

The Great White Throne Judgment (Part 2)

Revelation 20:11-15

Sunday, 19 March 2017

Revelation chapter 20:11-15 contains the most serious and sobering scene in all of the Bible because it describes the most tragic event in the history of mankind, the final judgment before the Great White Throne. The Apostle John must have trembled when he wrote down this vision of the final judgment.

John MacArthur says of this event:

This is man's last day in God's court. This day of judgment, this tribunal, this court, this trial will not be like the familiar trials held on earth. For those on trial this day will experience a very different kind of court. There will be no debate about guilt or innocence. There will be a prosecutor but no defender, there will be an accuser but no advocate. There will be an indictment but no case for the charged. There will be a swift presentation of the convicting evidence but no rebuttal, a testimony with no cross examination. There will be an utterly unsympathetic judge and no jury. There will be a sentence but no appeal, a punishment with no parole in a jail with no escape.

The petty courts of earth fall far short of this one. And it is the last courtroom that will ever convene throughout all eternity. After this no one will ever be tried again and God will never again act as a judge.

And for all through the centuries, since man sinned and fell in the Garden, Satan, the liar above all liars, has endeavored to deceive man about the reality of this coming event. He has done his best to convince men that there will be no final judgment. He has deceived sinners into believing that they can live any way they like and there will be no day of accounting, there will be no future punishment, no time of sentencing, no moment when they stand before the Judge of all the earth.

Atheism or any invention of a religion that has a God who is benign and poses no ultimate threat to them is all part of Satan's deception. Evolution's popularity is also based on that deception. It suits man just fine that he came out of some piece of protoplasm. It suits him just fine that there is no God because if there's no God then there is no one to whom he is accountable. There is no one to whom he has to answer. There is no one to sit in judgment. And man is free from the fear of ultimate accountability and free to sin as he pleases and then just pass out of existence.

But that's not the case. That is the deceiving lie of Satan and has been through the centuries. Either there is no God and there is therefore no accountability, or that the God who exists is not a God who is going to

judge us at all. Or that there is a God but when we die, life is over and we go into oblivion and annihilation. All of those are the lies of the enemy. ...

Somewhere unknown to us between earth and heaven, between the world as we know it now and the new heaven and the new earth, this judgment will take place.

Remember the chronology of the events in the book of Revelation?

- First, in chapters 1-3, John wrote about the vision of Jesus and the letters to the seven churches.
- Next, in chs. 4-5, John saw the worship of God and Jesus in heaven and Jesus taking the scroll from the hand of God who is seated on the throne.
- Then, roughly in chs. 6-18, he writes about the period of Tribulation.
- And then in ch. 19, Christ returns and destroys all human rebels, throws the antichrist and the false prophet alive to hell, and temporarily binds Satan and locks him up in the bottomless pit.
- Then in ch. 20, the Lord Jesus sets up His millennial kingdom and reigns with His saints. At the end of this thousand-year reign He releases Satan and allows him to deceive the nations, but God ultimately destroys all His enemies and throws Satan into the lake of fire.
- After this, we read in the last part of ch. 20, the Great White Throne judgment. God brings before Him all of His moral creatures for judgment or evaluation, either to punish the ungodly or reward the godly.
- Finally, in chs. 21 and 22, God brings the eternal kingdom recreating the universe with the new heavens and the new earth.

So we are now in this last part of ch. 20, looking at the Final Judgment before the great white throne. There is something interesting in the way this event is described. You will observe that very little is said concerning the scene. The language here is plain. There are no extra details. There are no adjectives that are stacked upon one another to show how serious, how immense and terrifying the scene is. It is plain, simple, straight-forward, unembellished language. (MacArthur)

As we look at this passage, we will follow a simple outline I have borrowed from John MacArthur in order to help us grasp its details.

- A. The Scene
- B. The Summons
- C. The Standard
- D. The Sentence

For today, we are just going to look at the **scene**.

The SCENE (20:11-12a)

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. ...

That's the scene.

Notice how verse 11 begins, "Then I saw." Every time you read this phrase beginning with the return of Christ, you will notice that it will introduce us to a new vision.

