

Judgment Day

Revelation 20:11-15

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-09-02

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Text

11 Then I saw a tremendous white throne and the One who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled away; and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne; and books were opened. And another Book was opened, namely, of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things that were written in the books. 13 The ocean gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged each one according to their works. 14 And Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death, the Lake of Fire. 15 And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Introduction

This past week I really got a kick out of a book titled, “Jesus May Come Today.” It was a recent reprint of a 1943 book by John R. Rice. It said, “This booklet will give you a new excitement as you realize that the Saviour may return at any moment!” So just for kicks I clicked on the “add to cart” button just to see how long shipping would take. And it was not an any-moment shipping. They guaranteed that it would arrive in 9-15 days. What’s wrong with that picture? We saw last week that what was wrong with it is that Christ’s Second Coming is guaranteed by the Bible to only occur after the millennium is completely done, and numerous prophecies of the conversion of the world have happened. It is anything but an imminent Second Coming. When the Bible talks about soon, near, at hand, and about-to-happen events, they always happen very soon. And Jesus did appear (the Greek word *parousia*) in the clouds of heaven to judge Israel, end the Old Covenant, and begin the process of converting the nations in AD 70, and making all things new. He promised that that judgment would be soon. And it was. But when he uses figures that speak of a long time away, a thousand years, or other figures of vast periods of time, you know that they are not going to be imminent. The doctrine of imminence is an innovation, not something central to Christianity. There is no way that a first century Christian would think that the events at the end of the thousand years would happen any time.

Last week we looked at Christ coming down to the earth (the Greek word *erchomai*) in fiery flames. That’s the Second Coming. And He came down to begin the judgment of resurrected nations. And now, verses 11-15 will show Him resurrecting the rest of the dead and judging all before the Great White Throne. If any passage highlights the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in this

book, verses 7-15 do so.

And before we look at this description of the final judgment, I want to briefly look at two minor puzzles in the text. They are major puzzles for most positions, but they are only minor puzzles for me.

I. Minor puzzles in the passage

A. How could heaven and earth pass away in verse 11 and yet the sea and those buried in the earth still be around in verse 13?

The first puzzle is how could heaven and earth pass away in verse 11 and yet the sea and those buried in the earth still be in existence in verse 13? There would be no sea or earth to get resurrected from if the earth and sea had passed away. Many commentators have puzzled over this. One commentary said that he has no answer and an answer is unimportant; it's just out of order. That's a rather cavalier attitude.

Others have said that it is simply metaphorical of what happened in AD 70 or metaphorical of what will happen at the end of time and that the heaven and earth don't really pass away. But that doesn't help either because chapter 21:1 says that the sea itself is one of the things that passed away in verse 11 of our chapter, yet the sea is present in verse 13. So even saying it is symbolic doesn't help because the symbolic that supposedly passed away in verse 11b is still here in verse 13.

Others say that there are three parallel descriptions of the same event, with verses 7-10 describing the last day of history, then verse 11 describing the same event from a second perspective, and verses 12-15 reiterating the same event one more time from a third perspective. And they do so based on the repetition of "And I saw" in verse 11 and again in verse 12. So they speak of these as three snapshots of the same event. That is actually a credible explanation that would work. And it may be true. But it doesn't seem natural to me based on John's use of kai as a sequence indicator. It seems to me that at least something in each section must be sequential after the previous section. And on my interpretation it is.

Another explanation is that it should be translated this way: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, the one from whose face the earth and the heavens flee away." In other words, 11:b isn't giving time sequence, but is simply describing the one who sits on the throne - it is the one from whom at some point the heavens and earth will flee away. That actually may

be part of the solution, though I don't think it is needed.

