

Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead

Revelation 20:11-15

We return once again to our fascinating study of the Millennial Kingdom—sheer fantasy to the lost, but treasured promises to the redeemed. May I invite you to turn to Revelation 20 and in a moment we will look at verses 11 through 15, primarily verse 11 this morning. But to give you a preview of what the Lord tells us in this text, we learn that at the end of the millennial reign of Christ when that 1000 years is concluded, two inconceivable events are going to occur. First of all, the universe is going to suddenly and violently vanish by the very Word of God purging it forever from the residue of sin. And, secondly, beyond the existence of time and space, in a dimension that we cannot conceive, the Lord Jesus Christ will judge all of the unbelieving dead down through the millennia of history and they will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Here in Revelation chapter 20:11-15 we come to these final two scenes.

Now thus far in chapter 20, in an economy of words the Lord has revealed to us what will happen when he returns to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish his messianic kingdom upon the earth. We have seen the incarceration of Satan, the allocation of rulers, the resurrection of saints, the incineration of rebels, the retribution of Satan and now in verses 11 through 15 we behold the disintegration of heaven and earth and the damnation of sinners.

So let's read this text, Revelation chapter 20 beginning in verse 11.

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the 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 from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And 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.¹

Now the question before us is simply this. How can we possibly fathom what God will do? Many will ask, and appropriately so, why will God do these things?

Now to answer this we must think rightly about God. So for a few minutes I want to hone your thinking a bit with respect to who God is. If you were to take, let's say, 100 people off of the streets in downtown Nashville and ask them to describe God in a word, you would get all manner of words.

¹ Revelation 20:11-15.

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Some would quickly say, “Dead.” Others would say, “Indifferent.” Some might use the word, “Love.” Others might use the word, “Omniscient or omnipresent.” Or perhaps even, “Omnipotent.” But very few people would use the word that he uses most to describe himself and that is the word “holy.”

Down through the millennia of human history, there is a reoccurring theme that is absolutely undeniable. And it is simply this: man has no fear of God. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter three and verse 18, “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”²

And, dear friends, the reason why men do not fear God is because they have no concept of his holiness. The basic meaning of holiness in Scripture is that of being set apart or separation. Morally speaking anything that is holy is set apart or separated from sin and consecrated to God. Because God is holy, he is totally separate from sin, totally separate from evil and he is justly devoted to glorify himself.

Another term that may help us grasp the idea of the holiness of God is the word “transcendent.” The term literally means to climb across or to exceed ordinary limits. And as we apply this to God we see that, indeed, he is utterly transcendent. He surpasses the limits of our imagination. He exceeds our ability to fathom. He exceeds the boundaries of the universe. He surpasses the inviolable laws of physics. For, indeed, he set them all into motion. He created them. He is totally other.

So, beloved, this is the essence of God’s holiness. In fact, holiness is the all encompassing attribute of God. For in it we discover the consummate perfection of his person. His holiness, his majesty, his eternal glory. And like no other attribute in that he uses to describe himself, we find that his holiness stands along as the defining characteristic of his person. In fact, the word “holy” is really a synonym for deity. Holiness is the quintessential summation of his attributes.

It was for this reason when Isaiah encountered God in his vision—and you will recall the seraphim were hovering around the throne to do the bidding of God—they were calling to one another in Isaiah 6:3, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”³

And, dear friends, because God is holy, because he is infinitely pure, his character demands that he judge sin. He is untainted by sin. In fact, the Word of God tells us that he cannot sin, nor can he tolerate sin. He is morally perfect in every conceivable way. Every thought, every action, every decree, every adjudication upon sin is always perfect and just. Every decision is absolutely righteous as Abraham acknowledged when he said in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”⁴

² Romans 3:18.

³ Isaiah 6:3.

⁴ Genesis 18:25.

