

## Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead - Part 2

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Revelation 20:11-15

If you will, take your Bibles and turn to Revelation chapter 20. This is the second part of our study of the judgment of the unbelieving dead. We come again to the Word of God where we have an opportunity to hear from him. And as I think about it, living in a world that seems cut off from the very presence of God, a world that has no fear of God, a world that has no use for God, it is easy sometimes for we as believers to lose a sense of the presence of God. It is easy for us to feel in some ways isolated from him. We see no burning bush. We do not witness any parting of a great sea. We do not see a pillar of cloud by day or fire by night. We do not see the glow of the shekinah presence of God from within the holy of holies. So therefore at times we can lose that sense of awe, that sense of being in the very presence of God.

We need a Jacob's ladder, don't we? We need a way to somehow bridge that great chasm between heaven and earth, to somehow bridge that chasm between the transcendent holiness of God and the mundane existence that we have in this world that is so ignorant of God.

And I would submit to you that we have that ladder through the Word. We have that ladder through the Word. Whenever we open up the Word, dear friends, we enter into the presence of the one who should make us tremble. We are suddenly struck afresh with a sense of awe, with a sense of a holy delight. And, frankly, if that is not your experience, there is something terribly wrong with your attitude. I would even go so far as to say that there is perhaps something wrong with the status of your soul.

So as we approach the God breathed Word again this morning let's do so with a sense of awe, with a sense of reverence realizing that we are coming in to the presence of God.

Now I would like to read the text that I will be speaking to you from this morning. It is in Revelation chapter 20 beginning with verse 11 through verse 15.

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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 20:11-15.

## Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead - Part 2

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Revelation 20:11-15

Here we witness three different scenes that I have labeled, first, a transcendent tribunal; secondly, a trustworthy testimony and finally, a terrifying termination.

Last week in part one we examined the setting of this transcendent tribunal in verse 11 where in a dimension that we could never fathom, outside of the realm of time and space, with the current heaven and earth utterly disintegrated, an uncountable number who have never bowed in repentant faith before a holy God will stand and receive their sentence from the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.

Today we examine verses 12 through 15 where the Lord reveals to us some amazing information concerning this trustworthy testimony and the terrifying termination. But before we examine this text I want to remind you of some very, very important theological truths that often escape us, but that are necessary for us to have as a foundation in order to fully comprehend what is going on here.

Once again remember that God's great white throne judgment upon the unbelieving dead is going to occur at the end of the millennium and, as we discussed last week, God will judge sin because he is a holy God and his character demands that he judges sin. This staggering judgment is, therefore, a dramatic illustration of the holiness of God which is his all encompassing attribute of his character. The holiness of God really defines his utter transcendence, his utter separation from sin and his hatred of it.

And I would also add that in this transcendent tribunal we witness the majesty of his eternal glory, the very reason why—now catch this—the very reason why God ordained sin and evil to enter into his perfect universe. It is so important that you understand this amazing truth. In order to fully see not only the holiness of God in his great white throne judgment, but also his glory which he ordained for himself before time began.

Many Christians cannot believe that God would have anything to do with sin and evil. In fact, this is largely the issue that spawned what I believe to be the errors of Arminian theology that insists that God merely allowed the possibility for evil to exist in order to give his creatures freedom of choice, thereby guaranteeing that man's choices would always be meaningful. They would argue that God is not responsible for evil, man is. The cause of evil is man's free will. After all, if God were responsible, he would not be holy.

The argument goes on—and you could summarize it this way—that God could have created robots that were totally righteous and therefore never allow any sin or evil to enter into his world, but that would have eliminated man's free will which he believed was far more important. So the argument goes on that if God is completely sovereign and acts as the primary source of man's choices, that would not only violate the higher good of man's autonomy or his free will, but it would also make God responsible for evil and we must protect God from the charge of that kind of injustice.

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So many, therefore, invent a God who is not sovereign, but rather responds to whatever randomly happens in his universe, a God who values man's will over his own.

But this is not the God of the Bible, my friend. This is not what Scripture teaches. In summary, Scripture teaches that though God is not the author or cause of sin and, indeed, he hates sin, he did ordain it to enter his perfect universe through the voluntary choices of moral creatures in order to dramatically display his glory through his holiness, through his wrath, his mercy, his grace, his love and his power. Had he not ordained evil to enter his perfect creation, we would have never known the full extent of his glorious person.

