

The Final Reckoning

Revelation 20:6-15

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I heard about a young boy playing Little League baseball. As he was sitting in the dugout, a man walked by and asked, “*Hey, son, what’s the score?*” The boy replied, “*They’re beating us 25 to 0.*” The man responded, “*Are you bummed out?*” The boy smiled and said, “*Naw, mister, we ain’t even got up to bat yet!*” I love that perspective.

As we look around at all the evil in our world, sometimes it appears that Satan is winning the battle. Last week, we learned that evil has an expiration date because one day the evil one will be seized, subdued, sealed, and ultimately sentenced by King Jesus.

We may look around and wonder, “*When is God going to do something?*” Revelation 20 answers that question. The scoreboard may look discouraging right now, but we know how it all ends. Jesus wins, His people reign and the devil will be defeated! And every person will stand before Christ and be judged based on whether they have trusted in His finished and final work on the cross.

Here’s the main point of Revelation 20:4-15: *Because Christ is victorious, His people will reign with Him, His enemies will be destroyed, unbelievers will be judged, and only those in the Book of Life will enter eternal life.*

1. Believers will reign with Christ. We see this in verse 4: “*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*”

Once again, verse 4 begins with the word “*then,*” which communicates sequence and progression. After Satan is locked up and locked down, the next thing John sees are believers on thrones with authority given to judge. John also sees the souls of martyrs who had been beheaded, taking us back to Revelation 6:9: “*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*” He also saw those who had stayed steadfast by refusing to worship the beast or receive its mark.

These faithful believers will come back to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This takes us back to the words of Jesus found in Luke 22:29-30: ***“And I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:12, ***“If we endure, we will also reign with him.”*** Revelation 5:10 says the redeemed will ***“reign on the earth.”***

Verse 5 tells us the rest of the dead, who are unrighteous, are not resurrected until after the millennium: ***“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.”*** I found this to be helpful: *“This does not refer to a single event but to the resurrection of believers in stages, beginning with Christ as the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20–23), including the resurrection of believers at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17), and culminating in the resurrection of Tribulation martyrs who will reign with Christ (Revelation 20:4).”* It is first in time, occurring before the resurrection of the wicked, but it is also first in importance because it leads to eternal life rather than judgment.

Verse 6 says, ***“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”*** According to verse 14, the ***“second death”*** refers to ***“the lake of fire.”*** This is the final and eternal separation from God that awaits everyone whose name is not in the Book of Life. While believers will experience the first death (physical death), the second death (the judgment of eternal separation) has ***“no power”*** over them.

Believers who share in the first resurrection are called ***“blessed and holy.”*** To be ***“blessed”*** means, *“fullness and favor”* on those approved by God and ***“holy”*** refers to being *“set apart.”* In a passage that describes the final defeat of evil and the ultimate triumph of Christ, believers are reminded that they are not merely spectators of Christ’s victory but are participants in it as ***“priests of God and of Christ.”***

There are seven different “blessed” statements in Revelation. We could call them the beatitudes of Revelation. As Jen Wilkin points out, these blessings multiply and begin to pile up as we move through the book, reminding believers that no matter how dark the conflict becomes, their future is secure in Christ. Revelation isn’t simply a book about judgment; it’s a book of blessing for those who belong to Jesus.

- Revelation 1:3: ***“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”***
- Revelation 14:13: ***“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”***
- Revelation 16:15: ***“Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on...”***
- Revelation 19:9: ***“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”***
- Revelation 20:6: ***“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!”***
- Revelation 22:7: ***“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”***
- Revelation 22:14: ***“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”***

Because Christ is victorious, His people will reign with Him, His enemies will be destroyed, unbelievers will be judged, and only those in the Book of Life will enter eternal life.

2. Unbelievers will rebel against Christ. According to verses 7-9, after being locked in the abyss for 1,000 years, Satan will be released and will gather together all rebels for one final rebellion: ***“And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them.”***

As we were reminded from Revelation 12:9, Satan is ***“the deceiver of the whole world.”*** The devil will turn to his ancient weapon of deception, gathering unbelievers from across the earth for one final rebellion against God. John describes these rebels as ***“Gog and Magog,”*** names taken from Israel’s ancient enemies in Ezekiel 38-39. Here they appear to represent all the nations of the world that join Satan’s opposition to God.