One other strange explanation is that of the Premillennialist, Mealy, who claims that there is a gap of 1000 years between verse 12 and verse 13, and that verses 11-15 are parallel to and describing the same things as verses 4-10.¹ So on his interpretation, verses 4-6 are the first resurrection (correct), and so is verse 11 (not correct); then he says that verses 7-10 are the second resurrection (correct), and so is verses 12-15 (correct, but he fails to see sequence). This of course forces him to hugely downplay the vanishing of heaven and earth in verse 11 since he sees it simply as the preparing of the earth for the future Premillennial thousand-year reign of Jesus on the earth. But since there will be death and sin in that supposed Future-1000 years, I fail to see how it is a complete vanishing away of anything. And Full Preterists have the same problem. They claim that heaven and earth passed away in AD 70. In fact, they say that the whole chapter happens in the first century, which means the same strange recapitulation. So the Premil and Preterist interpretations are perhaps the most convoluted interpretations that I have seen so far on this passage. But every commentary that I have read has struggled with how to place verse 11b. It is a puzzle for just about everybody.

I think my interpretation is the most straightforward and takes seriously the sequential progression in the chapter, and you don't need to re-translate anything. Here's how I break up the passage. Verses 4-6 is the first resurrection before the millennium. Verses 7-10 is the resurrection of Gog and Magog and the releasing of Satan after the millennium on the last day of history. Verses 11-15 occur one hour after Gog and Magog are raised, or at the end of that hour-long rebellion that we looked at last week. So there is sequence all the way through the chapter.

What about verse 11b? Well, the literal translation doesn't actually make 11b sequential. It would just describe which one sat on the throne. But I actually think there is a good reason for introducing it at this juncture. I see the whole of verse 11 as the summary heading of the last judgment in verses 12-15. So how do verses 12-15 occur after verse 11? They definitely occur after verse 11a. But 11b states the end result of this judgment on the last day of history. So I have just written beside verse 11, "summary title," and then verses 12-

1 "In the final analysis, it is possible to present the two judgments of Rev. 20.4-10 and of 20.11-15 as a virtual unity because of the mystery that they are mutually ratifying. The judgment and recompense according to deeds at the beginning of the millennium (20.11-12 // 20.4-6) and the judgment and recompense according to deeds at its end (20.13-15 // 20.7-10) reveal themselves as two movements of a single overall judgment." p. 185. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=JcbeBAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PA185>

15 amplifies upon it. Can I guarantee this interpretation is correct? No. The three-snapshot-theory may be the correct one, or the re-translation theory may be the correct one. But to me, the interpretation I just gave seems to be the most straightforward reading.

And my approach takes four things seriously that many interpretations do not: First, it takes seriously the oft repeated phrase in John 6 that all will be raised on the last day of history.

Second, it takes seriously the fact that John 5 twice insists that all (whether believer or unbeliever) will be resurrected within an hour of each other.

Third, it takes seriously the sequence in the chapter. Verse 11 definitely takes place after verses 7-10, and verses 12-15 definitely take place after at least 11a. So there is sequence in every section.

I'm going to save my exposition of 11b to next week when we start chapter 21 because it introduces such an encouraging concept that I want to devote an entire sermon to it. I believe there is a really cool reason why it is introduced at this point. It is showing (just as 1 Corinthians 15 does) that Christ's Second Coming has the purpose of putting down the last remaining enemy, death, and when that occurs, the last remnant of the old order will have vanished away and nothing will be left but the New Heavens and New Earth that Jesus was already making new in first century. But we will get to that next week.

And finally, it takes seriously John's use of headings throughout this book to summarize what he will be talking about in the next few verses. It is not uncommon for John to summarize what happens before and after a paragraph within the scope of one sentence. He does so according to everyone in verse 5. He does so in verse 3. And we have seen him do so in other sections of this book. So my interpretation is totally consistent with John's use of headings to summarize paragraphs.

So verse 11a begins the discussion of verses 12-15, and 11b shows the end result of verses 12-15. And we can't just take it as metaphorical, since chapter 21:1 highlights that even the ocean passes away. There is a literal fulfillment of that phrase.

