



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Great White Throne Judgment”

TRANSCRIPT

The subject is the Judgment of the Wicked Dead, or “The Great White Throne Judgment.” This is the biblical passage that has to do with the final judgment of mankind. So we are turning to Revelation chapter 20, and we’re going to read verses 11-15 for our Scripture reading.

“And I saw a Great White Throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell (or death and Hades) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

We all know -- I’m sure we all feel -- that eternal punishment is not a pleasant subject. It is not a pleasant subject to speak about crime or violence. And it is not a pleasant subject to speak about war. And it certainly is not a pleasant subject to speak about cancer. But, nevertheless, these subjects are very pertinent, especially in view of human nature.

You may remember that the Prophet Isaiah, in one of his very vivid expressions of taunt towards the false teachers has said, “Prophecy not unto us right things. So the false teachers were saying” -- or the Israelites were saying to their false teachers – “Prophecy not unto to us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.” It’s much nicer to speak about the nicer things of the Christian life. And surely most preachers do not like to speak about the final judgment. They do not like to speak about the lake of fire. But, nevertheless, it is part of the truth of God’s word. In fact, I think that you would be surprised to discover how much of the word of God has to do with the final judgment.

We are living in a day in which the idea of the final, permanent judgment of the irretrievably lost is a doctrine that is very unpopular. Some time ago -- this was a number of years ago -- one of our Midwestern universities took a poll of one hundred selected ministers on the subject of future punishment. The results showed that more than 50 percent did not believe in the future, conscious, eternal punishment of the wicked. And then another poll was taken of 500 ministers of different Protestant churches -- and this was a number of years ago -- and it showed that 34 percent of the Protestant ministers did not believe in the future punishment of the finally impenitent.

Now, I’m sure -- I’m very sure, that if the same poll were taken today, that of these 500 Protestant ministers, you would find that less than one-third of them believed in the future, conscious, final punishment or eternal punishment of the inpenitent. And that is because the doctrine of universalism has become so important in our day.

One of the -- for example, just to give you an illustration of how popular it is -- one of the most popular of the writers of biblical commentaries today is the man by the name of William Barclay. Some of you who teach the Bible may have used his commentaries. There are many good things in them; some interesting stories, also some interesting facts concerning the background of the Bible. Every Bible teacher can have -- will have some helpful material from reading Professor Barclay's studies. For a number of years, he was Professor of New Testament at the University of Glasgow. When I was living in Scotland, I sat in on some of his classes.

Professor Barclay is probably the most popular or the best-known preacher in the British Isles due to his writings which have sold millions of copies, and due to his columns that he has written in some of the most popular church magazines in Britain. His works are read by almost all preachers in the United States who use the Scriptures at all for their material. Professor Barclay is typical of the middle-of-the-road, liberal preacher of the day who takes texts from the Bible and attempts to preach them in an interesting way in order to get over ethical lessons.

Professor Barclay is a universalist. He believes that everybody is ultimately going to be saved, that there is no such thing as the future, conscious, final, permanent punishment of the finally impenitent. I am sure that if that poll were taken today, less than one-third would say that they believed in the future punishment of the lost.

Jerome once said that if an offense comes out of the truth, better it is that the offense come than that the truth be concealed. And that is true. And Jerome was absolutely right in expressing the truth that, in the final analysis, it is not so much what men believe that counts, it is what the divine revelation says. And so if in holy Scripture we are sure that the Scriptures teach the final punishment of the lost, if they teach eternal punishment, then it is something that we must preach with all of the fervor that we preach any other doctrine found in holy Scripture.

Actually, the idea of hell or the idea of future punishment of the lost -- and I mean future punishment, I mean eternal punishment -- the idea of hell has the same origin as the idea of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ is really the source of the teaching concerning hell. I think it’s very appropriate that the Lord Jesus should be the one who in the New Testament tell us more about hell than anyone else, because in the lips of other people it might be thought to be a part of human desire to speak about the judgment of other human beings. But the fact that this comes from the Lord Jesus himself assures us that it comes from someone who has the love of God for men, but at the same time has the purity of the truth of God.