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So because God is holy he must judge sin, but sinful man cannot stand that truth. It is repulsive to him. In fact, he spends every waking moment trying to deny any possibility that the wrath of God would in any way be upon him because of his sin. Sinful man scoffs at the idea that he is God's enemy and that he will spend an eternity in hell unless he repents. He sneers at the notion that he is desperate for undeserved mercy and a grace that he cannot earn. Instead, man has the ability—because of his deceived heart—to somehow rationalize and justify his own cause before a holy God, assuming that somehow his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds so the scales of divine justice tilt in his favor.

Because of this satanic lie the apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter one in verse 18”

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.⁵

How different is man's reaction from that of the heavenly worship described in Revelation 15 beginning at verse three? “Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy.”⁶

My friend, your ability to see your sin will be in direct proportion to your willingness to see the holiness of God. Then and only then will you be able to recognize your innate ability to conform to the moral character and desires of God which is, in essence, the core of sin. This is the sin that condemns us all and apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ, we would all stand guilty before God.

Let me put this in perspective. We hear a lot of talk these days about the United States being a Christian nation. And I would submit to you that nothing can be further from the truth. Now, to be sure, our country has more Christians per capita than any other nation on earth, but it has never been a Christian nation, for if it were a Christian nation, it would affirm these truths concerning the holiness of God and, thus, the sinfulness of man and therefore the need for Christ who is our only hope of salvation. A Christian nation would officially affirm that we as a people must follow Christ. It would be set forth in our constitution. It would affirm that “it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment,” Hebrews 9:27.

It would affirm what Jesus said in John 12:48 when he said, “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”⁷

⁵ Romans 1:18-19.

⁶ Revelation 15:3-4.

⁷ John 12:48.

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Moreover, if we were truly a Christian nation we would never allow the worship of any other false god. We would never allow any other false religion and certainly that is not true today, nor will it ever be on earth. But that will be true during the millennium.

Can you imagine our leaders affirming these central truths publicly concerning the holiness of God and man's need for a righteousness that is not our own, that can only be given to us from God through the righteousness of Christ?

Dear friends, in order for us to grasp what God is doing here in the text before us, may I remind you of some central truths about God. Not only is he holy, but we learn in Exodus 3:14 that he is the great "I am," meaning he is the one who has life intrinsic *to* himself and *in* himself. He is the creator of the heaven and the earth. He is utterly self-existent. He is eternal. He is unchanging. Indeed, he is transcendent. He is absolutely separate from our nature. He has a nature that we cannot even remotely comprehend apart from some of the truths that we read in Scripture.

In fact, God has said in Isaiah 55:8:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."⁸

Because of our sin nature, we rebel against God and we choose, instead, to worship ourselves. And the holiness of God that should evoke within every man a fear of God, is somehow replaced by a passion to love ourselves. And, therefore, apart from regenerating grace, man being a spiritual cadaver is utterly incapable of seeing his need for a Savior, of seeing his need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in my mind there is, perhaps, no other portion of holy Scripture save maybe the crucifixion of Christ that confronts us with the holiness of God like the text before us concerning this great white throne judgment. I am reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 10 verse 28 where he said, "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."⁹

And here we witness the haunting reality of that warning. God has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay,"¹⁰ in Hebrews 10. He goes on to say that the Lord will judge his people and it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Now, as we approach this text I find myself—and I think you would agree—being traumatized by the sheer holiness of almighty God, to try to somehow wrap my mind around this scene and what it would be like is staggering, to see the living God judging the unbelieving dead down through history.

⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9.

⁹ Matthew 20:28.

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:30.

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Now, you will notice that this scene is unlike any court that we have experienced. I have been an expert witness in a number of court proceedings over the years and I am sure you have been in courts. Hopefully, you haven't had to be the defendant. Maybe you had to be. But we all know what a court would look like in most places around the world. But this scene is very different.

You see, there will be no court room with a single defendant facing a human judge seated behind some raised desk. Instead, in a dimension that we could not even begin to fathom, in a reality outside of time and space, with the current heaven and earth completely disintegrated, there will be an uncountable number of people who have never bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ in humble repentance, who have never acknowledged the holiness of God and they will stand and receive their sentence.