- 19:11 - *Then I saw heaven opened* [and then John describes the glorious returning Christ riding on a white horse.]
- 19:17 *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun,* [calling the birds to prepare for the great supper of God to eat the flesh of all the slain enemies of God.]
- 20:1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven,* [with his chains and key to lock up Satan at the bottomless pit].
- 20:4 *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.*
- 20:11 *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.*
- 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,*

The phrase "Then I saw" does not only introduce a new vision, it also indicates the sequence of the visions that sum up the end of human history.

Now look at what John saw in this scene. In verse 11 he says, "**Then I saw a great white throne.**" These three simple words—great, white, and throne—indicate that something terrifying is about to happen. Let us consider each of those words.

"Great." Maybe John saw something about the physical appearance of the throne. I am sure this was the very throne that Daniel saw in the vision that God gave to him. In Daniel 7:9-10 of his prophecy we read:

9 "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; ... his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

Another reason perhaps that John says this throne was great was because of its significance. The throne represented absolute power and authority, glorious majesty, unchallenged sovereignty, and comprehensive judgment. It is the final judgment seat for the judge of all the earth to sit and make His judgment.

"White." This speaks of purity and holiness and righteousness. From that throne comes absolute righteousness. "It means that not even one speck or wrinkle mars the whiteness of God's perfect justice." MacArthur says, "It is a dazzling, blinding, blazing, pure, holy, divine throne where God sits in utter and absolute judgment."

"Throne." As I said, this is the very throne that Daniel saw in his vision in Dan 7:9-10.

- I think this is the same throne that Jesus was talking about in Mt 25:31-32: "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then **he will sit on his glorious throne.** 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations...*

- I also believe that this is what the apostle Paul referred to in Romans 14:10-12 when he was referring to all believers *"For we will all stand before the **judgment seat of God**; ... 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
- This is the same throne that he refers to as the judgment seat of Christ in 2Co 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."*

Whether it was Daniel, the Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul, or the apostle John, they were all speaking of the same throne, the Great White Throne. It is the same throne before which all resurrected humans, the godly and ungodly, will give an account of himself or herself to God, and be rewarded or judged according to their deeds.

And then John writes, **"And Him who sat upon it."** Who is this who is seated upon the great white throne?

Without doubt the Almighty Father is One seated on the throne. Throughout the book of Revelation God is the one sitting on the throne. For example, Rev 4:2 we read, *"At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."* As you continue to read the rest of chapters 4 and 5, you will see that it was God the Father who is seated on that throne. (You see that also in Rev 6:16; 7:10,15; 19:4; 21:5).

By the way, Mr. Eli Soriano uses this idea of God sitting on the throne to prove that God has buttocks. He is mistaken.

Moses said in Dt 4:12-16:

12 Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. ... 15 "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16 beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

Jesus also said in Jn 4:24 that *"God is spirit."* This means that God is invisible as opposed to the physical or material nature of man (Col. 1:15 says that "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God."

And so when John writes in Revelation that God sits on the throne, it does not mean that He has a physical form. He is using what bible teachers call "anthropomorphism." It is a figure a speech or a technique in which a writer uses human appearance, emotions or other human traits to animals, lifeless things or to God.

So, in the book of Revelation we find so many times that God is the One who sits on the throne. However, there are also other portions of Revelation that says the Son sits on the throne with Him.

Rev 3:21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Rev 22:1,3 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ... 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,

But there are also passages in the Bible that says that the Lord Jesus will sit on His glorious throne on judgment day. In Mt 25:31-32 we read:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then **he will sit on his glorious throne**. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations..."*

When Peter preached to the Cornelius and the Gentiles with him, he said that God appointed Jesus to be the judge. In Acts 10:42 he said:

42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

The apostle Paul confirms this when he spoke to the Gentiles in Athens in Acts 17. Paul said that in the Day of Judgment, God would judge the world by Jesus. In Acts 17:30-31 he says,

30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

The Lord Jesus Himself said that the Father has given all judgment to Him. Listen to the words of Jesus Himself in John 5:22-23:

22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

I think this is the reason why Paul could talk about the final judgment in terms of "judgment seat of God" in Romans 14:10 as well as "the judgment seat of Christ" in 2Corinthians 5:10.