Amazingly, even during Christ's millennial reign, there will be people opposed to Christ because their hearts will remain unchanged. One commentator adds: *"For all of human history, man has wanted to blame his sinful condition on his environment...God will give mankind a thousand years of a perfect environment...but at the end, man will still rebel against God at his first opportunity. This will powerfully demonstrate that the power to sin is in us, not only in our environment."*

When Satan is released, the true allegiance of unbelievers will be revealed as they join his rebellion. John says their number is ***"like the sand of the sea,"*** which emphasizes the vast multitude that will follow Satan's deception. This phrase echoes Old Testament passages where God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17). Tragically, here the image is reversed. Instead of describing a multitude who belong to God, it portrays a countless crowd united in rebellion against Christ, demonstrating the astonishing depth of human depravity apart from saving grace.

Yet this final conflict will hardly be a battle at all. There is no prolonged struggle and no uncertainty about the outcome. Before a fight can even begin, ***"fire came down from heaven and consumed them."*** God will consume His enemies in an instant, reminding us that no one can successfully oppose the sovereign reign of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual battles are closer than we think. This week, one showed up at a city council meeting in Iowa. I want to share a part of a post I put on Facebook this week.

An Ottumwa City Council meeting opened Tuesday night with an invocation beginning with "Dear dark father" and ending with "Hail Satan." I was stunned as I watched the video and listened to the dark words, which I will not repeat.

In the midst of this outpouring of evil, there were three courageous individuals who made public statements by their actions and words.

1. As soon as it was mentioned to *"embrace the Luciferian impulse to eat of the tree of knowledge,"* one citizen immediately sat down in protest.

2. When the prayer was over, New Life Center Pastor Rick Bick stood up and said he wanted to speak. After being told that he would need to wait until the end, he respectfully said, *“Let’s just reverse that curse that was just put on our city...that’s not welcome here.”* When he was again told public comments needed to wait until the end, he gently yet firmly responded, *“It needs to be done now. That was a curse put on our city...most of you know that and we just need to stop and reverse it.”*
3. Mayor Benjamin Foote, who was visibly shaken, spoke up and said, *“What I’m going to do right now is I’m going to invite us into a 30 second time of prayer, or time of silence.”* When a council member pushed back, the mayor interrupted and said, *“As mayor of the city of Ottumwa and the one running the meeting, I’m going to ask right now that we do a moment of silence to reflect on whatever it is we need to reflect on at this time and then we’ll move to the consent agenda.”*

I’m grateful this person, this pastor, and this politician spoke up for righteousness and against evil.

Perhaps this prayer I wrote will help us affirm that evil *has an expiration date because Satan will be seized, subdued, sealed, and sentenced by King Jesus.*

Almighty God, we thank You that You are the victor and though Satan is a liar, a thief, and a murderer, he is a vanquished foe. We affirm that Jesus has defeated death, depravity, and the devil through His substitutionary death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the dead.

We come before You on behalf of the city of Ottumwa and other communities and ask that You would protect all from the prince of darkness. May the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ continue to be spread in hearts, homes, council meetings, schools, and churches.

Stir within parents and grandparents to live for You so they can imprint Your Word on the hearts of the next generation. May You use this situation to alert each of us to the reality of evil so we will introduce our children and grandchildren to the life-changing message of the gospel.

Continue to equip children's ministry directors and youth pastors in our churches as they seek to evangelize and equip students. Thank You for faithful gospel-preaching pastors like the one who stood boldly in Ottumwa. May all pastors preach with conviction about sin and the reality of Satan, while being compassionate toward sinners who need to hear about the bondage-breaking power of the cross.

We ask that city mayors and council members who are followers of Christ will continue to represent You well, using their positions as platforms for ministry. We pray specifically that this evil group will not gain any traction in our schools or communities and may they repent and receive Jesus.

