that it ought to be a little scary for us believers as well. In **2 Corinthians 5:10** Paul says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

We saw with the Great White Throne Judgment the **Who, what and how** of that judgment. And while this judgment has the same Who, the what and how are different. So let’s look closer at those. Let’s see **how and what will be judged**. Now, when Paul wrote this he already knew something of what it was like to be standing before a ruler on a judgment seat. In **Acts 18** Paul made some people mad by what he was preaching (imagine that) and they brought him before Gallio who sat on what they called the bema seat. It was a large platform you got to by way of stairs and it overlooked everything with the person being judged well below the one doing the judging. And this judgment seat of Christ is often referred to as the Bema Seat Judgment. And Paul says here that *“we must all appear”* and obviously includes himself so we know he is talking about Christians. But that word “appear” means to be completely revealed. No covering up anything. No hiding. And that would really be scary if we were being judged for our sins but we know that our sins were judged at the cross and as I quoted earlier there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And yet it says plainly that we will receive what is due us whether good or bad. Now for the good things we have done we will receive great rewards. The Bible talks about 5 different crowns that are special rewards but there are other rewards as well.

3 men were waiting in line to enter heaven. The angel at the gate asks the first man "how many times did you cheat on your wife?" "10 times" the man answers. The angel gives him the keys to a 2010 Toyota Camry "This is how you will drive around heaven". The second man says he cheated on his wife 5 times, the angel gives him a 2018 Lexus and lets him in. The third man says he never cheated on his wife. He gets a 2024 Rolls Royce. A few days later the 3 men meet and the man in the Rolls Royce is very sad, the men ask him what's wrong, he replies "***I just saw my wife riding around on a skateboard.***" Well, I don't know that it will be quite like that but did you know that the Bible teaches that some Christians will enjoy special benefits in Heaven? Yes, not everyone's heavenly experience will be the same. **2 Peter 1:11** says there will be a special welcome for some. **Revelation 2:7** mentions special access to the Tree of Life and **Luke 12:37** talks about some getting special service by Jesus Himself. And like the commercial says, "*But wait there's more!*" **Matthew 25** talks about there being praise for faithfulness and even special positions of leadership. And Paul echoes that when he says in **2 Timothy 2:12**, "*if we endure we will also reign with him.*" All of that is more than I can take in. I'll tell you, I don't understand it all but I know enough that I am ready to go now! I have an idea that God didn't tell us more about how incredible Heaven was going to be because He knew we wouldn't be able to stay down here.

But as great as Heaven is going to be the Judgment Seat of Christ will also result in a loss of rewards for some. Our verse in **2 Corinthians** tells us that we will get what we deserve for our works both good and bad. Well how can we get what we deserve for what we have done bad if our sins have been forgiven? The answer to that question is to define the word "bad". And no I am not splitting hairs here or talking about semantics. The word "bad" here simply means worthless. It's not talking about sin. It is talking about the works you have done that were done for the wrong reason. Paul explains it this way in **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**: "*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*"

In other words, everything you have ever done will be judged according to your motives; what you were thinking; your real desires will all be laid out in the open. All works produced through self-confidence, self-conceit, and any other words that begin with the prefix self- (and there are many), will be examined at the judgment seat only to be found wood or stubble. And they will be burned up. When you helped that little old lady across the street secretly hoping she would give you a dollar – doesn't count. That money you gave to the church because you knew somebody was watching – burned up. When you waited to add something to the OCC shoeboxes until you knew somebody would notice – nope, up in smoke. No reward at all for that kind of thing. It will be burned up like lighting a match to wood, hay or straw. I thought about the thief on the cross next to Jesus. All his life everything he ever did was for his own pleasure and his own glory. He will have no reward in Heaven. No crown, nothing special for him. Sure, he will be in Heaven and that is incredible but how much more could have been his! C.S. Lewis said in his book [Mere Christianity](#), "*If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.*"

I said earlier that I think God didn't explain more about Heaven because He knew we wouldn't be able to stay down here. I read about a little girl who was taking an evening walk with her father. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed; "*Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!*" Charles L. Allen in [Home Fires](#). I'm looking forward to it! I'm ready to go now. Are you? Are you sure? You can be. We are not guaranteed another breath. Some of you are scared to take a nap this afternoon. And some of you maybe should be. Jesus said all you have to do is believe in Him to live with Him in eternity. But too many people think "believe" means less than what Jesus meant by it. To truly believe in Jesus means to be devoted to Him; to give Him your whole life. By faith, give Him all your hopes and dreams, your worries and fears, all your sins and all your possibilities and leave them at His feet. Devote yourself to Him and He will save you from Hell and to Heaven for eternity. Do it right now as the music plays.

For my incarcerated friends, I won't be preaching next Sunday so there won't be mail from me next week. 😊