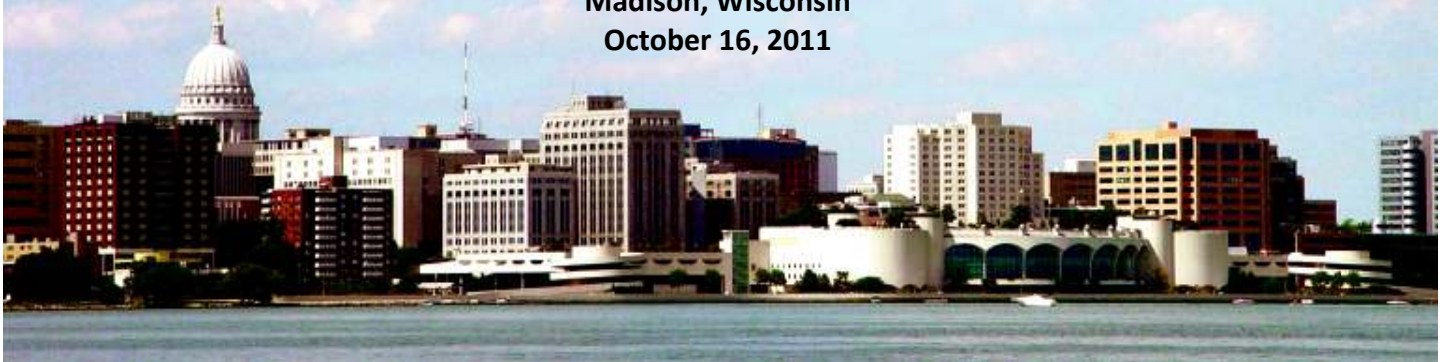


“The Great White Throne of Judgment”

REVELATION 20:11-15

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Many of us probably remember this man as being Judge Wapner of “The People’s Court,” a television show that began in 1981 and has continued with various other judges since Mr. Wapner retired in 1993. As we know, the show was so popular that it inspired many other similar shows. And so today we have Judge Judy, Judge Mathis, Judge James Curtis, and on and on and on. And as if that is not enough, there is now a cable channel dedicated entirely to the subject, “Court TV.” You can tune in and watch people being judged 24 hours a day! And as if reality TV is not enough, we can tune in to watch fictional judges on shows like Law and Order. And then, of course, if we are fascinated by what goes on in a courtroom, we can always just watch the news. Just in the last month, we have seen the re-trial of Amanda Knox, and of course we are now right in the middle of the trial of Dr. Conrad Murray out in California. As a society, we seem to really enjoy watching others get a taste of justice...as long as we are not the ones facing the judge!

However, we know that there is a time coming when all of us will face not just a television judge, not just a real judge in a real-life courtroom, but we will face the greatest of all judges. This morning, then, as we consider this great event, I would invite you to turn with me to a powerful passage in Revelation 20 (p. 1938). This morning I would like for us to consider the final judgment, the judgment of all people who have ever lived. The book of Revelation was written to encourage the seven churches of Asia as they were facing some intense persecution by the Roman Empire. The Romans were cracking down on the early church, and the apostle John knew that these people needed some encouragement, they needed the encouragement to hang in there and to keep on keeping on. And so, as we read in our Scripture reading this morning, the apostle John started with a blessing, ***“Blessed are those who read and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*** And throughout the book, John emphasizes (in a cryptic way) that the church will outlast the Roman Empire. John’s message, then, is that Rome may seem powerful at the time, but there was day coming when the account would be settled and those who persecuted the church would pay the price. They would answer to the Great Judge. And on the other side of this, it is also important that Christians be prepared for that day. As Christians, we should not be caught by surprise, knowing that we may face God at any moment. This morning, then, I would like for us to fast-forward through most of the book and skip over to Chapter 20 as John describes the Great White Throne of Judgment. If you will, please look with me at Revelation 20:11-15,

¹¹ Then 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

As we think about this courtroom scene for the next few minutes, I would invite you to think with me about some of the major aspects in this courtroom drama as they are described for us by the apostle John.