In Romans chapter three and verse five the apostle Paul tells us, "Our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God."<sup>2</sup> "Demonstrates" literally means discloses, reveals, makes obvious, puts on display. So he is saying our unrighteousness puts on display the righteousness of God. And in Romans chapter five and verse eight we read that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>3</sup>

You see, had God not decreed for sin to enter the world, we would not be able to understand his infinite love. We would have never seen his mercy, his grace. So our sin literally puts God's love and his mercy and his grace and his righteousness on display—and even his wrath in judging sin demonstrates his holiness.

In Romans chapter nine verse 22 we read that God was "willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known."<sup>4</sup> It goes on to say that he "endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."<sup>5</sup> And, I might add, that at the great white throne judgment, his endurance is over. So he "endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."<sup>6</sup> He goes on to say, "He did so..." Why? "In order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory."<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Spirit summarizes this with undeniable clarity in Romans nine verse 14.

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." So then it does not depend on the man who wills [in other words human choice] or the man who runs [referring to human effort], but on God who has mercy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:5.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 9:22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 9:23.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 9:14-16.

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Then he gives an illustration. “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP...”<sup>9</sup> Oh, stop, whoa, wait a minute. God is responsible for raising up a man as wicked as Pharaoh? Yes, indeed. The text goes on to answer why. ““FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”<sup>10</sup>

At this point many people will say, “I hate this doctrine. It is unfair because we all know that God is a God of love. Moreover, God is not sovereign over everything. That would violate free will. That would somehow make his will more important than man’s will. We can’t have that.” So many invent a theological system that bails God out of this whole jam. It is as though they haul God before their lower court of finite and fallen reasoning and judge him according to their own understanding of justice and make him answer to their law.

God anticipates such ignorance and arrogance. He goes on in Romans nine verse 19. He says this. “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’”<sup>11</sup> In other words, if he is sovereign this is unfair. In verse 20 he answers it.

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?<sup>12</sup>

Dear Christian, we should rejoice in the infinite wisdom of God that ordained evil to enter into his perfect universe. For because of that we can now join with the angels in eternal worship praising him with a profound in depth understanding of all of his attributes that will shine throughout eternity against the backdrop of sin and evil.

The greatest act of evil ever committed was the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. I ask you. Did God have anything to do with that? Was that merely the unfortunately risk that he had to take when he chose the higher good of man’s free will over his own? Not at all. In Acts chapter two verse 23 Peter told the Jews, “This man,” referring to Jesus, “delivered up by the [catch this] predetermine plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.”<sup>13</sup>

Why would Jesus the Messiah willingly suffer and die on a cross? Because God ordained for him to do so. And it was by his predetermined plan and foreknowledge. “Predetermined,” the original language comes from the Greek word **HORIZO** (hor-id’-zo). We get our word horizon from that and it means to mark out a boundary beforehand.

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 9:17.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 9:17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 9:19.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 9:20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 2:23.

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And the word “plan” comes from the Greek word **BOULOMAI** (boo'-lom-ahē) and it describes God’s will of purpose, that which he has designed, that which he has ordained, that which he has decreed in eternity past. In fact, sometimes this is called his decretive will or his sovereign will.

So Peter is literally saying, “Our sovereign God decreed that Jesus die on the cross. It was his predetermined plan.” And also it was from the foreknowledge of God. It comes from the Greek word **PROGNOSIS** (prog'-no-sis). It means to foreordain. It is far more than just merely looking ahead into eternity and seeing what would happen and then basing a decree upon that. It is literally ordaining something ahead of time.

If I can give you something very technical here, grammatically it is in what we call the instrumental dative case and that is very important in Greek because it tells us that God’s foreknowledge and his foreordination was *the sole cause*, in other words, the means by which you men nailed him to the cross. That is to say Jesus did exactly what God ordained him to do. Yet isn’t it interesting? You were responsible for his murder because you nailed him to a cross. He says it was by your hands, the hands of godless men, you put him to death. Once again, another remarkable example of the inscrutable mystery of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.

Beloved, Scripture teaches that God is in control of every conceivable aspect of his universe. He is absolutely sovereign. He is even in control of evil. He ordained it as we see here in his predetermined plan to deliver up his Son to evil man. God has, indeed, willed evil to exist as a part of his plan and his purpose to glorify himself. And we see this at the crucifixion of Christ. And, beloved, we see it again in the great white throne judgment.

In Isaiah chapter 45 verse six we read, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”<sup>14</sup>

At that point some would say, “No, that can’t be true. I demand an explanation.”

