

The book of life

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[0 : 00] Now shall we turn together this morning to the passage of God's Word that we read together from the book of the Revelation. Those of us who are regularly or sometimes even at the midweek meeting for Bible study and prayer have been over a period of time with certain lapses.

We have been seeking to have a study progressively through this very interesting and challenging book of prophecy that comes at the very end of Scripture.

This morning I want us to take the privilege of continuing our study in Revelation. At this particular passage because here is a message that is of tremendous relevance and is entirely appropriate for every one of us.

What we have described here in these closing parts of the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine is the awful grand finale in the history of the present world.

It is a scene which no other historian, past or present or indeed likely in the future, could or would ever seek to record.

[1 : 26] Because it is something essentially and necessarily future. And it is something that only the eye of faith and only someone who is enlightened and taught by the Spirit of God could be permitted to see.

But God, through the Spirit and by Jesus, has given John such a revelation not only for John's own comfort and John's own admiration as he sits in lonely exile on Patmos.

But such a revelation that this to be handed down to all the church in every generation. And such a revelation and such a testimony of the things that shall be. So that all men and all women who are already may know how this world shall yet end itself.

We have here, first of all in the closing part of the 20th chapter, how all men are assembled at the assise of the last judgment.

There have been many judgments in this world. There have been many seats and thrones set up to judgment. Some have been fair.

[2 : 39] Some have been cruel. Some have been merciful. And some have been vicious. But here we see the last great judgment.

By the one and only judge of all the earth. For he assembles together all these who are his creatures before him. And together, along with that very dreadful scene that John depicts and has revealed to him, we have what to my mind is a very exciting scene of the revelation of a new Jerusalem.

of a new order of life descending from God into a new earth. This we shall come to in time.

I myself heard different sermons on this passage of scripture. And perhaps it's just that I've chanced to hear those which have concentrated more on the great white throne and the books that are opened.

But here I want us to concentrate our attentions and perhaps to connect our thoughts with some other words that John brings out here regarding the judgment seat of Christ.

[4 : 0 0] The words that we have in verse 12, where we read that another book was opened, which is the book of life. These are words of hope, words of grace, words of comfort, words of assurance, that come amidst this devastating scene of judgment.

And it is these words and this book, the book of life, that I want us to fix our attention on particularly this morning. Another book was opened, which is the book of life.

I want us to look first of all at the importance of this book of life in the judgment. We have, as is John's method in recording this revelation, we have several different and dramatic visions here compacted together into one brief scene that is set before our eyes.

We see, first of all, the throne of the judgment. And I saw a great white throne. By this stage in John's unveiling of the history of the world, all other thrones that ever existed, whether they were thrones that were inhabited by demons or by humans, all other thrones and all other powers and all other authorities have been cast down.

By this stage in history itself, the devil himself has been finally chained up and thrown into the bottomless pit and that forever and forever.

[5 : 5 2] And so the only power that remains now before the creatures of the earth is the sole power of God himself. All other thrones are vanished.

We see here not only God displayed in all his power, but God displayed in all his perfect justice. What John sees is a great white throne which bespeaks something of the purity of God, the essential justice of God.

That there shall be no flaw in God's way of thinking or in God's way of dealing, for he brings men into account. The judgment throne is a great white throne.

But it is not an empty throne, for John sees him that sat on it. He does not give him a name. He does not need to give him a name, for his name is God.

Perhaps we should say, rather his name is Christ. It is the one throne, the throne of God and of Allah. But we read from the words of Jesus himself, that until all things are finished and brought into fulfillment, that the Father hath committed a judgment unto the Son.

[7 : 1 2] He has given him the authority to judge. And so the one that John sees sitting on this great white throne is Jesus, the Lamb of God whom he had seen come in to take away the sin of the world.

He now sees coming in judgment to judge the sin of the world. Even this Jesus, who walked our life in this ways on earth, and yet, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, who is appointed the judge of all men.

This is who John sees. But it is still not a lonesome, isolated picture that John draws. Not only is the throne occupied, but there are throngs upon throngs of people brought before this throne.