I. And obviously the first and most imposing character here is GOD, THE JUDGE.

And even more specifically, we find from other passages that the One who sits in the throne will be none other than Jesus Himself. We remember what Peter said to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. Peter referred to God who ***“ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One [referring to Jesus] who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”*** We remember how Paul referred to the ***“...day when...God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus”*** (Romans 2:16). We remember how Jesus Himself said in John 5:22, ***“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”*** We remember the words of Paul to the philosophers of Athens in Acts 17, ***“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He 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.”*** Or, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:10, ***“...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ....”***

We find, therefore, that Jesus is the Judge. When we face God on the Judgment Day, the face we see will be that of the Lord. Our Judge will be the One who gave His life for our sins. And we find here in Revelation 20 that when the Lord sits on the great white throne of judgment, all of those on heaven and earth will try to flee (will try to run away) from the presence of His face. And yet we also discover that there will be no place to hide from the wrath of God. And at that point, those who have rejected God will suddenly realize the terrible results of the gamble they have taken. First of all, then, we learn something about the Judge.

II. Secondly, we also find in this passage that there will be DEFENDANTS on the Last Day. There will be the ACCUSED.

And we learn from this and from other passages that the defendants will be made up of all of those who have ever lived. This account seems to focus in on those who are guilty, but as the Lord Himself said in John 5,

²⁵ Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Several weeks ago, we learned that the grand total of all of those who have ever lived on this earth is perhaps somewhere around 115 billion. Every single one of these people will face the Lord in judgment—the rich and the poor, the smart and the not so smart, the educated and the illiterate, the young and the old, men and women, the weak and the strong, world rulers and those who were crushed by those rulers, CEO's and common laborers, those who are famous and those who are virtually unknown, professors, doctors, engineers, scientists, atheists, kings, emperors, the homeless, the migrant workers, the living and the dead. It does not matter who we are or who we were: All people will face Jesus at the great white throne of judgment. None are too big to avoid it, and none are too small to escape it. The apostle Paul will be there. The demon-possessed man from Mark 5? He'll be there! The woman at the well, the one who had the five husbands, the one who was currently living with another man who was not her husband? She will be there! Stephen, the great hero who was stoned to death for preaching about the resurrection of Jesus? He will be there! On a more personal level, Ms. Katherine will be there. Marlin will be there. Mimi will be there. JJ and Randy will be there. Our parents will be there. Our children will be there. Every person who has ever lived will be there and will come face-to-face with Jesus in the judgment. So, we have a Judge and we have defendants.

III. Let us now please notice that there will also be EVIDENCE.

On the last day, evidence will be presented. Notice, please (in verse 12), we have a reference to **"books"** (plural), and then another book. In other words, the evidence presented will be taken from these three books, and John says that **"...the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."** Based on what we know from other passages, I would suggest that the first book is the Bible, the second book is a record of everything we have ever done, and the third book is the **"book of life"** (which is referred to down in verse 15). In other words, we have the standard of judgment (the Law), then we have what we did about it, and then we have the end result.

But it is interesting that among the evidence presented one of the first books to be opened will be the word of God. In other words: Here it is! This is the standard of judgment, and the standard will be opened and examined on the last day. As Jesus said in John 12:48, **"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."** The words of Christ, therefore will judge us as we stand before the great white throne.

And again, as I mentioned earlier, I believe the second book to be opened will be a detailed record of absolutely everything that we have ever said, done, or even thought. As King David said in Psalm 139, **"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all."** A little bit later in the Old Testament, we come to the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, **"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."**

Along with that line of reasoning, we certainly remember Hebrews 4:13 (from the New Testament), where the Bible says that **"...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."** And then we have the terrifying words of Jesus in Matthew 12:36-37, **"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."** And then as Jesus also said in Luke 10:17, **"For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light."** We could go on to consider what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:5,

“Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” I know sometimes we may get a little bit uptight when we start thinking that the government may be trying to trace who we call or where we go online, but this is so much more than that—every word, everything we do, every thought, even our motives—everything will be called up as evidence on the last day. That bad thought that I had back on June 14, 1998? Even that will be called up as evidence.