Gehenna is the specific New Testament word for hell. It is found twelve times in the New Testament. It always means hell or Hades or the lake of fire. It has to do with the idea of the final punishment. Gehenna is its meaning. Hell is the English equivalent. With but one exception out of these twelve times, with but one exception and that exception is James 3 verse 6, in every instance it is the Lord Jesus who uses it, so that Gehenna is Jesus Christ’s word for hell. Now, we have in this passage here, the expression “the lake of fire.” That is a little different, but they refer to the same thing. The point Keble wrote a little stanza which said, “The fount of love, his servant sends to tell love’s deeds. Himself reveals the sinner’s hell.” So the truth about hell is traceable to its most significant origin, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Charles Wolfe was a preacher of great ability. And in a sermon on the judgment -- on judgment on the text from Ecclesiastes 8:11 which reads, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil,” [Wolfe] said in his striking way that “the judgments of God fall often enough in this world to let us know that God judges, but seldom enough to let us know that there must be a judgment hereafter.”

So when we look around, and we see evidences of the judgment of God in our life, we can be sure that there is a judgment to come. But they fall seldom enough to let us know

that if there is a righteous universe, there must be a final judgment in which things are truly set right.

Now, here is the text of Scripture that gives us the details of the final judgment, and what a tremendous amount of truth is found in five short verses. In the first verse, we have the first point of what I want to speak about. Verse 11, it is the vision of the throne. This is Roman I in the outline, the Vision of the Throne.

Now, notice the opening statements. We read, “And I saw a Great White Throne.” Now, this will help us, this little expression “and I saw” to decide when this judgment takes place. Will you look back at chapter 20 verse 5 -- well, verse 4 I meant to say. In fact, I think it would be a good idea to look at verse 17 of chapter 19, too, and we’ll notice the whole connection of “and I saw”s.

Notice verse 17 of chapter 19, “And I saw an angel standing in the sun.” That has reference to the battle of Armageddon. We have already looked at that.

Then we read in chapter 20 in verse 1, “And I saw an angel come down from heaven.” Then we read of the binding of Satan.

In the 4th verse we read, “And I saw thrones and they sat upon them.” And we have the revelation here of the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus, Satan having been bound.

Then in verse 7 we read, “And when the thousand years are ended.” And I want you to notice that here this little *and* indicates that these events are chronological because he has just spoken in verse 3 that Satan would be bound till the thousand years should be fulfilled and now he writes, And when the thousand years are ended. So all of these *ands* and *and I saws*, all of them indicate chronological progression: the Second Advent of Christ, the Battle of Armageddon, the binding of Satan, the millennial kingdom, the events following the millennial kingdom in which we have the final rebellion, verses 7 through 10. And now we read, “And I saw a Great White Throne.”

So in the light of the fact that we have here one succession after another of *ands* and in light of the fact that in verse 3 compared with verse 7, we know that these *ands*, at least a significant one is chronological in its significance, then we gather that this description of the Great White Throne judgment is chronological with respect to the other events; therefore, the Great White Throne judgment is to occur after the kingdom of the Lord Jesus upon the earth. It is to occur after the final rebellion.

Now, we read in verse 21 and verse 1 following the description of the Great White Throne judgment, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” So we gather then that all of these *ands* are chronological, and since we have the description of eternal state beginning in chapter 21, verse 1, I think it is very plain then, and it’s true to say, that the final judgment occurs between the final rebellion of man after the kingdom of the Lord Jesus upon the earth and the eternal state. So we can place this event then before the eternal state after the rebellion that follows the kingdom of the Lord upon the earth.

Well, now, let’s look at what he first sees, “And I saw a Great White Throne.” What does this mean, a Great White Throne? Well, evidently the term *great* here is suggestive of the infinite character of the throne of God. And the fact that it is white in the light of the general usage of the term -- *white* throughout Scripture suggests that it is a place at which holiness, as a virtue of God, is prominent. And the fact that it is a throne indicates that it is a place where justice in a judicial sense is meted out to men. So we can say that these words put together refer to the infinite holy justice of a great judge who is now going to make at the final assize a judgment upon the men who stand before him.

Why must there be a final judgment? Why must there be a Great White Throne judgment? Well, first of all, there must be a vindication of the holiness of God. The Scriptures tell us that God is absolutely holy. You’ll remember the text in Habakkuk chapter 1 in verse 13 where the prophet says with reference to God, Thou -- now, I was just getting ready to repeat that verse and for a moment it slipped my mind. You would have thought that I was getting old [laughter] but it came back just the moment that I said

I had lost it. The Prophet Habakkuk looked up toward God and he said, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity” -- So God is a holy God. Furthermore in Psalm 111 in verse 9 he says with reference to God, “Holy and reverend is thy name.”