We pray against the devil and his demons, recognizing that the real battle in this present darkness is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Remind us to take up the spiritual armor you have provided so we can withstand evil by standing firm in Christ, knowing that for the believer, greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

Awaken us, O Lord, to the need for revival and mobilize your followers to live on mission for Your glory and for the good of our communities. Give us the opportunity to courageously and consistently speak truth in the midst of lies, to be light in a world of darkness, and to be committed to the good news of freedom and forgiveness found in the gospel.

We pray this in the mighty, matchless name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, our conquering King. Hail King Jesus!

BTW, that post generated over 500 likes and over 480 comments, many of which did not appreciate what I wrote. Verse 10 gives us the ultimate destiny of the devil, ***“And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*** The word ***“torment”*** is quite graphic as it means, ***“to torture, afflict with pain, and harass.”*** This will go on nonstop, ***“forever and ever,”*** which is a strong expression of endlessness in Greek.

The unholy trinity of the beast, the false prophet, and the devil will never be free again. But they won't be the only ones there. Verse 15 tells us that anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life will also be thrown into the lake of

fire. The same judgment awaiting the devil awaits all who die without Christ. That's why today is the day to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Because Christ is victorious, His people will reign with Him, His enemies will be destroyed, unbelievers will be judged, and only those in the Book of Life will enter eternal life.

3. Everyone will be reckoned by Christ. This past Monday, the Supreme Court of the United States began a new term. These nine justices serve on the highest court in our land and hear cases that affect millions of Americans. They will weigh arguments, examine evidence, interpret the Constitution, debate with one another, and eventually issue their rulings. We call it the Supreme Court because, in our judicial system, there is no higher earthly court.

It goes without saying, that these nine justices are human beings who are influenced by political persuasions, personal histories, judicial philosophies, and diverse worldviews. They take their work very seriously, but they don't always get every ruling right. In contrast, God's judgments are always right. He has no bias, no blind spots, and no political agenda.

Listen to verse 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.”*** Once again, the word ***“then”*** denotes sequence and progression. The word ***“great”*** indicates huge and powerful because it's the highest court in the universe while ***“white”*** means shiny and pure. One commentator put it succinctly: *“Its size conveys the grandeur of its authority, and its appearance reflects the presence of the glory of God.”*

The word ***“throne”*** is used more than 40 times in Revelation, the most of any New Testament book. We've been reminded that God is sovereign over every situation and circumstance unfolding on earth. John sees not just any throne, but the ***“great white throne.”*** This is the throne before which every unbeliever will stand. There will be no appeals, no excuses, and no mistakes. The Supreme Judge is seated upon this throne and is infinitely holy, perfectly righteous, and completely just. John 5:22, says: ***“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.”*** The Savior saves and He also sentences sinners for their sins.

Creation bows and retreats before the dazzling holiness of God as we read in Revelation 6:14: ***“The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”*** There will be no place for the

heavens and the earth to hide from His gaze and there will be no pretending or pretense from unbelievers while every sinful deed is recounted.

Verse 12 describes what John saw next: ***“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”*** Deceased unbelievers will be raised to life from every class and will stand for sentencing before the throne as ***“books were opened.”***

Wealth, status, accomplishments, and earthly power will mean nothing. The only thing that matters is whether one is saved or not. Acts 17:30-31 says, ***“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 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.”***

2 Corinthians 5:10 explains how believers will also appear before the judgment seat of Christ, not to determine their eternal destiny, but to receive rewards based upon deeds done for Christ: ***“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.”***

We’re introduced here to the ***“Book of Life,”*** which records the names of those who trust in the finished work Christ has done, while ***“the books”*** contain the deeds of what we have done. To say it another way, *the books record the deeds people have done; the Book of Life records the names of those who have trusted in what Christ has done.* The deeds of unbelievers will condemn them, while the blood of Jesus will be applied to those who have trusted Him. The Book of Life belongs to the Lamb according to Revelation 13:8: ***“...in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain.”*** Revelation 21:27 says ***“only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life”*** will enter the new Jerusalem.

In John 5:28-29, Jesus described two resurrections: ***“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”*** The lost will be judged ***“according to what they had done,”*** including sins of commission, sins of omission, reckless words, and sins of the heart and mind.