We are talking, here, about our permanent record. Of course, schoolchildren everywhere are wondering whether there really is a permanent record. I can tell you that there is...at least for me there was! Some of you know that I graduated from high school a semester early, in January 1990. When I finished my last class on Friday afternoon, I went into the principal’s office, he shook my hand, and then he gave me this folder. The rumors are true! There is such a thing as a permanent record! You can see that all of my elementary school pictures are stapled to the front of the folder, and then on the inside you can find the report cards, you can find notes from my teachers, you can find all of the standardized test results. It starts in kindergarten and then continues all the way through high school. It even includes the essay I had to write in order to graduate early. It is all there! And yet even this is nothing compared to the books that will be opened on the last day.

The gay rights groups tell us that what they do behind closed doors is no one’s business. And yet one of these days, it will, in fact, be God’s business. The abortionists (those who murder the innocent) tell us that what a woman chooses to do with her body is a private decision that should stay between her and her doctor, and yet we know from the Scriptures there is a day coming when those very private decisions will be made public. Teenagers might say to themselves, “What I do in private with my girlfriend is nobody’s business but my own.” And yet we know that those very private moments have been written down in God’s book, and those decisions that we have made in private will be presented as evidence as Jesus takes His seat on the great white throne of judgment.

And then the third book to be opened will be the Book of Life (referred to down in verse 15). The Book of Life is referred to just a few times in the Bible, but as you can imagine, it is a very important book. We have the Bible, we have what we did with the Bible, and then we have the Book of Life. The Book of Life appears to be some kind of a ledger, a record of all of those who are saved. In the New Testament, we find an interesting reference in Luke 10:20, where Jesus told the disciples to ***“...rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”*** Let’s just say: It is a good thing to have our names written in heaven! We have another reference in Philippians 4:3, where Paul referred to Euodia and Syntyche, the two women who were having a hard time getting along, and then he says, ***“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*** We read about the Book of Life earlier in the book of Revelation, in the message to the church in Sardis (in Revelation 3:5), ***“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”*** We find, therefore, that names can be added and names can be erased. The Bible teaches that unless our names are written in the Book of Life, we will be thrown into the lake of fire. I would suggest that if our names are written in the Book of Life, all of that evidence against us will be covered by the blood of Jesus. If I have been baptized into Christ, then that bad thought from June (of whenever) is covered, just as if it did not exist.

But the main point here is that God will consider all of the evidence, and His conclusion will be fair. Someone may say, “How can it possibly be fair to be thrown into a lake of fire?” And yet that is where we get back to

the evidence. The evidence will be fairly considered. Here is the Law, and here is what you did with it. The Judge will not take bribes. The Judge cannot be influenced by our friends or even our enemies. But the decision will be made based on the evidence. As Peter finally realized in Acts 10:34-35, ***“God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”*** The decision, therefore, will be based on the evidence.

IV. As we come to the end of this passage, we see one final aspect of the Judgment Day as we find that A VERDICT WILL BE HANDED DOWN AND A SENTENCE WILL BE IMPOSED IMMEDIATELY.

Of course, in our judicial system, defendants are normally entitled to an appeal. In fact, my understanding is that many death sentences are automatically appealed. And we have things set up that way in our society, because we know that the system is flawed. We know that juries can blow it. We know that judges make mistakes. We know that evidence gets contaminated. However, we know that once Jesus hands down the verdict, the sentence is imposed immediately because the Judge is perfect, and the evidence is indisputable. It will never be overturned by any kind of future discovery. The verdict cannot be argued.