B. How could the dead be judged in verse 12 before the dead are raised in verse 13?

The second puzzle stated by commentators is, "How could the dead be judged in verse 12 before the dead are raised in verse 13?" They can't be

judged before they are raised, can they? Well, if you take the three-snapshot-view, that is not on a problem. But on my interpretation there is absolutely no problem either. The Gog and Magog rebels are resurrected in verses 7-10 and given the opportunity to rebel for one hour before the rest of the dead are raised in verses 11-15. Just as the first resurrection had two phases (firstfruits and full harvest), this one is divided into two parts separated by one hour.

II. Description of the Final Judgment

But let's spend the rest of this sermon looking at the central theme of these verses - the amazing description of the final judgment. There is a courtroom, a Judge, evidence that is looked at, the standard by which this evidence is judged, a defense of some and no defense of others, a verdict, a sentence, and a happy result.

A. The Courtroom

Let's look at the courtroom first. Verse 11 says, "Then I saw a tremendous white throne..."

Great = power

The Greek word Pickering translates as "tremendous" is simply μέγας or great. It's a "great white throne." The word "great" speaks of the power of this Judge. The lost who stand before this throne will be struck with fright and the righteous will be struck with awe. Some people flippantly talk about what they will say when they see God face to face. But when they stand before this throne, all braggadocio attitudes will vanish and they will weep and tremble before Him. All jokes about hell will vanish as the reality of Judgment Day sinks in. Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 12:29 says, "For our God is a consuming fire." This is a great throne.

White = purity

The word "white" stands for the unapproachable purity of this Judge. Those who thought that their good deeds would outweigh their bad deeds on Judgment Day will see the filthy blackness of their souls against the absolute purity and holiness of this Judge, and they will tremble. They will have no doubt in their minds that they do not even remotely measure up to God's standards of holiness and purity. The only way to be pure enough to stand before this throne and not want to flee in terror is to be cleansed by the blood of Christ. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the

Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Psalm 51:7 says, “Purge me ... and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Every man, woman and child will have to come before the absolute brilliant purity of this white throne. And the only way to do so successfully is if you are purified by Christ’s blood.

Throne = kingly judgment

And the word “throne” itself indicates both rule and judgment mingled together. This Judge is the King of the universe. The second dictionary definition of θρόνος is “supreme power over a political entity, dominion, sovereignty” (BDAG). Those who think they are the captains of their fate will suddenly stand before the One who undeniably will call all the shots on that day. 1 Timothy 6:15 calls Jesus, “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.” If we do not bow the knee before Jesus in this life, we will shrink in terror from that throne on Judgment Day.

That my friends is the terrible courtroom of Judgment Day. It will reveal God’s great power, His brilliant purity, and His sovereign judgment from which no man can hide.

B. The Judge = Jesus (Matt. 25:31-32; John 5:22,27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Phil. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:1)

But let’s look next at the Judge Himself. Verse 11 says, “and the One who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the sky fled away; and no place was found for them.” It doesn’t say who this One is. So some commentators say that it is God the Father, since He obviously sat on a throne earlier in this book. But I agree with other commentaries who say that it is Jesus.

In John 5:22 Jesus said, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.” Of course, because of the unity of the Trinity, what the Son does, the other members of the Trinity also do. So Acts 17:31 says of God the Father, “because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.” So the Father judges the world, but He does so by the Man, Jesus. So it is not either/or. So I have listed several Scriptures in your outline that show that Jesus will sit on a throne judging all mankind on the last day of history. Let me read a sampling:

Matt. 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep

from the goats.

Acts 10:42 says that Jesus “was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” 2 Tim. 4:1 says, “the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead...” So I think it is clear that Jesus is sitting on the throne. He will be the Judge.