And in the stark nakedness of their guilt, with no place to run, with no place to hide, they will face their creator and judge seated upon this great white throne. The horror they will feel, dear friends, will be but a trifle compared to the torment they will endure for eternity.

In God's court, as we see, there will be no trial, only sentencing. There will be no jury. There will be no defense attorney. There is no presumption of innocence here. There is no hearing. There is no testimony. There will be no appeal. Instead, there will be a concise and perfectly accurate rendering of the indictment against them, whereupon the guilty will be justly sentenced by an omniscient God who is able to peer into their very heart and discern the very motives of every action that they have ever committed.

As a footnote, bear in mind that this will probably be a process that will not last very long. Some might think, "Well, with the myriads and myriads of people, it would take another thousand years to judge these people." No. You must understand, God created time, and this is beyond time and space. God set the boundaries of time for all things including the time of our own lives. Job 14 tells us about that.

So this is outside the boundary of time and space. I believe the whole process will be very short. I believe it will be a simultaneous sentencing. We must bear in mind that the resurrected bodies even of the unbelieving dead will be capable of grasping all of the evidence that condemns them. At some level their minds will be brilliant beyond our ability to understand.

Most of the condemned will be filled with a blasphemous rage toward their judge and execution. And their blasphemy will be their eternal rant. But it will be a rant that falls on deaf ears because they will exist throughout eternity utterly in torment, but also in utter isolation. They will live in a place that Jesus called outer darkness, a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth, of a never dying work and unquenchable fire.

Many will stand before their judge and want to appeal to their good works, their moral integrity, their religious affiliations and rituals that they hope will tilt the scales of divine

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justice in their favor. But, again, it is only the perfect righteousness of Christ that can possibly reconcile sinful man to a holy God.

Jesus has warned that many so-called Christians will be among that dreadful assembly, those who professed Christ but never truly possessed him. And in incomprehensible shock, they will stand before that great white throne awaiting their sentence, remembering the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21 when he said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”¹¹

And I believe in abject terror they will want to explode with the very defense that Jesus warned they would use in futility, the defense that he described in Matthew 7:22 when they will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?”¹² But the Lord will say to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”¹³

And then, having been outfitted with a body suited to endure the everlasting suffering of hell, they will be, according to Revelation 20 and verse 15, “thrown into the lake of fire.”¹⁴

I must add that it is an indescribable grief to my soul that some of you within the sound of my voice will be among that dreaded assembly unless, unless you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Now, once again, all of these truths are considered to be pure fantasy by the vast majority of the world. The Scriptures tell us that the Word of God is foolishness to them. Certainly preachers, people like yourselves and me who believe these things are nothing more than a fool’s fool. The holiness of God is ridiculous. There is nothing sacred in our culture and our society. They do not see their sin nor their need for the Savior. And because all of these things are so hideously offensive and terrifying to them, once again, they suppress these truths in unrighteousness.

We witness this in our culture, do we not? Think about it. Our culture insists that God is not our creator, but rather we are merely the result of random chance, that everything exists merely because of chance. We live in a culture, frankly, in a world that for the most part prefers to worship the creature than the creator, calling things holy that are not, which is really at the heart of the sin of idolatry. So people live their life as if God does not exist, as if there will be no final day of accounting, some final day of judgment before a holy God. You tell people, “Jesus saves,” and they laugh at you and say, “From what?” That is the attitude.

But here the Lord tells us in very simple, forthright language that there will be a day of

¹¹ Matthew 7:21.

¹² Matthew 7:22.

¹³ Matthew 7:23.

¹⁴ Revelation 20:15.

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reckoning and that is what is revealed in these final two scenes in Revelation 20, the disintegration of heaven and earth in verse 11 and the damnation of sinners in verses 12 through 15.

Now, I have chosen to break these scenes down into three simple parts. We are going to see the transcendent tribunal, the trustworthy testimony and the terrifying termination. We will only look at the first one this morning, the transcendent tribunal.