Now, you know of course that that’s the only time in the Bible that we have the term “reverend.” Now, you think, of course, that preachers should be called or are called *reverend*. Well, let me point out to you from the standpoint of our authorized version that the only time the word *reverend* occurs, it occurs with respect to God. In other words, it refers to an attribute of God. Now, we do often call preachers, The Reverend, Doctor So-and-So, or, The Reverend Such-and-Such. Now, Mr. Spurgeon said he never understood why any preacher would want to steal an attribute that belonged to God alone. It does belong to God alone. Holy and reverend is thy name.

By the way, that word *reverend* is a word which in the Hebrew text reads -- means something like *awe, awe-inspiring*. Or I think it is translated in some places *terrible, to be feared*. So you wouldn’t like to address a minister as the Terrible Doctor So-and-So, would you? [Laughter] This is probably one reason why most preachers don’t like to be called *The Reverend* or *Reverend*. It is not really a good practice. It’s not Scriptural. And I’ve known very few of them that are really reverend. It’s a virtue that belongs only to God, and it’s best to leave it with God.

Now, we have said that God’s holiness should be vindicated. Now, justice, we know in this earth, is not final and prefect. There are so many sins and transgressions of which the human law takes no cognizance. For example, do you know of anyone who was ever sentenced to a jail sentence for ingratitude? And yet that’s a sin. Do you know of anyone who was sentenced to jail for mental cruelty? I know that some have used that as grounds for divorce, but I don’t know that that has ever been used as grounds for a prison sentence. Do you know of anyone who has ever been put in prison for the sin of scorn or the sin of the little white lie?

You see there are so many kinds of transgressions and sins by which human law takes no cognizance. And so at the Day of Judgment we are going to see that all things are set right. And, in fact we might discover -- I have a hunch we are going to be very surprised at what happens at the Great White Throne judgment. What happens in heaven with regard to judgment, even the judgment of the saints at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

But we're going to discover at the Great White Throne judgment where the lost appeared, that there are some individuals whom we have thought were especially sinful who, in the sight of God, will not be nearly so sinful as some whose sins are practically unknown to us. We might even find that someone in the penitentiary is not nearly so sinful as another person who not only never came near imprisonment but might even have been regarded as one of the benefactors in the community in which he lived.

Furthermore, human judges in our courts do not know exactly which penalty exactly fits the offense. If I were a judge, I think this would be one of the most difficult things to be sure about: what kind of penalty should I levy in the light of the offense that has been committed? Only in one case, that of murder, do we know by the authority of divine revelation what a penalty ought to be. The rest of the time penalty is left up to our judicial system, and our human judges are not infallible, as they would be the first to admit. In addition, the human judge is often uncertain as to the guilt of the prisoner. How many of us have read newspapers and have read stories of individuals who evidently, so far as the evidence is concerned, appeared to be guilty of the crime for which they were charged? But they went to their death in many cases protesting their innocence.

When I was growing up, the big crime was the kidnapping and murder of Charles Lindbergh's baby. And when Hauptmann was caught, since his name sounded German, I think that probably most Americans felt that he was probably guilty. And all of the evidence seemed to point to Hauptmann's guilt. And as far as I know, he was guilty. But

he went to his death protesting his innocence. And only eternity will tell the final outcome of that man’s innocence. The human judge and the human juries are often uncertain as to the guilt of prisoners. That’s one reason why there should be a final judgment that sets things straight.

And then finally the reason there is need to ultimate vindication of the holiness of God relates to the fact that even those who are guilty and who are caught and who are charged and sentenced often escape. And in the light of these things, there is need for a final judgment. In addition, I think that we can make a good case for the fact that the final judgment is the revelation of the goodness of God.

The ruin of the few may lead to the salvation of many. There was a Connecticut preacher once who said, “My friends, some believe that all will be saved, but we hope for better things.” Chaff and wheat are not to be together always. One goes to the garner and the other to the furnace. So judgment is really the revelation of the goodness of God. It would be a terrible thing if the chaff and the wheat were to live together to the end of eternity, throughout eternity.