Well, he gives it in verse nine. And he says:

Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker— An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’ Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’<sup>15</sup>

In other words he is saying to question God’s justice in his sovereign rule is as absurd as a pot demanding an explanation from the potter as to why he is making him that way.

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 45:6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 45:9-10.

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Or—and this gets even further out there—a chromosome somehow questioning the rationale of conception to a father and a mother. I mean, it is so absurd you can't even wrap your mind around it. And that is exactly God's point.

In Isaiah chapter 46 verse nine he says:

I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'<sup>16</sup>

Deuteronomy 32:39. "It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."<sup>17</sup>

Proverbs 16:4. "The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil."<sup>18</sup>

Amos 3:6. "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"<sup>19</sup>

Psalms 115:3. "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."<sup>20</sup>

And, beloved, just because you may not understand it, don't redefine him according to your understanding. So why would God ordain evil? To glorify himself.

Beloved, ask yourself. Is God more or less glorified because he ordained Jesus to die on the cross? The answer is obvious. Is God more or less glorified when he pours out his wrath upon the ungodly, the unbelieving world just before he returns in power and great glory? Is God more or less glorified because of the transcendent tribunal of the great white throne judgment and the wrath of his sentencing? The answer is abundantly obvious. And it is for this reason the Scripture teaches, as I stated earlier, that though God is not the author or cause of evil—for, indeed, he hates sin—he did ordain it to enter his perfect universe through the voluntary choices of moral creatures in order to dramatically display his glory through his holiness, wrath, mercy, grace, love and power.

And the scene of the great white throne judgment literally explodes with the glory of God that he has ordained for himself. This was not some plan B that he is reacting to. This was something that he ordained in eternity past.

You say, "Well, I can't understand it." Well, I can't either. Do you know why? Because you are like me. You are a clay pot. You are a chromosome. You don't even remotely

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<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 46:9-10.

<sup>17</sup> Deut 32:39.

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 16:4.

<sup>19</sup> Amos 3:6.

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 115:3.

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have the capacity, nor do I, to understand the mind of God. And so by faith we trust him and we worship him. And with that we approach our text.

According to verse 11 John beholds this transcendent tribunal in the incomprehensible void of an uncreated universe that we studied last week with the Lord now seated upon a great white throne. And now let's see how the drama unfolds as we look, secondly, at the trustworthy testimony.

Verse 12. "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne."

These are the unbelieving dead that have existed down through the millennia of history. Since their death their immaterial souls have been in torment and now they are reunited with a resurrected body. Bear in mind the Bible teaches that at death the souls of unbelievers go immediately to eternal punishment as indicated in Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus. You will recall in Luke 16 where the rich man pleaded for Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool his tongue and it was all because he was, he said, in anguish because of the flame.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us that it is appointed for men to die once and after that comes judgment. So at the great white throne judgment, myriads upon myriads of unbelievers will be resurrected from their torment and their souls will be reunited with their bodies, bodies that will be uniquely suited for the eternal torments of hell.

In John 5:29 Jesus called this the resurrection of judgment. The prophet Daniel called in chapter 12 verse two the resurrection to disgrace and everlasting contempt. And in Acts 24 verse 15 Paul described it as the resurrection of the wicked.

Now, many will ask, "What will happen to the last living believers at the end of the millennium?" Well, God doesn't really tell us, but I think it is safe to assume that they will be translated into glory and also transformed at the end of the millennium like the miracle you will recall of Enoch in Genesis chapter five verse 24. I love that text. It says that he "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."<sup>21</sup> That is probably what will happen to those believers. Or, like Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11 who went up by a whirlwind to heaven. Of course, we have seen it, as well, or we will see it when we see it in Scripture in the rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 when the believers will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord.

Now, next, notice John's description of the dead in verse 12. He said they are "The dead, the great and the small."<sup>22</sup> Here we see that God is no respecter of persons. Whether a prince or a pauper, whether they are famous or utterly insignificant, whether they are rich or poor, those who never bowed before God in repentant faith shall stand condemned.

How thankful believers should be that we will never stand in the presence of God awaiting to be sentenced. What a wonderful thought. We know that, "There is now no

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis 5:24.

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 20:12.