So in a way I cannot fully explain, the One who will be seated on the Great White Throne is God. But seated together with Him is Jesus. Are we then going to see two individuals seated side by side on the throne? No, as I explained a while ago that God is Spirit and He is invisible.

In John 1:18 we read, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

I think, in light of all of those passages it would be safe to say that we are going to see Jesus physically sitting on the throne but the invisible God will judge through Him.

John 14:8-10 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and

you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

John 8:16 Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

Did not Jesus say in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one"?

I want to explain one more idea before we go back to the scene in Revelation.

In John 5:22 Jesus said that "*the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.*" Why is all judgment given to the Son? The first reason is in the next verse, "*23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.*"

But there is another reason. It is in John 5:27:

*27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, **because he is the Son of Man.***

What did Jesus mean by that? There are at least three things our Lord Jesus meant by saying "because he is the Son of Man."

- First, when He says that He is the Son of Man, he is referring to himself as the person that Daniel saw in his vision in the book of Daniel 7:13-14. In Daniel's vision, the Son of Man receives from the Ancient of Days (or almighty God) a kingdom over which He has complete authority, rule and power. And so Jesus is the Son of Man who rules over the kingdom and so He has the absolute right to judge.
- Second, as the Son of Man, Jesus became human in every respect minus sinfulness and therefore he can understand mankind fully (cf. Heb 2:17).
- Third, Jesus, as the Son of Man, is the Savior of the world who revealed God to humans and gave His life for them. Being the Savior that humankind has rejected, He has the right to judge them.

So John saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it.

Now look at what John says next in this glorious scene: ***From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.***

In a few words, I think John is expressing something that is incredibly marvelous. Someone said, "We can only speculate in great ignorance at the immensity of the scene these few lines describe."

John is talking about the departure of the physical universe. He is talking about the "sudden and violent termination of the physical universe."

We read about this already even in the Old Testament:

- *Ps 102:25-26 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 26 They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,*
- *Isa 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment,*

What John saw in Revelation 20:11 is the fulfillment of the prediction of Jesus in Mt 24:35:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Just as God created the heavens and earth and preserves them by His powerful word, now He uncreates them. Peter talks about this in 2Peter 3:10-12:

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved... 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

John MacArthur says:

John is looking at the uncreation. It's like it never happened. *And no place was found for them.* It doesn't mean they went somewhere, it doesn't mean it was reshaped. It was uncreated. It utterly goes out of existence. Here is the sudden, violent termination of the universe. ... Science says matter can't be destroyed and matter cannot be created. ... What scientists like to say is it can only be altered. But it was created by God and the same God who could create matter can uncreate it. Matter was created once by God and it will be uncreated by God, not just altered. ... Matter is not eternal. It's not going to last forever. It will pass away.

Verse 12, John continues to describe the scene. He says, ***"And I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne."***

"Every category of man now stands on an individual basis before God. Wealth, power, fame, and position do not matter now. The rich and the famous stand along with the poor and the unknown. God is no respecter of persons."

Focusing on the unbelievers, someone said in words to this effect: "Those whose lives amounted to nothing will be there, whose sins were common and petty. The great will be there. Men like Alexander and Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin will be present. Men who committed sin 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 last time." (John Phillips).

"Standing before the throne." Their stading position implies that they have risen from the dead. I believe that all human beings from Adam to the last born human being during the time of the millennium will be here and stand before the throne. And so this will include all resurrected people, both righteous and unrighteous.

- *John 5:27-29 - And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*
- *Mt 25:31-32 - When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then **he will sit on his glorious throne**. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*
- *Romans 14:10-12 - Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
- *2Co 5:10 - For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."*

I want to clarify:

I believe that that the Great White Throne judgment is going to be a time outside of the history and outside of the physical universe of man. This is going to be between the millennial kingdom and the the eternal kingdom when the whole universe is dissolved.

This means that there will be no place for any of the previously resurrected saints and martyrs who lived in their glorified bodies in the millennium to be but before God's throne.

Those who lived in their mortal bodies during the millennial kingdom and trusted in the Lord and died will be resurrected. They have no place to go but before the throne of God.