C. The ones being judged = all

The next thing we see in this courtroom is the ones being judged. Verse 12 says, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne...” So children will be judged and great presidents will be judged. And all will be forced to stand. They no doubt wished that they could run, but they will be fixated in place - forced to stand trial. Later in verse 12 it says, “And the dead were judged...” Verse 13 says, “The ocean gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged each one according to their works.” And verse 14 speaks of those “not found written in the Book of Life.” When you take all those phrases together, it reinforces the Scriptures I read earlier that Jesus will judge all humans from Adam to the end of time, whether they have already died or whether they were alive and given new bodies at Christ’s coming.

Those not found in the Book of Life (whether dead or alive)

And notice the two references to the Book of Life. Those not found in the Book of Life are the non-elect. And the reason I say they are non-elect is that Revelation 13:8, 17:8, and 20:15 all describe them as those “whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world” (17:8). Those burning in hell weren’t in that book from the foundation of the world. Which implies, by the way, that nothing in that book ever gets erased. If some people lose their salvation, as Arminians claim, then there would have been people whose names were written in the book from the foundation of the world, yet had their names blotted out of the book and end up in hell. But that is not Revelation says. It says that those in hell will be those whose names were not in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Those not written in that book are called the reprobate elsewhere in Scripture and those written in the book are called the elect or chosen. What Revelation affirms is that believers will not have their names blotted out. It’s not stating such is a possibility; it is giving us an assurance of what will never happen.

Those found in the Book of Life (whether dead or alive)

So before time began, God had a book that he wrote the names of the elect in, and He gave those people to Jesus to die for. That is called the covenant

of redemption from eternity past. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were in a covenant with each other to showcase their attributes through a redemptive Plan. And that book informs the Holy Spirit one whom He will regenerate. And only those will be saved, and all those will be saved. As the Westminster Confession words it,

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestined, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished. (Confession 3.3-4)

So those whose names are in the Book of Life are simply those who were predestined to be saved.

Now I know that the doctrine of predestination scares some people. They wonder, “What if I’m not predestined? How do I know whether my name is written in that Book of Life?” And the answer is actually pretty easy. Romans 3:9-18 says that an unregenerate person cannot truly believe and seek God. So if you seek God with a persevering faith, you had to have been regenerated to achieve that. And since genuine faith always produces a changed life, the more we are transformed into Christ’s image, the more confidence we have that we are elect. So 2 Peter 1 tells us to use our faith to receive from Christ virtue. And with all diligence, to add to our virtue knowledge, and to knowledge we are to add self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. And listen to the confidence we can have in both our internal calling and our eternal election when we pursue Christ with that kind of diligence (which is the fifth point of Calvinism - perseverance of the saints). Peter says,

For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure [this is how you have assurance of your election - “to make your call and election sure”], for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The book of 1 John indicates that assurance is not given by the Holy Spirit to those who don’t diligently do 2 Peter 1. Assurance is a wonderful gift of the Spirit that is given to those who walk in step with the Spirit.

That’s why in Philippians 4:3 Paul could tell by the genuine faith and transformed lives of the women and men mentioned in that verse that they were among those “whose names are in the Book of Life.” He could tell based upon the fact that they had a persevering faith.

The non-elect don't want to come to Jesus, and indeed cannot come to Jesus. In John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." But praise God, He also said in the same chapter, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Praise God, if you come to Him He won't cast you out! Why? Because coming is the proof that you were one given to Him by Father. And those verses again indicate that 100% of those given to Jesus by the Father before the foundation of the world (in other words, 100% of those written in the book) will be raised on the last day and spend eternity in Jesus. None will lose their salvation. None will have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. I'm spending a lot of time on this because there are commentators (like Vic Reasoner) who use the Book of Life language to try to prove that you can lose your salvation. You can't. It is a misreading of these verses.

But while those written in the Book of Life will be secure in Jesus, everyone else will be cast out of this universe and into hell. Clinging to Jesus is your only hope of salvation.