And as we embark on this exposition, it is my prayer that everyone who has not confessed Jesus as Savior and Lord will do so while there is still time. And for those of us who know and love Christ, we can use this time as an opportunity to be struck afresh with the holiness of God and the law that we have violated, but also of the love of God. Let this examination of the judgment that we deserve remind us of the glory of the cross, that through Christ the righteousness and holiness of God established in his law were perfectly maintained while at the same time he saved sinners who have violated it so severely. Beloved, this is the glory of the cross, amen, this is the glory of the cross.

So verse 11, we examine the transcendent tribunal. Again, the scene here is utterly holy, separate from anything tainted by sin except the myriads of sinners awaiting their sentence and they, too, will soon disappear from the holy presence of God forever.

Once again I find this to be one of the most profound illustrations in all of Scripture that attest to the holiness of God. Everything about this scene is transcendent, surpassing our ability to fathom. Here the ineffable majesty of God explodes upon our minds as we behold his utter hatred of sin.

Now notice what John sees at his vision, verse 11. “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”¹⁵

Now obviously what John sees defies explanation. With the disappearance of heaven and earth his eyes fall first on the most dominant aspect of the scene and that is this great white throne and him who sat upon it. In some expanse of limitless space the beloved apostle sees the almighty Father seated upon the throne as he has been depicted all through the book thus far. But the Son is there with him according to various texts, for example, in Revelation 3:21.

We know also in chapter 22 verse one that it is the throne of God and of the Lamb. Now remember, in some inscrutable way the triune godhead is one God that exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And, indeed, Jesus said in John 10:30, “I and Father are one.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Revelation 20:11.

¹⁶ John 10:30.

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And I believe Scripture indicates that it is the Lord Jesus Christ that is the predominant figure here. Jesus said in John 5:22, “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”¹⁷ And in verse 27 we read that he gave him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. And you will recall in Acts chapter 10 verse 42 Peter clearly states that Jesus is, quote, “The One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”¹⁸

The apostle Paul affirmed this as well when he called the pagan philosopher and all the people of Athens to repentance and warned them in Acts 17 verse 30 that God, quote, “...has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”¹⁹ Now who else could that be but the Lord Jesus Christ?

This is astounding to me. Beloved, think of this. This is the same Jesus that was once in a manger and he now sits upon a great white throne. This is the same Jesus that once hung on a cross. This is the one who suffered and died in our place. This is the one of whom we sang about this morning, the one whom we worship and serve and await.

Now, to be sure, the Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly suited for this final adjudication because he is not only the Son of God, but he is also the Son of Man. He is the one who has personally experienced human life and was rejected by man. At the end of his revelation in chapter 22 and verse 12 Jesus testified of his authority on this coming day of judgment when he promised, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”²⁰

Now, may I remind you that Daniel saw this same scene and described it in this way in Daniel seven beginning at verse nine?

I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.²¹

Again, there can be greater picture of divine sovereignty and the majesty of God's holiness than what we have before us. Here we behold what the ancient covenant people sang about. Remember in the song of Moses recorded in Exodus 15 the people sang to the Lord for he is highly exalted. And in verse 11 it says, “Who is like You among the

¹⁷ John 5:22.

¹⁸ Acts 10:42.

¹⁹ Acts 17:31.

²⁰ Revelation 22:12.

²¹ Daniel 7:9-10.

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gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?”²²

If I can digress for a moment, beloved, may I encourage you to reserve the words “awesome” to describe the Lord our God? I hear this term overused these days especially among our youth. I fear that it trivializes the profundity of the holiness of God. May I encourage you to reserve certain terms only for the Lord our God? Use certain terms exclusively to describe the one who is quintessentially awesome. Reserve terms like transcendent and ineffable, sublime, holy, awesome, to describe God.

Now, notice the throne is not only great with the idea that it is greater than any other throne that has ever existed, but it is also white, white being the symbol of purity and righteousness and holiness in the Word of God. Here white symbolizes the white light, if you will, of his holiness, the ineffable light of his righteousness that exposes every trace of sin. John witnesses what he described in 1 John 1:5 when he said, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”²³ And, of course, he saw a glimpse of that first hand on the mount of transfiguration. Even as white as the very antithesis of darkness, God’s holiness is the antithesis of sin. And here we see that stark contrast.