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condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”<sup>23</sup> Romans 8:1. Instead, we will participate in the first resurrection, as we studied in verse six of chapter 20. In fact, I love what Jude says in that great doxology in verse 24. We will stand in the presence of his glory, not condemned, but “blameless with great joy.”<sup>24</sup> My, what a difference. You see, by the time of the great white throne judgment upon the unbelieving dead, we will have already received our rewards, but not so those who have rejected God’s mercy.

As I look upon this scene I see God’s mockery of democracy, God’s mockery of the notion that the majority rules. More often than not the majority is wrong, dead wrong. And this horrific scene is a dramatic demonstration of man’s folly and his high treason against a holy God committed by the majority of human beings down through history.

I was thinking about man’s folly due to spiritual blindness. Upon several occasions—and I am sure you have experienced this as well—I have talked with men who want nothing to do with Christ and scoff at the notion of hell and on a number of occasions I have heard them say something like, “Well, at least in hell I will be among friends.” Well, that will be true for the brief time that they stand before the throne in judgment. But upon their sentencing, the eternal punishment that they will endure will occur in solitary confinement. Because they love darkness rather than light Scripture teaches that hell will be a place of total darkness where every inmate will be isolated from all the rest. We see that in Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30, 2 Peter 2:17 and Jude 13. So, yes, there will be a reunion for the damned, but a very short one, indeed.

This is such a terrifying scene, one captured so poignantly by the pen of John Philips who wrote, quote, “There is a terrible fellowship there. The dead, small and great, stand before God. Dead souls are united to dead bodies in a fellowship of horror and despair. Little men and paltry women whose lives were filled with pettiness, selfishness and nasty little sins will be there. Those whose lives amounted to nothing will be there whose very sins were drab and doughty, mean, spiteful, peevish, groveling, vulgar common and cheap. The great will be there, men who sinned with a high hand and with dash and courage and flare, men like Alexander and Napoleon. Hitler and Stalin will be present. Men who went in for wickedness on a grand scale with the world for their stage and who died unrepentant at last. Now one and all are arraigned and on their way to be damned, a horrible fellowship congregated together for the first and the last time,” end quote.

I must confess. This is hard to preach knowing that there may be ones that I love, perhaps some among you that will be in this vast gathering of the damned. I found myself repeatedly wiping tears from my cheeks as I prepared this feeble manuscript to present to you because I found myself so often crying out to the Lord to be merciful to those that I love, that he would save them by his grace.

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<sup>23</sup> Romans 8:1.

<sup>24</sup> Jude 24.



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As we drop down to verse 13 John gives us more detail regarding the condemned. He says, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them.”<sup>25</sup>

Now here the Lord speaks of the most remote places from which he will summon the bodies of the unbelieving dead. We see from the “sea.” Think about it. The sea was that place where billions perished originally in the judgment of the great flood. Bodies will also be summoned, he says, from “death,” death being emblematic of yet another taker of life like the sea, and even from “Hades” which was a term used in the New Testament as a reference place of punishment for the departed dead who await their final sentencing to the lake of fire at the great white throne judgment.

So just before the Lord uncreates everything at the end of the millennium, he is going to summon the DNA found in the bodies of these unbelievers whether it be in the sea or on the land, wherever it may be, in the grave, and bring those bodies to be united with those souls. So John sees the dead, the great and the small standing before the throne.

Then notice what happens in verse 12. “And books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life.”<sup>26</sup> Daniel saw this as well when he described the ancient of days in Daniel seven who took his seat upon the throne and then in verse 10 he said, “And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.”<sup>27</sup> So here John sees the same books. These are the books that symbolized God’s ability to remember precisely all of the evil deeds of the unbelievers that will stand condemned before him in contrast to another book that we see here in the text, the book of life, that book from which their names will be missing.

Repeatedly in Scripture we learn that God keeps a register of human actions. And in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 36 and 37 we read where Jesus condemned the Pharisees saying, “That every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment.”<sup>28</sup> Now although salvation is by grace alone, a man’s works will demonstrate the truth fruit of genuine saving faith. And, obviously, these works will be missing, demonstrating that their faith was not genuine, if they had one at all. And, I might add, that John would have been very familiar with the imagery of these books because in ancient cities of the first century they did keep a register of citizens.

As believers, our citizenship is in heaven, Philippians 3:20. And our names will be recorded, therefore, in the book of life which is the book of the redeemed, the book of the elect of God. This is the book of those that who will be rescued according to Daniel 12:1. And in Malachi chapter three and verse 16 you have the same concept. It talks about the book of remembrance of those who fear the Lord and who esteem his name. And Jesus commanded us in Luke 10 verse 20 to “rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Revelation 20:13.