Other Scriptures indicate that there will be many different groups standing before the judgment seat of Christ. There will be the self-confident atheists, who will no longer be atheists. They will simply see themselves as Psalm 14 sees them - as fools. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" They will be kicking themselves and saying, "What a fool I was."

There will be self-righteous Pharisees who think God owes them for their good behavior, and Jesus will see their works as filthy rags that are unfit for heaven. Why? Because those righteous deeds were not produced by Jesus and His grace.

There will be professing evangelicals, according to Matthew 7, who will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" (v. 22). And Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" And by the way, for the Five Point Arminians who think that your name can be erased out of the book of life and that you can be genuinely saved and lose your salvation, Jesus in that verse says to those professing believers, "I never knew you." He didn't say, "I knew you once, but you lost your salvation." He says, "I never knew you." "You weren't one of the ones given to Me by the Father and written in that book. I didn't die for you. I died for those written in the book. My life is dedicated to those written in the book by the covenant of redemption." In John 17:9 Jesus prayed to the Father on

behalf of those whom the Father had given to Him, saying, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours."

So we have seen that all, including true believers will stand before the Great White Throne on the last day of history; those written in the book, and those not written in the book.

D. The evidence and standard ("books...And another book")

And I'll just remind you again that in Matthew 7, Jesus will judge all professing believers by their works or their lawlessness. And this is something that many Christians don't get - they think they are saved, and that is all there is to it. But there are many Scriptures that indicate that believers will be judged by the Law on the last day of history.

So I want you to notice that these verses in Revelation also show that everyone (whether believer and unbeliever) will be judged by their works. There is evidence introduced and a standard by which everything is judged. Verse 12 says, "and books were opened. And another Book was opened, namely, of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things that were written in the books." If there are books (plural) in addition to the Book of Life, then there are at least three books opened on that day - books (plural - that would be at least two) plus the Book of Life. I believe the three books to be the Book of Works, the Bible, and the Book of Life.

The Book of Works

First of all, the Book of Works. Who gets judged by the things written in it? And the answer is clearly, "Everyone." That may come as a surprise, but Jesus does not distinguish between believers or unbelievers when it comes to being judged out of the Book of Works. Don't confuse the Book of Life with the Book of Works. All will be judged according to their works. Psalm 56:8 says that all of David's wanderings, works, and tears are written in God's book. That's Psalm 56:8. Psalm 139 says that nothing can be hidden from God. The first six verses says,

Psa. 139:1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. 5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.

And verse 16 says, "And in Your book they are all written..."

He's talking about a believer here - a man after God's own heart, yet every thought, motive, word, and action of David was being recorded in God's book - what I call the Book of Works. It is scary when you think about it.

In Ezekiel 11:5, Ezekiel says this: "And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said unto me...I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them."

What are some of those thoughts that come into your mind that God records in His book? 2 Peter 2:14 says, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." If you have eyes of adultery that cannot cease from sin, you are heaping up a lot of records in God's Book of Works. Those evil thoughts will be exposed on Judgment Day. Yes, you can be forgiven for those sins, but they stay recorded in that book. You might think, "Well, there couldn't possibly be enough time for me to be judged for every thought I've ever thought on one day of Judgment." But every thought will be judged. Many people have had near-death experiences where their entire life flashed before their eyes. They have no idea how in just a few seconds they could think of thousands of things they had done over their entire life. How can that happen? Yet many people have experienced it very vividly. Past actions that they hadn't thought about in years were flashing before their eyes. Judgment Day will be something like that, only it won't be just you that will see those things. Scripture indicates that we will have deep shame as others see what we too see. Our filthiness will be exposed in contrast to the brilliant whiteness of Christ's purity.

What angry words have you spoken this past week? In Matthew 12:36-37 Jesus said,

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.