He says, I saw them. I saw the dead. Now we may have seen corpses. But we have never seen corpses in the way that John saw them.

For John saw not them in isolated fashion, but he saw all of them together. Everyone who had ever lived and who had died was here brought before the judgment seat of Christ.

[8 : 3 5] And not only were they brought before the judgment seat, but they were brought standing, no longer dead, but brought to life again. This is the wondrous truth that the Bible speaks to us.

I would say a terrifying truth for those who believe not in Jesus, that death is not the end. Oh, if I had no saviour in this world, I would wish that death were the end.

But for those who have no saviour, they cannot say that. They cannot even entertain the hope, the faint hope, that perhaps everything will suddenly be nothing when I pass away.

But what we are promised is this, that after death, there is a resurrection. And a resurrection of all men. And this is what John has seen.

He has seen all those who have died now standing again with life in their bodies, standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb. He says, I saw the dead, small and great.

[9 : 45] And in that phrase, he is merely assuming that there are no exceptions to those who enter into the judgment of the Son of God.

No matter how small and how unknown and how insignificant our life in this world may be, and no matter how great and how powerful and how wealthy and how pompous our world in this life may be, we shall be one day dead, but brought to life again and brought before the throne of Christ to give an account.

Every individual of whatever shape or size, whatever rank, whatever color, whatever creed, there they shall be brought before the throne.

We even read in verse 13 that the sea gave up the dead which were in it. I've often wondered why it is that some out of choice, not out of necessity but out of choice, have asked to have a burial at sea.

But perhaps it is in the mind of some that if they have their bodies incarcerated and their ashes spread over the waters of the oceans, that not even God will be able to recover them to bring them into judgment.

[11 : 02] But here John says that there is no way we can escape the judgment. And he says also that death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.

Even those who have departed and who have not gone to be with Christ shall be brought back to face the Lamb of God. And death, that very fact which is a separation of soul and body, for that is what death is, that death itself shall be abolished in that hour and it shall give up its ability to hold in separation the body and spirit.

And what John is here depicting is a sign of the resurrection. A body and spirit shall come together again to be standing and to be judged as one complete individual before the throne of God.

And this is what John sees. The throne, the judge, and the dead, small and gray, standing before that judge.

And then we see the actual process of the judgment. A process that is absolutely thorough and absolutely fair. We are told, first of all, of the judgment.

[12 : 21] What shall it be like? Well, we cannot perhaps imagine it or picture it and explain it in detail. But it is like this, that it will be a judgment according to the perfect justice of God.

This we have already hinted at. And this is not only do we need to hint at for the Bible speaks it clearly and plainly. That Christ is seated on a great white throne.

And who, even if nobody else, who but this man, the judge of all the earth, shall do right? It is not that any man shall enter into judgment and be accused of something that they have never done or have never been.

But neither on the other hand is it this, that God will close his eyes in that day of judgment and pretend that we never did and never were the things that we did and the things that we were.

there will be a judgment that is fair, that is absolutely true, that is just to the last detail and the last iota, that we are guaranteed from God.

[13 : 32] He will deal with us fairly. He is our righteous judge. Not only will we be judged according to the justice of God, but John tells us explicitly that we will be judged according to the works that we have done.

It is not what somebody else was. It is not what the standards around us in the world were. It is not what somebody else might imagine we should receive.

we will be judged only by what we ourselves are and by what we ourselves have done. Our lives will speak for themselves and it is our lives from beginning to end that is being brought into account before the judgment seat of Christ.

And how shall this be? For we ourselves, even if we are comparatively young, we have forgotten more than half the things we have ever done or ever thought or ever said.

But we see here that at the judgment, not only is there a throng with a judge, but that judge carries with him the books that have been set up and stored in heaven.

[14 : 47] Books that are continually open. Books in which there are continual entries of your life and of mine. And that's how God knows. And that's how Jesus can be fair and can be just on the judgment day because there is nothing in that books except what we are and what we have done.