The prophet Habakkuk tells us in chapter one verse 13 that God’s eyes are too pure to approve evil and he cannot look on wickedness with favor. The prophet Daniel tells us in chapter two verse 22, “He emanates light without shadow saying light dwells with him.” And the psalmist tells us in Psalm 104 verse two that he covers himself with light as with a garment. And Paul describes Christ to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:16 as, “Whom no man has ever seen or can see to whom be honor and everlasting power.”²⁴ This is what we see in this great white throne.

As I meditated upon this scene my mind went back to Exodus 33. You will recall that great text where God allowed Moses to be able to see only his hindquarters. He could not look upon the face of the glory of God without being destroyed. And you will recall in that great story that when Moses returned from the mountain the mere reflection of the light of God’s glory was so powerful that he had to veil his face because the people were absolutely terrified with it. They backed up in fear.

Can you imagine the sheer horror of gazing directly into the face of a holy God? Were it not for their resurrected bodies, they would not be able to do so without disintegrating themselves.

But there is much more to see here in the drama of this transcendent tribunal. Notice again in verse 11, “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away.”²⁵ The term “fled” **EPHYGEN** in the original language, means to banish. And the term here pictures a sudden and violent termination of the physical universe.

²² Exodus 15:11.

²³ 1 John 1:5.

²⁴ 1 Timothy 6:16.

²⁵ Revelation 20:11.

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Dear friends, all that we know, the earth and the sky and all that is in it, is going to suddenly disappear in a violent vanishing. You might call it an uncreation. Jesus alluded to this a bit earlier in Matthew chapter 24 and verse 35 when he said, “Heaven and earth will pass away.”²⁶ The term means to perish, to go out of existence. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will [by no means] pass away.”²⁷

Now, you will remember that during the tribulation the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments will absolutely devastate the earth and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and then when the Lord returns he is going to renovate the earth. He will return it back to the splendors of Eden. But how at the end of the millennium we see that he violently and abruptly dissolves everything in an instant. This is not another renovation, but an uncreation that is going to be replaced by a new creation.

Now the Holy Spirit reveals to us more about this event through Peter in 2 Peter three. You might recall that in verse six of that text he reminds us that the world was once destroyed by water, but ultimately it is going to be dissolved by fire. And then in verse seven he goes on to describe this. “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”²⁸ And then in verse 10. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”²⁹ And at the end of verse 12 he says, “The heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”³⁰

Now this account yields much helpful information. Although it is impossible for us to grasp such a supernatural explosion, Peter says that the heavens will pass away with a roar. It means with a great noise. It is what is called an onomatopoeia, a word we don't use very often term which is really a word that sounds like it means.

We have words like that, like clang, bang, crash, slam, buzz, those types of things. And so he is saying here that the heavens will pass away with a [?], with a great noise. And he says and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat.

Now this is an intriguing term here. The elements. What are the elements? Very enlightening. **στοιχείον** (stoy-khi'-on) in the original language and as I studied the lexicons I found the best explanation is simply this: any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise, an element, first principal. For example, the spoken words of the letters of the alphabet are called the elements of speech. So here we have the elements of all that exists. Here the created elements that are in motion, that make up all that exists, all of the material, the elements of the

²⁶ Matthew 24:35.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 2 Peter 3:7.

²⁹ 2 Peter 3:10.

³⁰ 2 Peter 3:12.

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universe, the protons, neutrons, all of the atomic and sub atomic particles that make up matter, will be uncreated with a loud noise.

In Hebrews chapter one and verse three we read that the Lord Jesus Christ, “upholds all things by the word of His power.”³¹ Beloved, one day the word of his power is going to stop upholding all things and he is going to let it all fly apart. Colossians 1:17. “In Him all things hold together.”³² The term literally means they continue to adhere. He is both the unifying principle and the personal sustainer of all that he has created.

