

God's Justice – Revelation 20

I read the story of Supreme Court Justice Horace Gray back in the late 1800's. Before he was a U.S. Supreme Court Justice he once informed a man who had appeared before him in a lower court and had escaped conviction on a technicality, *"I know that you are guilty and you know it, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt with according to justice and not according to law."* What was Mr. Gray talking about? He was talking about the justice of God, wasn't he? How many of you have ever thought, *"That guy's gonna get it someday. He's gonna get justice and I hope I'm there to see it."*? Well, I looked this case up online and found out some more information. I always try to make sure that any of my illustrations are 100% correct and when I looked it up I found out the man Justice Gray was talking to left the country and went to Belgium. There, surprised while robbing a house in Antwerp, Belgium, the thief fled out the back door, clambered over a nine-foot wall, dropped down the other side, and found himself in the city prison. (*Oops: The Book of Blunders*, 1980.)

Justice! We all love justice...until it comes to us. Until we are the ones caught red-handed. Until we are the guilty party. Then we want mercy, right? Well, the good news is that, as Christians, we have received mercy. Not just a little bit of mercy. We have received mercy after mercy after mercy and we will continue to receive mercy when we die if we are true believers. The bad news is for those unbelievers that die. They will face almighty, all-knowing, all-seeing God who tried their whole mortal lives to show them mercy but they refused. That is what they are doing when they refuse the free gift of salvation that God provided by sending His Son Jesus to die for their sins. What they are ultimately saying is that they want to be judged by their own deeds whether they can enter Heaven or not. Well, God's standard for entering Heaven is perfection. So, you can either be absolutely perfect all your life or you can trust in and live for the One who is perfect and died for you and rose again to have a relationship with you. The choice is yours. But you have to make it in this life. We are continuing our series on the attributes of God. So far, we have seen His sovereignty, majesty, and holiness. And those attributes are incredible and wonderful and fun to talk about and read about. But God is none of those things if He is not also just. Where there is no justice, there is no love. And we know that God is love so He must also be just. He is a God of justice and we see that nowhere better than in the last book of the Bible. Turn to Revelation 20 and we will look at a very somber and serious passage starting in **verse 11**. We see here the Great White Throne of Christ. It is for unbelievers only. Those of us that have a real relationship with God will not have to stand before God at this time. We will stand before God and be judged for our good deeds to determine our eternal rewards. But after we die we will never have to face the wrath of God for what we did wrong in this life. I told you we would continue to receive mercy after we die. But not unbelievers. Let's read it in **Revelation 20:11-15**. *11 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 believe of all the passages in the Bible, this one should be the most motivating of them all. It should motivate believer and unbeliever alike. It should scare all of us into either making sure that we are true believers and if so, to make sure that everybody else is a believer as well. I know that anytime someone preaches on hell somebody somewhere is going to roll their eyes and say, *"Oh, you're just trying to scare people into Heaven."* And my response to that would be, *"If it works, you are absolutely correct!"* I will preach it again next week if I thought it was needed. I would come to your house and stand in the yard with a megaphone if I thought that would convince you. How do you read that passage and

not want to scream “Jesus” from the mountain top? How do you read that passage and not want everyone you know to be scared of hell? That’s my response.

Now, let me tell you what the Bible’s response is. **Leviticus 25** says to fear your God. **Deuteronomy 5:29** Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me. **Joshua 24** says, “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.” **Psalms 2:11** Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. **Proverbs 1:7** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. **Luke 1:50** His mercy extends to those who fear him. In **Acts 9** the church grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. And finally from this same book of **Revelation 14:6-7** Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, *“Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.”*

Most of you know that I am not usually a “hellfire and brimstone” kind of preacher but I do preach the entire canon of scripture and I will always preach all of it and I make no apologies for preaching something that Jesus Himself spoke of so many times. The thing is, most people don’t believe in hell and if they do hardly anybody thinks they are going there. And of those few that would admit they believe they are going there they have a serious misunderstanding of the place because they talk about partying down there with all their friends. Or they joke about Satan being afraid they are going to take over or some other foolishness. They obviously don’t understand this passage and so I want to look at this a little closer. This is a passage speaking about the last judgment that will be cast onto all unbelievers at the end of time. As most of you know there are actually 2 judgments. In **II Corinthians 5:10**, Paul talks about the Bema seat or the Judgment Seat of Christ and it is there that we as Christians will be judged and rewarded for our good deeds and scripture teaches that we will have already gone through that when the Great White Throne judgment takes place where all unbelievers will be judged. In **verse 11** the author, John, says he saw a great white throne. He doesn’t say who is sitting on it and he doesn’t have to. He has had this revelation come from God and John has seen in this revelation God, specifically Jesus, sitting on the throne. And as the King on the throne He is worthy to judge. Some person might question the authority of the one on the throne making these judgments so let’s look at what makes God worthy to judge. What makes any judge worthy to judge anything? I watched a rerun of the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show on TV a few nights ago. It was won by Banana Joe, an Affenpincher, whatever that is. It’s a little monkey-faced mutt that looks to me like it wandered in from the junk yard, but what do I know? You see, it is the judge who knows what an Affenpincher is supposed to look like. He knew what the standard is for that breed and so he has the right to judge. God has the right to judge because he has the knowledge of what we are supposed to look like. We are supposed to look like Jesus. God knows the Law and He knows what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to look and so He is worthy to judge. As Christians, as Jesus-followers, as believers having asked Jesus into our lives and for forgiveness of our sins, God sees us just as He sees Jesus and so we meet the standard. We are pure and spotless just like Jesus because we look like Jesus, not because we deserve it but only through our faith in Him.