We will be judged according to the books. Our whole life, every thought that we have ever thought shall be brought into account.

every word that we have spoken, whether it has been words of praise or words of harm, shall be brought into account. Every action we have ever done towards ourselves or towards others or towards God shall be brought into account.

and so we have here the most just exercise of judgment. And at the judgment process in this tribunal seat there will be no further higher court of appeal.

There will be no way that any man shall say but or plead not guilty. There is no way that we shall be able to excuse ourselves or justify ourselves then before the sight of the all-knowing and the all-seeing Christ.

[16 : 15] There is something about this judgment seat that makes it so particularly relevant to us and it is simply this. That because all the dead small and great shall be gathered there I will be there.

Not only will I be there but you will be there for that is a solemn assurance of this message of scripture. We will be there to give an account of what our life is or was or yet will be.

We see also the verdict of the judgment. We see death and hell these great enemies of God and of his kingdom.

They are taken once and for all and they are cast into the lake of fire. There shall be no more death. That greatest enemy that there ever was against mankind.

The last great enemy is then utterly and forever destroyed and abolished and with it hell itself who holds all the schemes of this evil one shall be thrown into the lake of fire from which there is no retrieval and the rest of the earth and the rest of the earth.

[17 : 30] at all. But not only are death and hell brought under the judgment of Christ but we read this and this is what brings us to our text that whosoever was not written in the book of life they followed along with death and with hell itself and they were cast into the lake of fire.

Now what this suggests to my mind and why this is so utterly important for my soul is this that it is whether my name is recorded in the book of life depends how I shall stand before Christ in the judgment.

I shall stand before him. So shall everyone who has ever lived whether they be Christian or whether they not be a Christian. We shall stand and as Paul himself says he also shall stand for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ but there is a difference.

Those who stand and have no book no name written in that book of life the only judgment that Christ could possibly exercise towards them is according to what is written in the other books.

And no matter how good or how virtuous or how worthwhile or how acceptable that life may be in general or to ourselves or to our neighbors or to our memory once we pass it is not acceptable enough to God or to Christ but that he must make us follow along with death and hell into the lake that burneth a fire.

[19 : 20] There is only one way out to the judgment seat there is only one term of acquittal before the Christ of judgment and it is this that my name is written the Lamb's book of life for I must stand and I must give an account and I must labor all my life before Christ as my conscience shall be revealed to me but I know this still with assurance that there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared and where is that forgiveness and where is that redemption and that salvation and that most needy hour of my existence it rests in only one thing and in only one place but my name is recorded in the Lamb's book of life there were the books piles of them we can't imagine with all the deeds and the thoughts and the actions of all men who ever lived in any age but one book that has all the names of God's own people if our name is there though we shall stand in judgment we shall stand acquitted and forgiven before the judgment seat of Christ that to my mind is why this book of life is so important in the judgment can we look secondly at the importance of the book of life for our eternal welfare as we travel forward into chapter 21 we hear words which are words of the greatest comfort to believing

Christians we do not say to all but to those who believe in Christ and here we see John with more visions presented to his mind than to his heart he says I saw a new heaven and a new earth and here we have what is a rather brief description of a most glorious and the most wonderful event a renovated and a rejuvenated universe a new heavens the new earth we ask ourselves where is this land of glory of which the Christian church has been speaking of for so long where is this blissful utopia that we say is surely somewhere beyond the horizon but we have not seen it yet where is the glory of God's children to be utterly and finally revealed and not forever where is it to be

