

REVELATION – SERMON 82

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

Revelation 20:11-12

INTRODUCTION

- Daniel Webster was once asked “What is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your mind?”
- His reply: “The greatest thought that has entered my mind is my accountability to Almighty God.”
- Yet most people would prefer to keep such a thought out of their minds, and in doing so, will not be prepared give an account to God when the day comes
- God, as our Creator, has every right to require an account of us (Psalm 24:1)
- Many people profess to believe in a “higher power”, “divine architect”, or some other vague god who made us but does not require anything of us
- This is deistic idolatry, the spawn of Satan to convince men and women that there is no day of judgment to concern themselves with
- A minister’s chief responsibility it is to prepare his people for the day of judgment
- “I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.” (Richard Baxter)
- This is one of the most solemn and weighty portions of the entire bible, dealing with the final judgment and eternal damnation of unbelievers in the lake of fire
- The judgment of the last day is a necessary consequence of God’s attribute of holiness
- Since God is absolutely holy, he is absolutely just, and those who sin against an eternal God make themselves liable to eternal punishment
- This doctrine of eternal judgment is one of the six foundational doctrines listed in Hebrews 6:1-2

- As God himself takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), and as Paul wept as he considered the final destruction of Christ’s enemies (Philippians 3:18-19), so we take no delight in contemplating the damnation of sinners, but are moved to warn them (Colossians 1:28), persuade them (2 Corinthians 5:11), and save them with fear, pulling them out of the fire (Jude 23)
- The events recorded at the close of Revelation 20 bring to a conclusion the “day of the Lord”, which encompasses the whole period from the beginning of the tribulation period (6:1) through to the new heaven and new earth after the millennium (21:1)
- This is the seventh “and I saw” found between 19:11-20:15 which mark successive visions covering the Second Coming through to the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ; the eighth “and I saw” in 21:1 heralds the new heaven and earth
- After the damnation of Satan (v.10), there remains one final event to be fulfilled before the eternal felicity of the new heaven and new earth can be enjoyed – the judgment and damnation of unbelievers

I. THE GREAT THRONE OF WHITE (11)

A. The glory of the throne

1. It is *great*
 - a. This describes not its size but its power and authority
 - b. It is the highest judgment seat that ever was or will be
2. It is *white*
 - a. White indicates the holiness and righteousness of God’s judgment against sin and sinners
 - b. The rainbow about the throne (4:3) is gone – there is no promise, no covenant, no grace, no mercy
 - c. For believers, it is a “throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16), but for the unbeliever it is a throne of condemnation
 - d. White (*leukos*) also indicates “bright, gleaming” (Matthew 17:2)

B. The location of the throne

1. The location of this throne and judgment is neither earth or heaven but somewhere in limitless space, outside of human history

C. The Person on the throne

1. The scene is very similar to Daniel's vision (7:9-10) where God the Father sat on the throne judging the cause of his Son
2. But here on the great white throne, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who sits in judgment
 - a. The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22-23)
 - b. God will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained (Acts 17:30-31)

II. THE GRAND TERMINATION OF THE WORLD (11)

A. Earth and heaven flee

1. The word for "fled" (*ephygen*) pictures a sudden and violent termination of the creation
2. This event is described in more detail in 2 Peter 3:7,10-12, where God will destroy the heavens and earth with fire, melting the very elements and dissolving them with fervent heat
3. One view is that this will be merely a "renovation" of the earth's surface and atmosphere, while leaving the foundations of the earth unchanged (cf. Psalm 104:5)
4. The other view is that God will utterly dissolve all the matter in the entire universe, essentially "uncreating" it, in a reversal of Genesis 1
 - a. Many scriptures indicate a complete destruction of heaven and earth (Psalm 102:26; Isaiah 34:4; 51:6; Matthew 24:35; Hebrews 1:10-12)
5. God himself is "a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29), at whose presence "the hills melt, the earth is burned...yea, the world, and all that dwell therein" (Nahum 1:5; Psalm 114:7)

6. What follows is the “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13), when God will “make all things new” (21:5)
7. This is God Almighty in all his glory, might and majesty, before whom all else must fall

III. THE GRIM THROG OF THE WICKED (12)

A. The dead summoned before God

1. This is the same as “the rest of the dead” (20:5) whose resurrection awaits the end of the 1000 years
2. They are not part of the “first resurrection” of the just, but are the second resurrection of the unjust

B. The final judgment

1. Some falsely teach a general resurrection and general judgment of both the saved and lost at one time
2. Yet there are at least three main judgments for different groups at different times
 - a. The judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)
 - i. Believers are judged and rewarded for their work (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)
 - ii. This takes place in heaven after the rapture
 - b. The judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46)
 - i. This involves the remaining nations who survive the tribulation
 - ii. It will take place on earth immediately after the second coming of Christ
 - c. The great white throne judgment
 - i. This involves only the unsaved
 - ii. It takes place after the Millennium
3. There are other various judgments that will, or have taken place

- a. The judgment of the believer's sin at Calvary (1 Peter 2:24)
 - b. The believer's self-judgment (1 Corinthians 11:31)
 - c. The judgment of Israel during the tribulation (Jeremiah 30:7; Zechariah 13:9)
 - d. The judgment of fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4)
4. This judgment is only for the unsaved
- a. It is "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7)
 - b. It is a judgment of *works*, that is their sinful thoughts, words and deeds
 - c. There is no mention of anyone being acquitted at this judgment, only condemned
 - d. The saints will be present, but as spectators (Isaiah 66:24)
5. Small and great
- a. The wealth, fame, position and prestige that the world covets is nothing to God (Acts 10:34)
 - b. As the cross is the great leveller of men in salvation, so the great white throne is the great leveller of men in damnation
 - c. Many who "gained the whole world" will stand before God on that day, having lost their own souls (Mark 8:36)
6. They must stand before God
- a. It is impossible for such sinners to stand before such a holy God, but they must, albeit temporarily as they are judged and sentenced
 - b. During the tribulation, sinners will ask, "who shall be able to stand?" (6:17)
 - c. Only those clothed with white robes are able to stand before the throne, and before the Lamb (7:9)

- d. These condemned unbelievers have only the filth of their sins upon them, and like the man without the wedding garment, will be cast into outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:11-13)

CONCLUSION

1. God's command to Israel applies to all people: "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12)
2. The only way to prepare to stand before God is to flee to Christ for refuge, repenting of your sin, and trusting in his blood and righteousness alone
3. If the very heaven and earth cannot stand before the face of God, how much less can sinful man stand before him?
4. Yet the believer, clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ, may stand with boldness before this thrice holy God
5. This present earth with all its allurements will one day be completely destroyed
6. This should provoke us to live in view of the next world, in holiness, godliness, being diligent to be "found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:11-15)
7. If you know the terror of the Lord and the awful fate that awaits those who die in their sins, you will "persuade men" to flee from the wrath to come (2 Corinthians 5:11)