Mankind’s final day in Court

(Revelation 20:11-15)

**Revelation 20:11-15** Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

It is hard to believe that next June will mark the 25th anniversary of the murder of O. J. Simpson’s wife, Nicole Brown Simpson. It doesn’t seem possible it has been that long ago. Of course, the entire world was glued to the TV as O. J.’s case was tried in a California court.

The prosecution brought five pieces of evidence in an attempt to prove O. J.’s guilt:

1. O. J’s blood was on a gate at the murder scene
2. Two XL Aris gloves covered in the blood of O. J., Nicole, and Ron Goldman were found, one at the scene of the crime and another at O. J.’s home.
3. Strands of hair were found on Ron Goldman’s shirt that were microscopically identical to O. J.’s hair.
4. Bloody shoe prints made with a rare, Italian-made, size 12 Bruno Magli shoe were found at the crime scene. O. J. said he didn’t own a pair of those shoes, but a picture of him wearing Bruno Magli shoes on a TV football broadcast was found. BTW, O. J.’s shoe size is 12.
5. A pair of bloody socks were found in the bedroom of O. J.’s home with both his blood and that of his ex-wife, Nicole.

In spite of this mountain of evidence (which included DNA evidence), the jury found him not guilty.

O. J. had a trial before a jury of his peers and, by his peers, was found not guilty of the crimes he was charged with.

But in the trial we read about in Revelation 20—when the unsaved of all the ages stand before their Creator—there is no jury of peers. This future trial is called the Great White Throne Judgment because everyone who has ever lived that is not saved will stand, not before an earthly judge or a jury of their peers, but before God Almighty. And that’s what I would like to speak to you about for a few minutes this morning.

**Title:** Mankind’s Final Day in Court

(Prayer)

(**Words** here about the times that I have been in court and the seriousness of the atmosphere.)

In John 5:29, Jesus told His hearers not to be amazed that there is coming a day when every single unbeliever since the beginning of time will be given a summons to stand before Almighty God. All who are in the graves will hear God’s voice and be raised from the dead. This is called the **“resurrection of condemnation.”** They will be resurrected and given a full and fair hearing before God. This will be unsaved mankind’s final day in court.

First, I would like you to notice…

**1. The austerity of God’s courtroom**

In v. 11, John said:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

The first thing that lost people will notice when they stand before their Judge is that, in His court, there is no jury box.

This will be what is called a “bench trial.” That is, a trial without a jury where the judge decides the facts.

* + **Great** — it is huge and God Almighty is seated on it. In verse 12, John says he saw the dead “standing **before God…”**
  + **White** — human judges are corrupt, but God is holy and every single person will get a perfectly fair trial and punishment.
  + **The earth and the heavens have “fled away”** — what John is saying here is that standing before God is so serious and sobering that the earth, moon, and stars attempt to flee, but “there was found is no place for them.” In other words, there is no escape.

If you are here today, and you don’t believe, you can keep God at a distance your entire life, but not on this day. There is no place to hide. You will be summoned to court, and you will stand before God.

In mankind’s final day in court, Wiersbe said, there will be a Judge, but no jury. Unbelieving humanity will stand before God and Him alone.

This is the austerity of God’s courtroom.

**2. The diversity of the defendants**

In v. 12, John said:

And I saw **the dead**, **small and great**, standing before God…

Those standing before God are **similar** in that they are all unsaved. They are called **“the dead”** (= the spiritually dead).

But they are **different** in that some are “small” (unknown) and some are “great” (well-known). And my friends, in that day, it doesn’t matter if a person was worth two bucks or two billion bucks, if they have never been saved, if they have never believed the words of Christ concerning everlasting life, they will stand before God in judgment.

Dr. Adrian Rogers said that some will be…

“out-and-out sinners” (God-haters)

“self-righteous” sinners   
(those who think they are too good to be damned; upstanding citizens who take pride in their education, intellect, and income)

“procrastinating” sinners   
(always putting off getting saved to a later time)

“religious” sinners   
(church-going people who believe all is well because they are religious)

But regardless of what group a person is in, if a person has not been saved by faith alone in Christ alone, whether they are in the gutter or in a mansion, they will stand before God and be condemned.

Someone might say, *Pastor Bob, this is so scary and sounds so awful. Why do you have to talk about this?*

We have to talk about this because God loves sinners and wants to see them saved … AND HE HAS ENTRUSTED THE SHARING OF THE GOSPEL UP TO US!!!!!

God puts this in the Bible to wake up **unbelievers** (about the horror of that future day) and to wake up **believers** as well (about the need to share the good news).

First, we saw the austerity of God’s courtroom…   
 (a throne from which there is no escape)

Second, the diversity of the defendants   
 (the small … the great)….