All of the unrighteous who have died since the time of Adam will be resurrected and they too have nowhere else to go at this time but to face the throne of God.

So all of the righteous and unrighteous, from Adam to the last born human being, are resurrected and face the Great White Throne. All human beings will face God before He ushers in the eternal kingdom or the New Heavens and the new earth.

Remember what the Lord Jesus said in *John 5:28-29*: "*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*"

I think this means that all those who are resurrected will face the Great White Throne, BUT there is going to be different kinds of judgments for them. The Great White Throne judgment will be a time of condemnation for unrighteous but commendation for the righteous.

What would the great white throne judgment mean for those who have trusted in Christ? Because all of those who have trusted in Christ have their sins *already judged* in Jesus at the cross, they will face the Great White Throne and their names in the Lamb's book of life will be confirmed. Their works for Christ are going to be evaluated, whether good or bad and they will receive their rewards. This is what Paul refers to in 1Co 3:12-15:

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

In that passage, "Paul makes it clear that what we have done, and our motive for doing it, will be tested by fire, and the purifying fire of God will burn up everything that was not of Him. The believers won't be *punished* for what was not done rightly unto the Lord, it will simply be *burned up*, and it will be as if we never did those things. They will simply be rewarded for what remains. Sadly, some will get to heaven *thinking* they have done great things for God, and will find out at the judgment seat of Christ that they really did nothing." (David Guzik).

What would the great white throne judgment mean for the unrighteous? All of the unrighteous will also be resurrected, but they will face a "resurrection of judgment" (Jn 5:29). They are going to face the Great White Throne judgment and face sentencing. Someone said, "This is not a *trial*, trying to determine what the facts are. The facts are in; here is the sentencing of someone already condemned."

I read this striking illustration from about a letter that one grieving mother who lost her daughter. She wrote to the columnist Abigail Van Buren and expressed to her her disgust because of what another writer wrote saying that we mortals have no right to demand God to explain His actions.

The mother began her letter with Dear Abby. By the way, according to *Wikipedia*, "Dear Abby" is an advice column founded in 1956 by Pauline Phillips under the pen name "Abigail Van Buren." Readers say that her column is "well-known for sound, compassionate advice, delivered with the straightforward style of a good friend."

Dear Abby:

I am troubled with something a reader wrote: "*What right do we mortals have to demand an explanation from God?*"

Abby, that writer has never known the gut-wrenching pain of losing a child . . .

God didn't answer my prayers, and I resent being told that I have no right to question God. If there is a God, and if I ever get to meet him face to face, you can bet your life I will have plenty of whys for him to answer.

I want to know why my little girl died and that drunk was allowed to go on living. I love her more than my life, and I miss her so. I am mad that I am having to live in a world where she no longer lives, and I want to know why. Why shouldn't I have the right to ask God?

Aren't we supposedly created in his image? If so, surely he has a heart and soul capable of hurting just as I hurt. Why would he not expect to be questioned if he has anything to do with miracles?

I don't fear the Lord. And I don't fear hell, either. I know what hell is like. I've already been there since the day my precious daughter was killed.

Please sign me . . .

A Bereaved Mother

Without being unsympathetic to that grieving mother and to mothers who have the same struggles, the Bible implies that there will be no criticism of God on Judgment Day. Actually I got this illustration from David Guzik and he commented:

This desperate woman will see not only the righteousness and goodness of God, but she will also see her own sin and rejection of Him more clearly than ever. How we wish she knew how the Father Himself knows what she has gone through!

So, that's the **scene**. We are going to look at the standard, the summons and the sentence next week, the Lord willing.

Closing Words

Let me just close with these words. One day, we will all face the Great White Throne. Even if you do not agree with that, there is no question we will all face, either the judgment seat of Christ, the judgment seat of God or the Great White Throne.

Before that judgment seat or Great white throne each of us will give an account of himself to God and each one will receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. That is an undeniable fact.

Those of you who are still unbelievers may say that you do not feel that way. It is not a matter of feelings. You do not realize that God is begin patient with you and He wants you to repent. But if you persist in your sin you are storing up more wrath upon yourself. Please, do not test God. Do not try His patience.

Let me close with these words from Paul in Romans 2:4-11.

4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to

repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.