

Rev. 20:11-15. the Great White Throne

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the concept of the Great White Throne, where God will judge all people based on their works, and those who are not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire.

Scripture: Psalm 102:26, Isaiah 34:4, Jeremiah 4:23, Mark 9:48, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, Revelation 13:8, Revelation 17:8, Revelation 20:11-15, Revelation 21:27

Topics: "Eternal Consequences", "Judgment"

Description

Horatius Bonar preaches on Revelation 20:11-15, depicting the Great White Throne as a scene of ultimate judgment where all humanity, both great and small, will stand before God. He emphasizes the grandeur and purity of the throne, the certainty of judgment based on one's deeds recorded in the books, and the terrifying reality of the second death for those not found in the Book of Life. Bonar warns of the impartiality of God's judgment, where every action and thought will be accounted for, leading to eternal consequences. He challenges the congregation to reflect on the truth of this judgment and its implications for their lives, urging them to consider their standing before God.

Transcript

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."--Revelation 20:11-15.

This ought to have begun a new chapter, or formed a separate section. It is a new scene--following, no doubt, close on the judgment terrors of the preceding verses, but still separate from them. It is a scene of infinite grandeur and solemnity; a scene from which the world shrinks back, but which shall one day be realized on this very globe. John 'saw' it--in vision, no doubt; but in a vision presented by God Himself--a true picture of coming realities to man and man's world. All this scene shall one day come true. It is the 'vision,' and it shall be one day the reality of--

(1) A THRONE--YES, a royal seat, a seat of judgment, the seat of the great King and Judge of all. There have been many thrones on earth, but none like this--one throne in place of the many.

(2) A GREAT throne--All earth's thrones have been little, even the greatest--Nebuchadnezzar, or Alexander, or Caesar, or Napoleon--but this is 'great;' greater than the greatest--none like it in magnificence.

(3) A WHITE throne--White is purity, truth, justice calmness. Such is the throne to be--unsoiled, untainted, incorruptible--no one-sidedness nor imperfection--no bribery nor favor there. All is 'white'--transparent and spotless perfection.

(4) One SEATED on it--It was not empty or unoccupied, nor filled by a usurper, or by one who could not wield the power required for executed its decrees. God was seated there; that very God before whose face heaven and earth flee away; that God whose presence melts the mountains, and made Sinai to shake (See Psalm 102:26; Isaiah 34:4, 51:6; Jeremiah 4:23, 26; Revelation 6:14, 16:20). In the last two passages we find men upon the earth, and hail falling from heaven upon them, after it had been said that all had fled away; which shows that it is not annihilation that is meant in any of them. Nothing is annihilated. Our bodies return to dust, but return out of dust into themselves again; so earth will undergo changes, but will come out of these the same earth, only purified. For our bodies there is resurrection, for earth restitution, but for neither annihilation. If annihilation is the portion of the wicked--what then, does their resurrection mean? He who sits on this throne is the mighty God, able to judge and to carry out His decrees in spite of all human or hellish resistance. How terrible to stand unready before such a Judge and such a throne! All justice, all perfection, all holiness! Who can abide His appearing?

But besides the Judge and the throne, there are the millions to be judged. They are--(1) The dead; those who did not rise in the first resurrection, called 'the rest of the dead' (20:5). They remained behind the dead in Christ, but they must rise at last. (2) Small and great; from the youth to the old man, from the feeblest to the strongest, all are there. 'They shall not escape.' They have to do with unerring eyes.

These 'stand before God.' There are others who 'stand before God,' or 'before the throne of God,' but for very different purpose.

'The angels stood before God' (8:2); the two witnesses 'stood before God of the whole earth' (11:4); the great white-robed multitude 'stood before the throne' (8:9-15); the elders 'sat before the throne of God' (11:16). But all these are very different from the 'small and great' who stand before 'the great white throne.' The former stand for honor and glory and gladness, the latter for judgment.

The process of judgment is also seen. (1) Books are opened--books probably containing God's history of the sinner's life. His record of the sinner's deeds. How different from man's! How different God's story of our great men, our literary men, our poets, our philosophers, our captains, our kings, from man's! The divine version of human history--how unusual it will be! How unlike all earthly annals! Most of the leading facts the same, yet how differently told! Most of the scenes and events and actions the same, yet how differently put the interpreted! What a strange thing will be a biography, a human life, seen by divine eyes and recorded by a divine pen! What 'books' these will be! Alongside of these is another book, called the book of life--the register of those whose portion is life eternal, whose home is to be the land and city of life, whose heritage is to be that God in whose favor is life. (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 21:27).

The books first mentioned contain the materials for the Judge's decision. Out of them the individuals are judged, 'every man according to his works.' The 'things written in these books' being thus connected with the 'works' mentioned, lead us to conclude that they are the record or annals of the works of each. All things are written down. God keeps His diary of every soul's doings and sayings and thinkings. Nothing is

forgotten! Every deed awakes from its slumbers and speaks on that day! What a resurrection of each buried thought and word at that great white throne!

The judgment will be just and fair; nothing overrated, nothing underrated. Every fact will speak exactly for itself. Each word will be weighed in perfect balances. No one shall be able to complain. God will be justified in all. What a scrutiny! What impartiality and calmness, yet what exactness and minuteness!

It shall be universal judgment then. Sea and land shall give up their dead. Death and the grave shall part with their victims. Each region of earth shall furnish its thousands or millions of the dead for judgment. And again it is said, 'according to their works.' On these each man's judgment is to turn.

Then death and the grave are utterly destroyed. They exist no more, but are consumed. The lake of fire is their portion; and in this lake there is the second death. The first death passes away only to give place to a second far more terrible; a death that never dies, that has no grave, and no end. The second death! The lake of fire! What words of horror are these! Yet they are not exaggerations, but God's own calm and solemn language. It indicates real punishment, not annihilation.

And all who are not found in the book of life are cast into this fiery lake--handed over to this second death, this eternal mortality, this never-ending dying--this death that is always both present and to come--the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched. Such is the eternity of the lost, according to God's account of it. Man may dilute or disbelieve or allegorize the statement, but there it stands. Eternal sorrow or eternal joy!

(1) Is it all true? Do we believe it? All this about the great white throne, and the Judge, and the books, and the lake, and the second death? Are all these things true?

(2) Does it bear upon us? Have these scenes of judgment any bearing upon us? Are their terrors for us? Has humanity anything to do with that lake of fire? Or is it only for lost angels?

(3) Is it rousing to us? If anything could awake us, it would be a futurity like this. That Judge, that judgment, that woe!

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