I say it is to be in this world and yet not in this world there shall be a new heavens and a new earth for we see that when the glory of Christ comes in judgment that even the very heavens and the earth flee away from his presence and there are no room left for them no place found for them but there shall be a new heavens a new earth but where is it that a Christian is heading is he merely going to some vague spirit world that we call heaven where we go around in some queer spirit form undefinable unsettled for the rest of eternity I do not believe so not for a minute because that is not the future that God depicts for his saints it is this there shall be a resurrection which is a bodily resurrection not bodily in the present sense because the body that I have is mortal and it must die but there shall be a resurrection of a new body a new physical spiritual nature as was Christ's glorified body when he rose from the tomb now if we are going to have such bodies when they are reunited and glorified state shall there not also be an environment that is suited to them and where is this environment where are we going to be in heaven which no man has seen no I do not believe so oh there is a place called heaven because Christ is there at present not only as God and as a spirit but as a man who rose from the tomb there is a place it is a place where all those who believe in Christ when they pass away from this world their souls do enter into the perfection of Christ and into the bliss of his presence there is a heaven let us be quite sure of that but what I am speaking about is the glorious state that there shall be once this history of this world is wound up and where shall it be it shall be not in heaven it shall be in a new earth now we are not very sure about these things or we question perhaps when the apostle John is revealed and say well he is a mystic and he is a prophet and he is having visions and we cannot debunk ourselves in his word let us read what Peter also says in very clear straight plain unchangeable language

Peter in his letter puts it like this that in that last great day then the elements shall melt with fervent heat the heavens themselves shall be on fire and the earth shall be burned up conflagrated what we are reading is this that at the end of the age when Christ comes in glory it shall be accompanied by the most amazing destruction as it would be yet destruction come rejuvenation of the world it is not that the world is so utterly destroyed that it is no longer existing but it is so touched by the purifying flames of God that a new world emerges now this is where the believer expects and hopes to be according to John this is what Jesus himself calls in his days on earth he spoke about these days when the son of man comes in the regeneration and that word regeneration we know is the new birth it is the making of all things new and when the son of man comes there shall be a regeneration of the existing of the existing of the existing universes a new form a new fashion a new glory a new perfection it is what

Peter calls again when he addresses the men on the day of Pentecost as a restoration of all things and there we are brought back into the biblical picture we are brought back right to the beginning of world history right back to the paradise that God had made in this world where man lived in perfect fellowship and harmony with God where everything was all very good in the sight of God himself now what is there to be at the end of the age there is to be a restoration of all things back to what was but an even more glorified form I do not believe in the spirit world for eternity for this reason and we shall have bodies and for this reason that God himself says that there shall be a new earth as well as a new heaven some have spoken of these events or a picture of these events of when volcanoes have erupted causing immense and severe and serious damage all around destruction lay in the wake of the the molten lava that poured out of the erupting volcanoes and yet generation or so later some of these places that have been so destroyed by the overflow of that fire from inside the mountain were places that have given birth to the most fertile soil and the most luxuriant growth and the most exquisite beauty on the face of the earth these things can be seen in our world now I believe these things from the very world of nature are a pointer to what shall be yes things shall be burned up but out of the ashes of this present world shall come a new order a new earth wherein dwells righteousness and wherein dwells

[28 : 14] God's new people now that is what we believe the bliss and the glory of the earthly paradise is restored it is perfected try and imagine this world with all the imperfections removed we can hardly and yet that is something of what John is saying here where the very barrier between heaven and earth itself is diminished if not demolished altogether we read in verse 1 of chapter 21 and there was no more sea there was this new heaven and new earth but there was that distance of invisibility between the two there was no more sea there was no more separation but God was with his people heaven and earth as we all must become one there is that wonderful intercourse between God and his people in the world it shall be

I saw a new heaven and a new earth John says then I saw a new Jerusalem that is the second part of his vision coming down out of heaven perhaps we can notice that that the Jerusalem that John sees which is to be the eternal dwelling place of God's people is a Jerusalem that comes down out of the new heaven onto the new earth that it is there that God is setting up his rule and his reign for all eternity in the new world in the new earth and this is the place where the resurrected people of God shall live forever and forever remember what Jesus said to his disciples before he left them words that bring comfort to a believing heart let not your heart be troubled I have gone to prepare a place for you and what we see in this glorious revelation of John is simply this it is this place prepared coming

I saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband Christ has gone to prepare the new Jerusalem he is even now in the present tent setting it in order for the day that it shall be revealed to the sons of God a place that is so exquisitely beautiful that even John undergoing a trance and all the teaching of the spirit cannot explain it to our fallible minds he says it is something like a bride adorned for her husband now no woman was ever better looking than the day she got married I happened to pop into a wedding in Inverness just the other day and had the privilege of seeing the bride with the groom a very beautiful bride at her very best how a bride is dressed up in absolute perfection she wants to be at her very best and what