Would heaven be a wonderful place to look forward to if everybody was going to heaven? I don’t think so. I am delighted with what that preacher said. I think he’s right. Some believe that all will be saved, but we hope for better things. Judgment is a revelation of the goodness of God, too.

And finally in the Great White Throne judgment, we see the consummation of man’s sinfulness. Acts of sin lead to habits of sin, and habits of sin lead to the formation of a person’s character. And character fixes permanently the nature of the individual.

Isn’t it interesting that in the Bible it says that Judas, after he hanged himself, went to his own place. That’s very descriptive, for it tells us in effect that the place to which Judas went, Gehenna, is fitting because it’s like his character. It’s his own place. He and the place fit each other. So the character of those who are lost is fitted in this life. And if there is no conversion, no repentance, no conversion, no communication of new life

through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, then that which we have done fits us for that which is to follow.

One of the most terrifying stories in holy Scripture is the story of Hazael, the King of Syria. Before Hazael became king, Elijah spoke to him and he said, “I know the evil that thou will do unto the children of Israel. Their strongholds will thou set on fire and their young men will thou slay with the sword and will dash their children and rip up their women with children.”

And Hazael said, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?” And you know, of course, the story. He was lead by the insidious, the subtle, the progressive nature of sin to commit the very barbarities that the prophet had prophesied in which he denied that he would.

Peter was in earnest when he said to Jesus Christ, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.” But notice the progressive nature of the working of sin in the apostle. He is seen following Christ afar off, then he’s found with bad company, and in a moment he is heard blaspheming and denying the Lord Jesus Christ. And were it not for the grace of God and Jesus Christ, which preserves those who have believed in him, Peter would never have found his way to the heaven in which he resides at the present time.

So this is the Great White Throne at which God’s righteousness and God’s holiness is vindicated, and the rights and wrongs are all settled there in heaven. The text of scripture says, “I saw a Great White Throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face heaven and earth fled away; and there was found no place for them.” Evidently the judgment occurs somewhere in illimitable space. No place is given for it. We read there was no place for heaven and earth, so as heaven and earth flee in dismay, there is left the throne of God. And somewhere in the space about us, this great judgment is hell.

Now, Roman II in the outline, the Vision of the Judgment of the Dead, verses 12 and 13. And I want to comment now on some of the important words that are found in this section. And I saw the dead -- now, who are the dead? Well, if we look back at

verses 5 and 6, we may gain some idea of who are the dead. In the description of the vision of the kingdom, we read about certain ones who sat upon thrones and who lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But then in the 5th verse of the 20th chapter we read, “But the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished.” This is the first resurrection. Now, here we are told the rest of the dead did not live.

Now, if you will remember way back in the beginning of our studies of eschatology we referred to this passage, and we tried to point out when we were discussing amillennialism and premillennialism that the word “lived” here refers to bodily resurrection: the rest of the dead live not until the thousand years were finished. Those that are believers in the Lord Jesus in the present age are caught up to be with him when he comes in the air. And that’s when we receive our new bodies. We are given a resurrection body. The dead who have died before the coming of the Lord Jesus in the air, they are raised from the dead and given a new body. We are given a new body by this present one being changed. And we meet with the dead who have died in Christ and we meet with the Lord.

And that rapture occurs -- that catching up occurs -- at the beginning or just before the beginning of the Great Tribulation period. Then we studied and we came ultimately to the resurrection of the Nation Israel which occurs after the next seven-year period of time, the tribulation period. That resurrection of Israel and the Gentile saints occurs when he comes to the earth to establish his kingdom.

Now, these two resurrections make up the first resurrection. There are two phases: the phase of the church and the phase of Israel and the Gentiles. So that all of the saved from the preceding ages are resurrected; that is, they’re given a resurrection body like the Lord Jesus Christ’s body before the kingdom.

Now, this text says the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished. So the resurrection of the rest of the people is a resurrection that occurs after the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Now, he says, “Blessed and holy is he who hath part in the first resurrection. On such the second death hath no power but they shall be priests of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years.” So the first resurrection, which has the two phases of the rapture and the Second Advent, is the resurrection of the believers, the saved. The second resurrection is the resurrection of the lost.