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 20:12.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel 7:10.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 12:36.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 10:20.

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And Paul spoke of fellow believers in Philippians 4:3 as those “whose names are in the book of life.”<sup>30</sup> Even the writer of Hebrews described this in Hebrews 12:23 where he spoke of, “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”<sup>31</sup> But for the innumerable number of those who will stand condemned before that dreaded throne, their names will not be found in that book of life.

So we read at the end of verse 12, “The dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”<sup>32</sup> We see the emphasis on their deeds again at the end of verse 13. Again, bear in mind, this does not prove salvation by works, but rather condemnation by works. Those who refuse to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died as a substitute for all who believe, those who refuse to believe that by faith the righteousness of Christ can be imputed to them, that he took their sin upon himself at the cross, all of those will stand guilty before God’s bar of justice because they violated his law.

Now at this point I have heard this so many times. People will say, “Oh, come on, preacher. Come on. I have been a good person all of my life. My good deeds far outweigh my bad deeds.” Yes, but may I remind you that God demands perfection. God has said, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”<sup>33</sup> Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>34</sup>

Dear friends, please hear me. Hell will be filled with good and very religious people, but it will not contain one perfect person. Paul warned the self righteous Galatians in Galatians 3:10 saying, “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.’”<sup>35</sup>

My friend, God does not grade on the curve. He demands absolute, perfect, holiness. And for this reason James warned in James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”<sup>36</sup>

Well, that is the bad news, isn’t it? But that sets up the good news. Galatians 3:13. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’”<sup>37</sup> This is the glorious promise of the gospel, my friend, that God “Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Romans 4:3.

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 12:23.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 20:12.

<sup>33</sup> Leviticus 19:2.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 5:48.

<sup>35</sup> Galatians 3:10.

<sup>36</sup> James 2:10.

<sup>37</sup> Galatians 3:10.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.

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Please hear me. Some of you within the sound of my voice are far too cocky, far too arrogant with respect to your evaluation of yourself. You are hopelessly biased in your own favor. You are convinced that you are simply too good of a person to deserve such condemnation. And, in effect, what you are saying is God is not as holy as he claims to be.

On this subject Jonathan Edwards made this observation and I quote, “Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it. He depends upon himself for his own security. He flatters himself in what he has done and what he is now doing or what he intends to do. Everyone lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself and that his schemes will not fail,” end quote.

My friend, do not be deceived. The Word of God tells us that, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”<sup>39</sup> that “All are dead in [their] trespasses and sins,”<sup>40</sup> that all are enemies of God. And, according to Romans five verse one, we can only have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”<sup>41</sup>

So at the end of verse 12 we see that “the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”<sup>42</sup> Repeated again at the end of verse 13. Deeds will include every thought, every word, every action. This is incomprehensible. But I might say that it is probably more comprehensible today than it was 100 years ago in light of the invention of computers. And obviously God’s infinite mind surpasses anything that we could begin to comprehend.

I find that it is a peculiar aspect of our sin nature to think that somehow we can hide from God; that somehow we can sin in secret, in those secret recesses of our imagination where he doesn’t see. Nobody else can see it, so I guess maybe God doesn’t see it. But the Word of God tells us differently. Psalm 44 verse 21 we read that God “knows the secrets of the heart.”<sup>43</sup> In Romans 2:16 we read that he “will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”<sup>44</sup> And Jesus said in Luke 8:17, “Nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”<sup>45</sup>

He can know the secrets of man’s hearts and therefore obviously he can discern our words and actions. Jesus said in Matthew 12:37, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”<sup>46</sup> And in Ecclesiastes chapter 12

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<sup>39</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 2:1.

<sup>41</sup> Romans 5:1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 20:12.

<sup>43</sup> Psalm 44:21.

<sup>44</sup> Romans 2:16.

<sup>45</sup> Luke 8:17.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 12:37.

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verse 14 the Holy Spirit summarizes his omniscience by warning that “God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”<sup>47</sup>

And then, on the basis of their deeds God will adjust their level of punishment in hell.