That is legal language of a courtroom. For believers it won't spell their doom in hell, but only because their names are in the Book of Life and they are secure in Jesus. But you will know the guilt of every idle thought and word. Psalm 139:4 says, "For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether." Hebrews 4:13 says, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Yes, you will give account for everything that you think, say, and do on Judgment Day. Gossip, slander, criticism, lies, evil jokes, will all be exposed as the black evil darkness that they really are. Luke 12 says,

Luke 12:2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not

be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light... Ecclesiastes 12:14 insists, “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” When you watch pornography behind closed doors, angels grieve along with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And Jesus says that believers need to take this Judgment Day seriously because we will be ashamed and even lose our rewards that we would otherwise have had. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3, and I want to give one of many passages that show a loss that believers will have because of their carelessness over their lifestyle. 1 Corinthians 3, beginning to read at verse 11.

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. So, we are secure in Jesus. We will get into heaven because of Jesus. That is true. But what do we build on this foundation by His grace? That’s the subject of the next three verses. Verse 12:

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Evidence of whether your works are done by the flesh or by the Holy Spirit is being gathered minute by minute in the Book of Works. Nothing is left out or crossed out. Even your attitudes toward this sermon is being gathered and written in the Book of Works in heaven. Let me end this section with two more Scriptures for believers alone. Matthew 10:42 says that believers will be rewarded for works done by grace.

Matt. 10:42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

When you moms change diapers as unto Christ, you receive the reward of Christ. Why? Because God is recording that deed. And 2 John 8 says that we can also lose rewards that we have been accruing when we engage in evil or backslide. John says, “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.” Take seriously this Book of Works. Both believers and unbelievers have everything about us recorded in it.

The Bible (John 12:48)

Well, if the first book was the Book of Works, what about the other two? I can’t prove it definitively, but I believe the second one is the Bible. And the reason I say that is because Jesus said, “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” (John 12:48). The “last day” is the Day of

Judgment. So Christ's words that are recorded in the Scripture, will judge the person and their own works will judge the person. So those are the two books referred to in verse 12 when it says "the dead were judged according to their works, by the things that were written in the books."

And of course, that dovetails with the fact that the scroll of the Old Testament was the basis for the judgment of nations in history according to Revelation 4-8. Even civil courts on earth were supposed to reflect God's justice by judging according to the law of God. Well, God is not going to abandon His law when He judges and sweep evil actions under the carpet. In Ezekiel 44:24 God says about human judges: "In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes..."

And people respond, but what about believers? Will they be judged by God's law on Judgment Day? Aren't we rescued from the Law's curse? From the Law's curse, yes. That's what the Book of Life is about. But we are not rescued from the Law's evaluation. God continues to be a Just God. James 2:12 tells believers, "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty." Why would he say that if everyone gets rewarded equally in heaven?

The Book of Life

The third book is the Book of Life.

E. The only defense - having your name written in the Book of Life

And that book appears to be our defense. As I said earlier, it is the covenant record of the covenant of redemption between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity past. It records those whom the Father gave to Jesus and those whom Jesus would die for.

And as to rewards - those are all of grace as well. The Spirit produces the works that Jesus purchased for us by grace. And the works that Jesus purchased for us were planned by the Father from eternity past. So Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." We do have responsibility yes, but Philippians 2:12 says that we can only work out what God has already worked in us. So even our rewards are a product of grace. Our flesh can produce nothing that will get into heaven. So again, from beginning to end, the Triune God working through Jesus in our lives is our only defense.

F. The Verdict (vv. 13-15; ch. 21-22 with James 3:1; John 19:11; Heb. 10:29; Matt. 11:22; Ps. 62:12; Is. 59:18; Matt. 16:27; Jer. 17:10)

The verdict that will be based upon the actions recorded in the Book of Works appears to be strictly according to what is deserved. Believers will gain rewards and lose rewards based upon what the Spirit has worked through them. Their sins are dealt with in Christ, so what was deserved from sins will be canceled out by the Book of Life. But rewards will be judged based upon what we have done and what we have not done as recorded in the Book of Works. And God will be very just in giving those. James 3:1 tells Christians, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” I will be judged more strictly than some of you because of my privilege and by the fact that I should have known better. Every reward will be judged according to the law of God. It is after all a Book of Works.