**3. The conclusiveness of the evidence**

Look once again at v. 12:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

* **Books** (plural) were opened = the deeds of every unsaved person

**How do we know this?** Because: “the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

* **Another book** (singular) **was opened**, which is the Book of Life = the names of every person who have been saved through faith in Christ. It is the book of those posessing ETERNAL life.

The first set of books (plural) contains the deeds of an unbeliever’s entire life. God has kept perfect records of this because it is on the basis of this evidence that the judge will determine the **severity** of an unbeliever’s eternal judgment.

The second book (singular) is the Book of Life (i.e., eternal life). V. 15 tells us that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Not one person of the billions that will be at this judgment (and sociologists estimate that around 100 billion have lived and died thus far) will have their name written in this Book of Life. The sovereign God who gives life and takes life has clearly spoken:

The one who believes in Christ (regarding eternal life) is not condemned, but the one who does not believe Him is **condemned already** BECAUSE he has not believed the words spoken by God’s one and only Son.

Now someone might say,

*When I die, I’ll be gone. That’s it! I will be no more!*

Not true. Look at v. 13:

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, **each one** according to his works.

Every single unsaved person, both moral and immoral, will be resurrected and stand before God! There is no escape! No one can hide from God:

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** tells us-----God will bring every work into judgment, including **every secret thing**, whether good or evil.

In **Matthew 12:36,** Jesus said-----But I say to you that for **every idle** [worthless] **word** men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

And **Romans 2:16** speaks of-----the day when **God will judge the secrets of men** by Jesus Christ…

There are TV commercials that brag, *What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.* Not in the day of judgments! The books will be opened and the secrets of mankind will be revealed … every single one of them.

(Word to those who claim to be moral … good … upstanding … YOUR secrets will be revealed before a Holy God!!!)

First, we saw the **austerity** of God’s courtroom…   
 (it is a throne from which there is no escape)

Second, the **diversity** of the defendants   
 (the unknown and the well-known all stand before God)….

Third, the **conclusiveness** of the evidence  
 (The Book of Life — your name is written in it, or it is not   
 —there is no in-between!!!)

**4. The severity of God’s sentence**

This is in vv. 14-15. Three things are cast into the lake of fire: death, Hades, and the unsaved:

Then **Death** and **Hades** were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **anyone not found written in the Book of Life** was cast into the lake of fire.

Can you imagine hearing these words that our Lord spoke in Matthew 25:41:

Matthew 25:41 “…Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels…”

What is the basis of a person being condemned---it is that their name was not in the Book of Life. They did not possess the gift of God, which is eternal life.

**Anyone** not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Is your name there?

If it isn’t, there is no appeal in that final day in court. There is not a higher court you can appeal to and say, “My sentence was unjust!” No, every single human being who stands before God will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that his or her sentence is perfectly fair.

(Invitation)

**Study Notes**

**Revelation 20:11–15**-----

11 Then I saw

a great white throne and

Him who sat on it,

from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.

And there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw

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**Revelation 20:12**-----12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

**Matthew 12:36–37**-----36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

**ZCH on Rom 2:15:**

Thus in the judgment of Gentiles, the moralizing *discussions* they have had *with each other* (*metaxu allēlōn*) will come into play. Those discussions may have been either *condemning* of one another’s conduct *or even defending* ***one another***, by justifying this form of behavior or that. Such discussions will reveal at the judgment precisely what aspects of God’s law have remained upon these pagan hearts. In that way the standards they have used to evaluate the conduct of their fellow man will become the standards by which they themselves will be judged.

If, for example, a pagan has said to his contemporary, “I think it is wrong of you to deceive others like that,” yet he himself in other circumstances has employed the same kind of deception, the very words of this pagan will condemn him in the Day of Judgment, precisely as Jesus said they would! Thus the law inwardly *inscribed on their hearts* will be made manifest by the displays of *conscience* that *their discussions with each other* so clearly reveal. Their own words will provide evidence against them.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Luke 8:17**-----17 For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor *anything* hidden that will not be known and come to light.

**John 12:48**-----48 He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

**Romans 2:16**-----16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

…the jarring declaration that *God will judge men’s secrets* should function like a convicting arrow aimed at every heart. For what human being does not have *secrets* that he or she hopes will never see the light of day?[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Bench trial:**

Trial without a jury in which a judge decides the facts. In a jury trial, the jury decides the facts. Defendants will occasionally waive the right to a jury trial and choose to have a bench trial.

**No escape:**

“…there is no way that you can escape judgment. You may refuse to answer an earthly summons. You may put on a disguise. You may commit suicide. You may flee to a foreign country. You may go somewhere where this law cannot extradite you. But there is no way possible, my dear friend, that you’re going to flee the hand of God.”

Adrian Rogers, “The Final Judgment,” in Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Re 20:11–15.

1. Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)