Verse 13 adds more detail, ***“And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.”*** In the ancient world, being lost at sea was especially dreaded because the dead would have no burial and no grave. John MacArthur writes: *“God will summon from its depths new bodies for all who have perished in the sea throughout human history.”*

Those lost at sea will be raised, as will those who have been buried, cremated, or beheaded. All unbelievers who have been formerly held in the temporary bonds of death and Hades will be raised bodily to give an account before being consigned to the lake of fire. Notice that ***“each one of them”*** will be judged, which is what we read in Romans 2:6: ***“He will render to each one according to his works”*** and Romans 14:10: ***“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”***

Judgment is not arbitrary but based on the evidence written by the life of every person. I appreciated this insight: *“The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a person’s actual relationship with God. Salvation is by faith, but faith is inevitably revealed by the works it produces.”* Because of grace, born again believers have their redemption recorded in the Book of Life. I’m reminded of what Jesus said in Luke 10:20: ***“...rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”***

In verse 14 we read, ***“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*** John describes the final defeat of death, humanity’s oldest enemy. It’s been said this way: *“Death has filled cemeteries, broken families, silenced voices, and reminded mankind of the curse of sin. Yet here, death itself is condemned. The grave will no longer hold its prisoners, and Hades, the temporary realm of the dead, will have fulfilled its purpose. Both are cast into the lake of fire, signifying their complete and permanent destruction.”*

This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 25:8: ***“He will swallow up death forever.”*** What the prophets anticipated, John now sees accomplished. As Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:26, ***“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*** At the Great White Throne, that final victory becomes a reality when death dies and the curse is reversed.

While this is great news, verse 15 may be the most frightening verse in the entire Bible: ***“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”***

Don Whitney summarizes what Jesus taught about Hell: *“Hell is real, it is separation from God, it is eternal, it is fire, it is a prepared place, it is eternity with the devil and his angels, it is inevitable if you have never come to Christ, it is inescapable once you are there, and it is avoidable if you will repent and believe in Jesus Christ.”*

Jonathan Edwards illustrated Hell this way:

“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, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do...the pit is prepared. The fire is made ready. The furnace is now hot, ready to receive them. The flames do now rage and glow...O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in.”

The lake of fire is not described merely as a place of punishment but as ***“the second death.”*** The first death is physical separation from this life; the second death is eternal separation from the blessings of God’s presence. It is the final destiny of all who reject God's gracious offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

This scene also fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 12:1-2: ***“At that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”***

Every person who has ever lived will rise. Some will enter everlasting joy, while others will face everlasting judgment. This is both a warning and an invitation. The Judge seated on the throne is the same Savior who stretched out His hands on the cross to save sinners. Those who come to Christ by faith will never face the second death because Christ has conquered death on their behalf. Those who trust in their own righteousness will face eternal judgment, but those who trust in the righteousness of Christ will receive eternal life.

Right now, it might look like the enemy is running up the score, even scoring points at city council meetings. We see a world broken by sin, marked by injustice, and seemingly dominated by evil. It’s easy to feel discouraged, to look up at the scoreboard of life and wonder, *“Lord, how long?”*

Friends, mark this. The game isn't over. One day, the books will be opened. Every thought, every word, and every deed will be brought to light. On our own merit, none of us can stand. If your name is not found written in the Book of Life, the Bible says you will be thrown into the lake of fire. Imagine the horror of standing there that day and not finding your name written in the Book of Life! Imagine what it would be like to hear these words from Matthew 25:41: ***“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”***

That's the bad news, but the good news is that Jesus Christ went up to bat for us. He lived the perfect life we couldn't live, died the death we deserved, and conquered the grave so that your sins could be completely and permanently wiped away. When you place your trust in Him, your name will be written in the Lamb's Book of Life and you won't have to fear judgment, because Jesus took your penalty upon Himself on the cross.

Will you repent and receive Him right now?

Invitation

Safe Families Interview with Jessica Trowbridge

1. Can you share about the distinctives of Safe Families and its effectiveness in helping families?
2. What is something you're excited about as you look ahead?
3. What are some ways someone could get involved?
4. Can you share a couple prayer requests?

Pastor Appreciation

Saturday – Larry

Sunday – Souk