Now, we read at the end of verse -- of this chapter in verse 15, “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire.” You read through these verses and you discover that there is no description of anyone who withstands the judgment of the Great White Throne. So when we read then the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished, the meaning is that their resurrection occurred then. But it is a resurrection of unbelievers. So when we read here, “And I saw the dead stand before God, small and great,” the reference is to the unsaved of the generations, centuries, ages that have preceded this Great White Throne judgment. In other words, all of the lost are gathered at the Great White Throne judgment.

There is, so far as we know, no believer who is judged at the Great White Throne judgment. The final judgment then is the judgment of the impenitent lost throughout all of the ages that have preceded. The believing dead were raised previously. But it does say, “The rest of the dead lived not.” Now, that lets us know that they do have a resurrection.

But what kind of resurrection is it? Well, it’s a resurrection in which they are given a resurrection body, but it is a body not like our Lord’s own glorious body. But it’s a body in which they are able to suffer eternal punishment. So the resurrection is a doctrine that pertains to the saved and to the lost. The saved are resurrected, given a body like Christ’s own glorious body. The lost are also resurrected, but they are given a body, it’s not described, it’s a body in which they are -- have the capacity to endure eternal punishment.

In other words, at this Great White Throne judgment, among the dead there will be Cain. There will be the generation of Norr. There will be Nemrod, there will be Pharaoh. There will be Saul. There will be Judas. There will be Pope Leo X. There will be Harry Emerson Fosdick and all of the others who have denied the doctrines concerning the Lord Jesus Christ down through the centuries.

Now, I know that you suspect that there are probably some odd characters in my genealogy, and you are right. I have a distant relative who is still alive in North Carolina. He is a painter. My wife is a painter, too, but the two -- there is no connection between them at all. This man is part of my family, and Mary is not a part of it, so I don't want you to think that she has any of his characteristics.

This man is well-known over the area of North Carolina where he lives. He is now a very old man, probably about 85 years of age. I haven't seen him in about 15 years, but I am told -- he incidentally is a Presbyterian preacher. Now, I'm told that when this man was young, that people came from far and wide to hear him because he was noted for his unusual vocabulary and his ability to preach. But he was eccentric. Now, I contend that all orthodox preachers are eccentric in some ways because they have the eccentricity of the truth if they're orthodox. They all are somewhat eccentric. Almost all orthodox men -- you have to be because the truth is just that way. That's all there is to it. Anyway, but you don't have to go as far as this man does or as far as I do, I'm sure.

I went to visit him, and I was amazed. I went in his studio. Now, I do know this and that -- and I won't tell the town in which lives because then you would know him and probably you'd have some friend up there, and you can write and find out about him -- but he is well known as a painter, and he was asked by the city in which he lives to put one of his paintings in the local library because he was one of the local painters and well known. And they had just built a new beautiful building, and it was quite an honor to ask him to put one of his -- to paint a picture for that new library. So being eccentric, he painted a picture. He painted a picture, and he brought it in, and he covered it up.

And then some of the dignitaries came in, and they knew that they must have a look at that picture before the dedication. So they unveil the picture and were horrified to discover that it was a painting of the Lake of Fire, which didn't seem to them too appropriate for the library, a giant painting of it.

Now, when I visited him, he told me that story, and he chuckled over it because he had been trying to convert a lot of those men for many years, and he just enjoyed being able to do this and was not surprised at all when they rejected it. But he said, Perhaps, Lewis, you'd like to see it. And I said, I certainly would. And he showed it to me, and it was a most interesting picture of the Lake of Fire. Very vivid. And there was a little of the -- you know, the thing that I remember about it particularly is that there was -- it was rocky. All around it was rocky and the flames were just shooting up. He's an accomplished painter. They were just shooting up. It felt warm to look at it. [Laughter]

And then there was a ledge down along the side of one of these giant rocks. And there was an angelic being standing down right at the end. There was a long line of men who were on the ledge. And this angelic being had a pitchfork in his hand, and he was taking these men with the pitchfork and tossing them up in the air. And there was one man whose feet you could see just sticking out of the Lake of Fire as he was going in. And one was in the air above the Lake of Fire. And another one was just starting. And another one had a horrified look on his face as he was getting ready for him. But the most striking thing about it was that you recognize the faces of the individuals. [Loud, sustained laughter]

And there were some of the well known men of the 20th century. There was Adolf Hitler, and there was Stalin. And there was Harry Emerson Fosdick, and he had a special place for these preachers, and you could recognize them. Well, I don't know that it's going to be exactly like that but, nevertheless, they are going to be some of the characters there. And I know one man at least who is going to have a smile upon his face at the Great White Throne judgment.