Not only that, but we also find here that the sentence is eternal. We are not talking here about 20 years in prison with an additional 10 years of probation. We are not talking about some kind of fine or restitution. We are not talking about some kind of training or counseling or rehabilitation. We are not talking here about retaking the ACT or maybe a driver’s test after doing poorly the first time. We are not talking about being reincarnated and coming back in another form so that we can give it another shot. There will be no purgatory. There will be no chance for our relatives back on earth to purchase our freedom by paying \$500 so that some kind of church can have a mass in our honor. We are not talking about any chance of a do-over like we might have on the school playground. But we are talking here about being thrown immediately into a lake of fire, a punishment that will continue for eternity. And we know that the punishment is truly eternal because Jesus Himself (the Judge) used the same word to refer to the duration of the punishment of the wicked as He did to refer to the duration of the reward of the righteous. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus referred to the wicked and said, ***“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*** The same word is used to refer to the duration of both the reward and the punishment. As the Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:27, ***“...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”***

By the way, the word we normally translate as ***“hell”*** is ***“GEHENNA,”*** and the word refers to the Valley of Hinnom, a valley just outside the City of Jerusalem where at one time the Jewish people offered child sacrifices to the pagan god Molech. Molech was a metal statue. They would heat up the statue with a fire, and they would place their little children (alive) into the outstretched arms of that statue. Well, obviously, that was an abomination to God, and so when King Josiah came along, he outlawed the practice and declared that the Valley of Hinnom would from that point on be a garbage dump with a perpetual fire. And for year, even into the time of Christ, the Jewish people would come down and throw their trash off that cliff, and it would burn. It was a fire that never went out. This next picture here is of a garbage dump in Mombasa, in our President’s native land of Kenya. Maybe this would give us a better picture, but in the time of Christ, the Valley of Hinnom was a garbage dump that was always on fire. They would throw the animal carcasses down there. They would throw just about anything disgusting down there, and the smoke was always rising from the Valley of Hinnom. Well, when Jesus needed to describe the eternal fate of the wicked, He basically said: It’s like that! If you would like to envision the eternal home of the wicked, you can try to picture yourself living in the Valley of Hinnom, or GEHENNA. As I understand it, the word GEHENNA is used 23 times in the New Testament, and Jesus is responsible for 16 of those times that the word is used. Do you remember that passage where Jesus talked about how it would be better to chop off your hand or pluck out your eyes than to go to hell? In that

context, the Lord referred to GEHENNA as the place “...*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:48). According to Jesus, hell is the place of flaming maggots that never die.

Conclusion:

The point of all of this is simply to emphasize that at the Day of Judgment, there will be a Judge, there will be defendants, there will be evidence, and there will be a verdict handed down. And then, those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire. As we look back over these five verses, and as we ask ourselves “So what?,” as we ask ourselves why this passage is in the Bible, as we ask ourselves what this really means for us, I would make several suggestions:

1. First of all, I am thankful that I do not need to go there (GEHENNA). In fact, that is one of the main reasons why we praise God. He saved us! As Paul said in Colossians 1:13-14, “***He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***” We are here this morning to praise God for adding us to His kingdom and saving us from the alternative.
2. Secondly, although we are thankful, we realize that we have friends and loved ones who are still headed in that direction. In fact, there are billions of strangers in this world who are headed in that direction. What does this passage mean for us? It means that we need to be telling people what they can do to avoid going here. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “***Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men....***” This right here motivated Paul to do something. This right here motivated Paul to get out there and say something. Take a DVD from the entryway on your way out of here today, and give it to somebody. Go home and click “Like” on the church’s Facebook page. Invite a friend or a neighbor to learn more about the word of God, because this right here is a fate that can be avoided.
3. And then finally, this morning, I would also suggest a very practical application for those of you here this morning who have not yet obeyed the gospel. Right now at this moment, you have an opportunity to make things right with God. I don’t know your situation, but I do know what the Bible tells us what to do to be saved. The Bible tells us that we must repent and be baptized. That is, we must turn away from sin, and we must imitate the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water. You can do that right here, this morning. We can go downstairs and fill up the baptistery. I can tell you that the water will be incredibly cold, but I can also tell you that baptism is necessary. As Jesus said in John 3:3, “***Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.***”

If you have any questions about this, or if you would like for us to pray about some situation in your life right now, let us know. But if you are ready to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, please let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com