But for unbelievers, the same is true. They will obviously be judged worthy of death because of a lifetime of sin and the fact that they are not united to Jesus and are thus not in the Book of Life. But they don't receive equal punishment. Scripture indicates that the reprobate who have sinned ignorantly, will be judged less severely than those who have sinned willfully. In John 19:11 Jesus said that the Jewish leaders who handed Him over to Pilate had greater sin than Pilate did. Hebrews 10:29 says that those who deliberately trample underfoot the blood of Christ will receive “much worse punishment.” There are degrees of punishment in hell, based upon the works of unbelievers. This is why Jesus told Chorazin and Bethsaida, “it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you” (Matt. 11:22). Why? Because God metes out punishment on the last day of history that is consistent with their works and their degree of knowledge and responsibility. It is a faulty view of justice that says that all in hell will receive the same punishment and all in heaven will receive the same reward. Psalm 62:12 says of God, “You render to each one according to his work.” Isaiah 59:18 says, “According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay...” Matthew 16:27 summarizes what many such Scriptures say, when Jesus said, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” So there is overwhelming evidence that there will be degrees of punishment in hell depending upon the verdict from the Book of Works, and there are degrees of reward in heaven according to God's verdict from the Book of Works.

G. The Sentences (vv. vv. 13-15; ch. 21-22 with 2 John. 8; 1 Cor. 3; Matt. 6:20; 19:21; Luke 19:17,19,26; James 3:1; John 19:11; Heb. 10:29; Matt. 11:22; Ps. 62:12; Is. 59:18; Matt. 16:27; Jer. 17:10)

Next come the sentences. The sentences that are handed out are two: whatever is deserved in the Lake of Fire for those not in the Book of Life, and whatever is deserved in the renewed heaven and earth for those who are in the Book of Life. There will be no socialistic redistribution where everyone gets exactly the same reward. Unbelievers will have degrees of punishment in hell and believers will have degrees of reward in heaven. According to 2 John 8, our bad behavior later in life can wipe out a lot of rewards we earned earlier in life. "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward."

Too many Christians think that getting to heaven is all that is involved and that we equally share in mansions. But Jesus was quite clear that while getting eternal life is a free gift of God, we will be judged for our thoughts, words, and deeds. So 1 Corinthians 3 indicates that some Christians will get into heaven, but with absolutely nothing to start their dominion with. Everything from this life will be burned up as hay, wood, and stubble - everything. Others will have laid up huge amounts of resources in heaven because they weren't lazy socialists and they took seriously Christ's words, "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20), and "give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21). The parable of the Minas is an amazing passage on rewards for the righteous. Based on strict justice, Jesus gives one servant who has been ten times more faithful as a steward, ten cities to rule over after the second coming (Luke 19:17). Another servant whose stewardship was five times better was promised that he would rule over five cities (v. 19), while the lazy servant got no stewardship in heaven (v. 26). Now, it's going to be great to be in heaven even without rewards. But those of you future minded enough to be saving up for retirement on earth (and hopefully that kind of future-mindedness is true of you), you need to be even more future-minded; need to be saving up for eternity. What you start with there will make it easier to take dominion for ages to come. It's not just an empty symbolism. You really do want to lay up treasures in heaven by God's grace. But 2 Peter 1 says that it takes your diligent faith to appropriate what Jesus purchased for you in heaven.

So keep in mind that there will be a real judgment of both unbelievers and believers. The Book of Life makes the difference between life and the second death in hell. But the other two books make the difference on how

well we will start off in eternity. God's justice will not be arbitrary. You and I will face a day of judgment of our works, and it should affect how we live today. May it be so, Lord Jesus. Amen.