Some years ago I went into a dentist’s office and was waiting for my appointment, and I guess reading about the Great White Throne judgment – it’s appropriate for a dentist’s appointment. [Laughter] But I picked up some of the magazines that were lying on his table and one of them was a Masonic magazine. And never having read a Masonic magazine because I have no desire to be a mason -- their doctrines are contrary to holy Scripture. They like to think that they are biblical, but they are really -- they’re contrary to holy Scripture. And I picked up this particular article about the masons and I -- it had to do with the Great White Throne judgment, and I was amazed to read this interpretation of the Great White Throne judgment.

The last paragraph of this article, which was entitled “The Temple not made with hands,” and I presume that it’s somewhat authoritative because it was written by a 32nd-degree mason. He says, “the Holy Bible is given us as a rule and guide to faith and life. Within its covers we find a set of rules and principles which, if followed, will make our lives pure and spotless. We will enjoy an honorable life. And when our weary feet shall have come to the end of their toilsome journey and from our nerveless grasp shall drop forever the working tools of life and our bodies have been laid beneath the silent clods of the valley, we can look forward, if we have been found faithful, to a triumphal entry -- entrance -- before the Great White Throne. There to stand before Him who sitteth as the judge supreme and hear from Him the welcome words, Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thou Lord. Yes, into the temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

It’s pitiful to see how misinterpretation of holy Scripture is given a place in the articles that we read. There is no one who stands before the Great White Throne judgment triumphantly. It is a time when the lost only are judged.

Now, the text of Scripture says, “I saw the dead, small and great.” There are kings who stand there. There are peasants who stand there. There are presidents who stand there. There are simple citizens who stand there. There are preachers who stand there,

and there are atheists who stand there. And Madalyn Murray O'Hair will be there if she does not repent and turn to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And some of our best-known preachers, Protestant preachers and Roman Catholic priests shall stand there if there is no repentance in turning to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We read that they stand before God. Now, evidently this term *stand* is another term for the resurrection. So when we read, I saw the dead, small and great, *stand* before God, we are to think that here we have finally those -- the resurrection of the body having taken place, and in this resurrection body they stand before the Lord.

Now, I said that we do not have any understanding of what kind of body that is going to be. There has been some speculation about it in the light of the fact that the body that the saved receive is a beautiful body like our Lord Jesus Christ's own resurrection body. The implication would be that the kind of body that the unsaved possess throughout all eternity is a very ugly and terrible kind of body. That is the implication. But we are not actually given any description in the word of God of that body. Then we read, "And the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life."

Now, what does this mean? There are evidently two witnesses of the things that men have done. One must be a kind of book of vouchers for the other. So when we read the books were opened, evidently this is a record that is kept. Of course this is symbolic, but there is a record kept of all of the works of every individual. And then there was another book opened which is the book of life. So, one is the book which contains the vouchers that relate to the other book.

What is the distinction between the book of life and the Lamb's book of life? I've thought about this a great deal, and I'm not sure that I have the final answer to the question. It has been said, and it certainly is an appealing kind of answer, that all men have their names written in the book of life. And as a person passes out of this human

existence, his name without having -- having no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, never having believed in Him, his name is erased from the book of life.

We do know that it was the custom in those days for villages and towns to have citizenship roles in which were enrolled all of the citizens that were born in that community. So we might presume that the book of life is a book that has written in it the names of every single human being who has ever been born. And then as he lives his life, dies without Christ, his name is erased. The Lamb's Book of Life, it has been said, is the book of the elect. That book of life written before the foundation of the world contains the names of all of God's elect. All of those elect shall be saved. The whole work of God is directed toward the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the lost. In the final analysis, the names that are in the book of life are exactly the names that are in the Lamb's book of life. At any rate, we read here that the books were opened, and then another book was opened which is the book of life.