Not only is God worthy to judge because He knows the standard but also because He is perfect. In **Matthew 5:48** we are told to *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* He is also worthy because He is the creator. **Genesis 1:27** says, *“So God created mankind in his own image.”* He is the creator and as such He is worthy to judge. And the worthy judge sits on the Great White Throne. Not only is He worthy to judge but all people will be judged. John goes to great lengths here to show us that all people will be judged. Everyone, the great and the small, those that have died on land and on sea, from days of old to the present will be judged by the worthy King. All will be judged according to their deeds including Hitler and Stalin down to those foul-mouthed rappers on TV, down to the sweet little old lady down the street who has refused to ask Jesus into her life.

John says the books will be opened and those books have recorded everything the unbelievers have ever done, good and bad. Every act, attitude and thought will be recorded and will be read for everyone to hear and then God will judge those people on how they have lived. So many people think they will be judged on a scale where hopefully their good deeds

outweigh their bad deeds and when God asks them for an account of all they have done that is where they will point. But Jesus, on the throne, the Great I Am, will say, *"I Am the standard. I Am the way you are supposed to look to get into Heaven. I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man comes to the Father except through me. And you don't look like me. I modeled the standard while I was on earth. I gave you the rules in my Word. I made it plain what you had to do and your salvation from hell has nothing to do with how many good works you have done in your life but it has everything to do with asking Me into your life to be Lord by faith while you were alive on earth. There are no more chances. **You** have been weighed on the scales, not your deeds. You have been weighed and have been found lacking. You are judged."*

And just like when the Supreme Court of the United States makes a judgment there is no appeal. There is no more arguing. There is no more evidence to bring out. The Supreme Court has the last word when it comes to justice in America but when it comes to eternity, God is the worthy judge and all will be judged and the judgment is always going to be hell. Hell is the judgment at the Great White Throne. **Verse 15** says that anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. Some people get distracted here trying to figure out if this is a literal passage or if it is symbolic. Is it really a lake of fire? How could a lake be fire? Is God really opening literal books or is it something else? And to be honest, I don't know for sure if it is a literal lake or if it is something else. But remember, this is a revelation to John and he is using the best words he can to describe what he sees and I know that if what he is seeing is not literal then it is worse. I don't want to know what a lake of fire looks like and I believe that is John's point here. When it comes to hell it doesn't matter.

But hear me say that there is a literal hell and there are literally people all around us who are dying in their sins and going there every day. And when I say that hell is the judgment for those unbelievers I want you to know what the Bible says about it. Jesus says in **Mark 9:44** that the fire in hell never goes out. Some people think hell is a place much like before we are born. Or they want to think that we will be unconscious but the rich man in **Luke 16** was very much conscious in hell and it says he was in torment begging for the beggar Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool the man's tongue. **Matthew** tells us in **chapter 8** that hell is a place of complete darkness. **Luke 13** teaches that hell is a place of complete separation from anybody else. One of the things about heaven that I look forward to the most is seeing friends and family again that have passed away but in hell the unbeliever is all by himself. Not to mention the fact that he will be completely cut off from God Himself. Several places mention the fact that hell is a place of absolutely no hope. **Hebrews 6:2** and **Matthew 25** both say it is a place of eternal judgment or punishment. The one thing they will have in hell is their memory; memories of all their family and friends, memories of all the people who tried to talk to them about God and heaven and Jesus and knowing that the judge was fair and righteous and holy and worthy and that the only person to blame was themselves. I don't like preaching about hell. I really don't. I look forward to next week when I get to talk about God's love. We could do that every week, just come together and tell ourselves how blessed we are to be going to Heaven and what it's going to be like. But just like preaching about hell, there is a time for that but we can't do it every week. Sure, we could all stay right here and pat ourselves on the back for being saved but Jesus says in **John 4:35** that the harvest is ripe. **Romans 10** asks how they can hear without a preacher? And it's not talking about a professional preacher. It's talking about someone like you. Jesus left the disciples with the task of spreading the Gospel to the entire world and there is no Plan B. Everybody we see we ought to be thinking about what we can say in the 30 seconds we have with them at the grocery store or the 30 years we live with them that will bring them to have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

So, while there is no good news to someone already in hell there is still Good News that we can share. And that Good News is that while we were yet sinners Jesus died for us because He loves us so much. He died because the penalty for sin is death and the only way we can pay for that is by death in hell but Jesus paid the debt that we owed with His death on the cross. Then after 3 days He rose again and is the only God of any religion that is alive today and so therefore He is the only true God because only God can defeat death and keep us out of everlasting hell. Have you asked Him into your life today to forgive you of your sins and be Lord of your life? Do it right now as the music plays.