

The Revelation of Jesus Christ Chapter 20:11-21:8 August 31, 2016

In verse 13 of this chapter we see a great resurrection of the dead from the sea and the land. This resurrection, foretold in verse 5, is a prelude to judgment before the great white throne. We believe that this judgment is only of those who have died without Christ, whose name is not written in the book of life.

How do we know this? Because all who have been saved have returned to life in the “first resurrection” of 11:6 and are thus called blessed and holy. The first resurrection begins with the rapture of Old Testament saints, deceased Christians, and those Christians blessed to be alive at that time (1 Thess. 4:14-17). Following them will be the righteous martyrs rescued out of death during the tribulation (Rev. 11:12, 15:2, 20:4). As for the those who believe during the millennium, it’s possible they do not taste death at all.

But those pulled from the grave to stand before the white throne in this portion do not enter into glory and blessing. Instead they hear a recounting of the sins of every degree committed during their lifetimes. Who among mortal men could withstand such an examination? Who upon seeing his wicked heart laid bare would not acknowledge the justice of God in sentencing him to a “second death”?

The answer, of course, is no one – no one whose sins are not covered by the blood of the Lamb. Those sins do not come into judgment: *“He does not deal with us according to our sins... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us”* (Ps. 103:10,12).

But there is a judgment for believers: *“So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 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”* (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

The Greek word for “judgment seat” is *bema*. It can mean a tribunal as in Acts 18:12 but

also was the platform from which victorious athletes received their laurel crowns (like an Olympic podium). Christians will stand before this judgment seat and give an account of every thought, word, or action; not in “fearful expectation of judgment” (Heb. 10:27) but in anticipation of reward for good deeds performed in service of the Lord. Our misdeeds or even righteous acts performed for selfish purposes will be purged as with fire: *“... each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire”* (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

The book of Revelation gives no account of the actual judgment seat of Christ but we may assume it takes place soon after the resurrection of the believer, as the white throne judgment does with the unbeliever. In Chapter 4 the elders representing the church make their appearance right after the rapture and are wearing the crowns they presumably have received at the judgment seat (crowns that they cast before the Lord in Rev. 4:10).

Some additional verses relating to the judgment seat of Christ are:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom 14:10).

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matt. 16:27).

... whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free (Eph. 6:8).

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we[a] have worked for, but may win a full reward (2 John 8).

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

Scripture wants us to be keenly aware of this coming event during our stay on earth. We can anticipate the cleansing exposure of our sins by judging and confessing them now. And our words and deeds towards our brothers and sisters should manifest our desire to be awarded crowns of righteousness by our loving Savior.

Notes on Chapter 20:11-21:8

20:11 The one sitting on the throne is Christ, exercising the authority given Him by the Father. The earth and sky dissolve as prophesied in 2 Peter 3:10.

20:12 The first books are records of sin; the second is a list of those whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus. None present at this judgment are found in the book of life.

20:13 Death is the grave, where our physical bodies end up. Hades is the place where disembodied souls reside, whether believers or unbelievers, until they are united with their bodies in resurrection.

20:14-15 Before this point, the lake of fire held three occupants: the beast, the false prophet, and Satan. How fitting that they should be a type of “firstfruits” for those whose portion is eternal torment.

21:1 The heaven and earth are no longer needed. The sea, a symbol for unrest and turbulence in

Revelation, also has passed away as God’s perfect eternal peace comes in.

21:2 As we will study more thoroughly next week, new Jerusalem is the church, the bride of Christ (Eph. 5).

21:4 There is some difficulty in this chapter in determining whether the new Jerusalem of verse 10 is a picture of the eternal state or the church reigning with Christ over the earth during the millennium. The absence of death here in verse 4, following the dissolution of the physical universe, tells us we are seeing the eternal city. Isaiah 65 implies that death, though delayed, is not yet abolished during the millennial time.

21:5-7 These verses give a wonderful summation of the outcome of the blessings found in Christ:

- Rebirth and renewal
- Triumph and conquest
- Reconciliation into the very family of God
- Eternal life through the free gift of grace

21:8 When we consider the “trivial” sins like lying included among the grievous ones in this list, it is clear that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Those in the lake of fire have not merely sinned, as all have, but have died in their sins because of lack of faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:24).