Now, this judgment that takes place is not taking place, of course, because the judge is curious about who is going to be saved. God knows who is to be saved. He is in no doubt whatsoever. This is not a trial, but it is an occasion in which the lost are gathered before God in order that he may render his verdict upon their lives. So we are not to think of this as a time when we're to stand before God, and there are people who are going to stand up and say a few things for us and others are going to get up and say a few things against us, and God is going to make the final decision. There is no evidence of that at all. This is a judgment in which the judge pronounces his verdict, and that is all.

We are also sup -- we also read in the latter part of verse 12 and again in verse 13 that they were judged out of the things that were written in the books according to their works. Now, there are two things that are suggested here. First of all, this judgment is just. They are judged according to their works. He will judge the secrets of men through his gospel, Paul says, in Christ. He will judge them according to their works. I've often wondered about this judgment. And some of the things we have discovered through

modern science may be very useful or may reveal things that will enable us to understand how a God can be so just in his judgment.

When we pull up the sheet of a darkened room, the light seems to cross the room and reach the opposite wall immediately. Actually scientists have known that for many, many years that it takes time for light to travel from one place to another. According to modern discoveries, the speed of light is the fastest possible speed, and it's used as a measuring rod in the study of both atoms and great distances in astronomy. The speed of light, you'll remember, was measured by a Professor Michelson of the University of Chicago, and he found that light travels about 186,000 miles per second. In other words, if the sun were to suddenly stop giving its light, we would still continue to see it for eight minutes because it takes about 500 seconds for light to travel from the sun to the earth. And if the North Star should suddenly explode, we would not see the explosion for 75 years because it takes that long for light to travel from the North Star to our particular planet. In fact, if we could sit upon the star Regal with a very large telescope and focus it upon the earth, we would just be able to see the ships of Columbus reaching America for the first time.

Now, if we add to this the fact that our memory is very much like a polemicist -- you know that a polemicist is manuscript that has been -- in which the first thing written upon it, or the second perhaps, has been erased and other things have been written over it. One of the most valuable manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, for example, is a polemicist manuscript in which originally the New Testament was written upon it in a very early time in the 5th century. But then along about the 10th or 11th century, someone having this very valuable manuscript and not realizing how valuable it was, erased a good bit of it and put over it the sermons of a man by the name of Ephraim, thinking that the sermons of this man Ephraim were no doubt more valuable than the text of the New Testament.

Now, by modern scientific methods, we can illuminate what Ephraim said and discover what was underneath Ephraim's word so that we have come to -- into the possession of a very valuable Greek manuscript called *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus* which means *codex*, the codex of Ephraim, *rescriptus* means having been erased or polemicist manuscript.

Now, our minds are kind of like a polemicists'. So I think we can understand how God is able to bring to our attention not only what has transpired but enable us to actually stand before the Great White Throne judgment and see everything that has to do with our life as it actually occurred.

Have you ever had the experience of remembering something you had not thought about for -- well, now, you're not this old -- but for ten years, or perhaps twenty years? I often have that. I remember something that I have not thought about for twenty years and suddenly something happens that makes me remember it. Well, when we stand -- I'm not going to stand before the Great White Throne judgment. But when men stand before the Great White Throne judgment, this judgment is going to be just, and God is going to be able to pass right through your vision. Right before your vision and in your mind all of your thoughts, all of your actions, everything that you have ever done so that there will be a perfect revelation of your mind and your heart and your life before the Great White Throne judgment. Must be a terrible thing to stand before the Great White Throne judgment.

Now, this judgment is also in degrees. Scripture tells us or suggests to us that this judgment is in degrees. We read, for example, in Matthew chapter 10 in verse 15 words like this -- I'll read this text. There are some others to which we could turn if we had time. "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for that city." Notice the comparative, *more tolerable*. We learn from this that the judgment in the final day at the Great White Throne judgment is a judgment in degrees, so that some will be judged more intensively than

others. So, at this time at which there’s an instant replay of all of your lives, it is going to be evident that some deserve greater judgment than others, and there will be a judgment in degrees.

We read in the 13th verse, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.” *Every man, every individual* who stands there before the Great White Throne judgment is judged. Not a single one of these individuals is left out. And then they are judged according to their works. The things that they have done, the expressions of their lives, the character that is revealed in the products of their lives is the basis upon which they are judged. The text of Scripture says.