We see evidence of this in Scripture, for example, in Matthew 11. You will recall Jesus condemns the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because of their rebellious rejection of him even though he spent the majority of his ministry in that area. They saw more miracles of Christ than any other group of people. And yet because of their rebellion and their unbelief he said that they were more rebellious than Tyre and Sidon. And for that reason he pronounced judgment upon them in verse 24 and he said, “I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”<sup>48</sup>

Similarly we see levels of judgment described when our Lord spoke to the leaders of Israel in Mark 12:38-40 that because of their self righteous religious hypocrisy he said, “These will receive greater condemnation.”<sup>49</sup> That there will be varying degrees of punishment in hell is also taught in Jesus’ parable of the faithful steward in Luke 12:47-48 and also by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 10 verse 29 who asked this question. “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, for those of you who know the gospel clearly and who reject it with impudence, yours will be a greater condemnation. So in unimaginable horror and guilt they will stand condemned awaiting their sentence.

This leaves us, finally, to the terrifying termination in verse 14. “And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”<sup>51</sup> “Death and Hades,” referring to the place of the departed dead where they have been experiencing temporary punishment until their resurrection and final sentencing. And, finally, my friends, this ghastly scene comes to a conclusion, one that exceeds the limits of our imagination, one that begs for language, but certainly one that gives glory to God even in his wrath as we see him justly punishing sin. The vast assembly of the damned are now thrown into the lake of fire. It says, “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.”<sup>52</sup>

Henry Sweet describes it this way, quote, “The perspective now changes as death and Hades come to be personified as inseparable companions, two voracious and insatiable monsters who have swallowed up all past generations and now meet the same fate as the prey they have just disgorged,” end quote.

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<sup>47</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:14.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 11:24.

<sup>49</sup> Mark 12:40.

<sup>50</sup> Hebrews 10:29.

<sup>51</sup> Revelation 20:14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

So, in other words, death and Hades vomits up, all that has been within their confines and these are thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire, **GEENNA** (gheh'-en-nah) in the original language. The term was used in the New Testament to describe the Valley of Hinnom which is located just southwest of Jerusalem.

In the days of the monarchy in the Old Testament this was the place where an idolatrous cult sacrificed their children by making them pass through the fire, a hideous, vile, satanic religious system. And even in the first century BC this name came to be used in a metaphorical sense to denote a place of fiery torment that the people believed was reserved for the wicked either immediately after death or immediately after the last judgment. And in Jesus' day it was a garbage dump. This is what John would have very clearly remembered, a garbage dump that would burn continually and often the bodies of criminals would be ignominiously thrown into that dump to burn. So here the imagery of the lake of fire is very fitting. Here it symbolizes the eternal dumping ground for the wicked.

God does not tell us if the fire of which the text speaks, the fire of hell is a literal fire as we know it. It may be. But certainly it is emblematic of that which is excruciating, that which is tormenting and painful. But we do know that hell will be as Jesus described it in various passages as a place of outer darkness, a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth, of a never dying worm and unquenchable fire where "the smoke of their torment," according to Revelation chapter 14 verse 11, "goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night."<sup>53</sup>

The text says, then, "This is the second death, the lake of fire."<sup>54</sup> You see, unbelievers will experience the first death, the physical death here on earth in time and space, but yet here we see a second death where they will die again eternally at the great white throne judgment, death that will include unending torment. The scene closes in verse 15. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."<sup>55</sup>

Dear friend, I pray that you have cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, cried out for him to save you, because if you haven't, one day he will judge you. And I would plead with you as a minister of the gospel of Christ to believe in him before it is too late, to examine your heart. It is very easy, especially in our culture, to deceive yourself into thinking that you truly know and love Christ because you belong to some church or you have repeated some prayer or you have signed some card or walked some aisle and on and on it goes. But may I remind you that Jesus has said that not everyone who calls me Lord will enter the kingdom, that there will be more deceived, quote, unquote, *Christians* than there will be real Christians. And I pray that none within the

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<sup>53</sup> Revelation 14:11.

<sup>54</sup> Revelation 20:14.

<sup>55</sup> Revelation 20:15.

Revelation 20:11-15

sound of my voice will be a part of that number. So I plead with you with all of my heart to examine your heart and place your faith in the living Christ and be saved.

Today is the day of salvation. Don't put it off.

Let's pray together.

*Father, these are sobering words. They are words that cause us to tremble. They are words that cause us to weep over the lost. And, yea, Lord, they are words that cause us to rejoice in the unmerited salvation that is ours because of Christ.*

*Spirit of God, work your mighty work of conviction in the hearts of the lost and cause all of us who know you to rejoice in an even deeper way as we contrast the joys that are ours because of Christ with the torments of hell that we justly deserve. We thank you and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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