This is staggering. When we look around at our world today we see an orderly system, not a chaotic one. We see inviolable fixed laws of physics in the material universe that maintain the unity of all of the complex systems. Astrophysicists tell us that the slightest change in the rate of the earth’s rotation around the sun or the most minute change of angle on its axis would cause us to either freeze or burn. And physicists tell us that the slightest change in the mass of the proton would result in the dissolution of hydrogen atoms which would cause the entire universe to dissolve into oblivion.

I find it interesting that physicists are still utterly baffled in understanding why the nucleus of the atoms hold together. And, of course, the answer is what we have just read. It is the Lord Jesus Christ that holds them together, the one that the world hates.

Eventually the one who holds these protons together will release them in final judgment and, shall we say, the nuclei of the atoms are going to fly apart as 2 Peter 3:10 says, “The heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”³³ Now remember, it was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ who created the universe. John 1:1-3 tells us that. And it would be the Son who uncreates the universe when he does so in judgment.

Hebrews chapter one verses 10 through 12, the writer quotes Psalm 102 verses 25 through 27 and here is what he says.

THOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING DIDST LAY THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH, BUT THOU REMAINEST; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD AS A GARMENT, AND AS A MANTLE THOU WILT ROLL THEM UP; AS A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.³⁴

Jesus will one day roll up and discard the universe like we would roll up and discard an old worn out garment. And then he will change that garment and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, one that will never be tainted by the corruption of sin.

³¹ Hebrews 1:3.

³² Colossians 1:17.

³³ 2 Peter 3:10.

³⁴ Hebrews 1:10-12.

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Isaiah spoke of this in chapter 51 verse six when he said, “Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment And its inhabitants will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not wane.”³⁵ My, what a comparison.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this as well in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 26. He says, “His voice shook the earth then,”³⁶ referring to Mount Sinai and the giving of the law. “His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN.’”³⁷

This expression, “yet once more” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. And in verse 29 he said, “Our God is a consuming fire.”³⁸ What he is saying there is simply this. All of the physical things that can be shaken will be destroyed. And all of the eternal things which cannot be shaken shall remain.

Dear friend, one day even as the Lord spoke the universe into existence, he is going to speak it out of existence and then with a word he will create a new heaven and earth to replace it. So, “earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”³⁹ They will cease to exist.

This, my friends, is the setting for the transcendent tribunal where the final judgment of the unbelieving dead will occur, where they will be sentenced, where the universe will finally be purged of any trace of sin. Then a new heaven and a new earth will be created and all of the saints down through the ages will enter the endless eons of the eternal state where we will all relish the infinite joys of serving the triune God in ways that we cannot comprehend.

I want to close this morning with this challenge. In 2 Peter 3:11 in the context of all of this Peter says, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”⁴⁰ He answers his question. We ought to have holy conduct and godliness in light of all that God is going to do.

Holy conduct refers to the fruit of godliness that everyone should see hanging from the vine of our life as well as godliness, he says, referring to the private, secret devotion that every saint should have to God, a secret devotion that dominates our thoughts and motivates us to have an aggressive witness for Christ.

These, dear friends, should be the twin pillars of our character and of our conduct. There should be no other rival in our life than our pursuit of holiness and godliness. So may all of us who are trophies of his grace look upon this text and allow it to renew our

³⁵ Isaiah 51:6.

³⁶ Hebrews 12:26.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hebrews 12:29.

³⁹ Revelation 20:11.

⁴⁰ 2 Peter 3:11.

Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead

Revelation 20:11-15

commitment to our own personal pursuit of holiness which should be marked primarily by an ardent zeal for evangelism.

And for those of you within the sound of my voice who are without Christ, I call you yet again humbly but forthrightly to repentance that you might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved before it is too late. Bow before him today as your Savior and Lord or else one day you will stand before him as your judge and as your executioner.

Let's pray together.

Father, allow these magnificent, unfathomable truths to sink deep within our hearts that they might motivate us to holiness and to godliness that through our lives many will be saved. Thank you for the hope that is ours in Christ. Thank you that the judgment for our sin was paid in full on the cross of Calvary for it is in Jesus' name that I pray. Amen.

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

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