Now, the Lord Jesus said that the things that come out of a heart of -- the heart of a man perfectly reveal what his is. A good tree brings forth good fruit; a corrupt tree, corrupt fruit. And so the works are a perfect revelation of the character of the individual who stands before the Great White Throne judgment. In the final time that will be demonstrated that the believers, the saved, are truly, in fact, more righteous than the unsaved. They shall be judged according to their works.

Now, I have a good friend who likes to say that this judgment is a judgment according to their good works, but that is not the teaching of Scripture. You will discover that these words, judged according to their works, has to do with all of their works. What might be called good works and what might be called bad works, because in the sight of God all of our works are bad if we have not come to faith in Jesus Christ. Because if we have not come to faith in Christ, they are not works that are directed toward the glory of God, and they are not works that flow out of the heart of faith. So if they do not have a proper origin -- in trust in God -- and they do not have a proper goal -- the glory of God -- they are sinful works. Even though, according to men’s standards, they may seem to be very beneficial works.

So the benefactors of humanity who do not do their work for the glory of God but for the glory of their own name, their works are sinful works. So in the text of Scripture then they are judged according to their works.

And finally now, Roman III, the consequences of the judgment is given for us in verses 14 and 15. And John writes, “And death and Hades were cast into the Lake of Fire.” This is the abolition of death and Hades. Hosea says, “O death, where are thou plagues? O where is thy destruction? Repentance shall be hid from my eyes.”

And so finally death and Hades itself are destroyed. And then he writes, “This is the second death. And whosoever was not founded written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire. Here there is initiated the second death.” Remember in Holy Scripture when the Bible says that Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, it said that he should die.

Now, the judgment for sin is one. It is death, spiritual death. But this spiritual death issues in physical death. That’s why we die physically because we have all died spiritually. We are born spiritually dead. And because we are born spiritually dead, we must die physically. Now, if in our spiritual death we do not turn to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and are saved, if this salvation does not take place, our spiritual death is prolonged throughout eternity and Scripture calls that the second death or eternal death or the Lake of Fire.

Now, the penalty is not threefold, spiritual death, physical death, eternal death. The penalty is one: spiritual death. But physical death and eternal death inevitably follow if there does not occur faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There are people who say, with some measure of sound reasoning, it might seem. But why is it true that we should suffer for eternity even though our deeds have been done in a course of a lifetime? Why should a person suffer throughout eternity for deeds that are done during the course of a particular life?

Well, now it's not the physical force that determines the guilt of the deed, nor is it the time that it takes to commit it that determines the guilt of a deed. Whether the point of a pen is thrust against a stone or into the pupil of an eye or whether a match be cast into the sea or into the magazine of an arsenal, or whether a blow will be given to check the murderer's assassin or whether it be to the meek and innocent Savior Jesus Christ who is rudely smitten makes all the difference in the degree of moral turpitude.

And, furthermore, as far as the length of time is consumed, it requires only an instant to commit a murder when it might take all night to commit a theft. But one crime is much more significant than the other. So these human ways of measuring crime do not pertain to the divine standards. And if it is true that we have rejected the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the crime is not measured by the fact that it was done in time. It is measured by the dignity of the person against whom we have sinned. And in sinning against the eternal God, we have committed eternal sin. So that eternal death is the judgment of the lost.

There is a famous story which I like about William G.T. Shedd and Henry Ward Beecher, one of the great preachers of the last generation. *The North American Review* engaged Professor Shedd to write an article vindicating eternal punishment and also engaged Henry Ward Beecher, the preacher, to write an article against it, because he said he didn't believe it. They then sent the proof sheets to Mr. Beecher whereupon he telegraphed from Denver to the *North American Review* to cancel the engagement, "Shedd is too much for me. I hath believed in eternal punishment now myself. Get somebody else." The Biblical revelation concerning eternal punishment is so plain.

Now, then you'll notice, finally, that in this last verse there is no hope for anyone. Whosoever is not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire. And there is no evidence that anyone is not cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the judgment of those who are dead..

Let's bow together in a time of prayer.

“The Great White Throne Judgment” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege of proclaiming him in the city of Dallas and to people who live in other places through the ministry of this little church. We pray Thy blessing upon its outreach, over the radio, over the tapes, and on the written page. We pray now Thy blessing upon us. May the ministry of the word of God glorify Thy name. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.