John is depicting here in such fallible language really is the beauty of the perfection that shines gloriously from the city of God the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven it is the most glorious picture to enthrall and to fill the saints of God something to attract us to the world that shall yet be not another world but this one when it is renewed by the purifying power and grace of God I saw new Jerusalem perfect in every deity lavish to the extreme exquisite in his beauty and in this new Jerusalem John sees this and perhaps it is really the center of his vision that God has come to tabernacle among men you know we speak of a Christian is dying as going to be with Christ and that is certainly true in the present but after this day of the great judgment and the winding up of the history of this present world the creating of the new heavens and the new earth there shall be what it is not that we shall go to be with

Christ or we shall go to be with God where he is it is the other way it is God shall come and dwell among us Christ shall come and tabernacle among his people and that is a blessed reality that John is pointing out here it is the condescending of the grace of God I wonder if we grasp this we think of this world that it's in such a desperate state such a horrible mess that we will be glad when the day it should be demolished but it shall be utterly demolished it shall be renewed everything shall be cast out that makes a mess or nonsense of this world but Christ has chosen the very world in which his own feet trod as the humble servant of God the very place where God has reared up the cross of our salvation is the very same theatre where God is going to raise up the new heavens and the new earth the place in the world where

[33 : 43] Christ was pleased to dwell amongst men in their sin is the same in their glory and this is what John is revealing to us God with us it has already happened it is the promise of scripture consistently from the beginning that God shall dwell among them and be their God you read through your Old Testament scriptures you see how often this is promised we see it partially when Jesus comes and here is Emmanuel God with us this baby born God has come to live among and he has left his spirit in the hearts of his people and in his church God is among his people but what we are seeing here is the end result the glory the perfection of it all the new earth and Jesus there visibly living among the redeemed people of God I John saw a new heavens a new earth and a new

Jewish slump we can hardly picture it all we can hardly take in what all is here but there is with it a whole new way of life so hard to understand so hard to understand that John can only put it in negatives and I realize that perhaps in this present world of time we are very conscious of time but I want us to look at this just for a minute John says that in this new order of things there is a new way of life where gone are the tears gone is death itself gone is sorrow gone is crying away is pain these things shall be no more now you sit down and you try and think of this world without these elements of the present life we can hardly imagine it because our world is constantly composed of these very things they are the very whoop and warp and fabric of our present existence but the way of life is so changed that

John says then tears shall disappear with everything that ever caused them and to make absolutely sure that they shall be no more God himself shall wipe away the tears from our eyes that there shall be no more any such thing as death or it has been vanquished finally and fully and totally abolished there shall be no more sorrow there shall be no more crying and pain of whatever kind and whatever variety has entered the human mind and the human breast shall disappear forever can we imagine a world like that hard to conceive but it is not impossible because this is the world we believe in shall yet be this is a world which I as an individual Christian long for this is a world which every believer in Christ should never be ashamed of but glory in it that God himself shall do these things and shall dwell among his people and we see one other thing there are also other things banished from this new order of life not only other things but other people we see there in verse number 8 of chapter 21 but the fearful the abominable and the murderers the whoremongers the sorcerers the adulterers the all liars they will have no place in God's new universe and we could accept that we could accept that we would say yes or amen to that how could

God have a new universe and still have these same old causes of despair and of the despondency and of death but we also read in the second clause there in verse 8 but the unbelieving also shall be excluded and they shall have their part in the lake which burneth of fire and brimstone you see it is not only death and sorrow and pain that must go but go with it must be those who have no love for Christ and no room for this glorious judge in their hearts they also are abolished we read in verse 27 and that is why I read that verse of the 21st chapter there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth neither whatsoever works abomination or maketh a lie but but they which are written in the

Lamb's book of life and here we see the importance of the book of life to the new order of things that order of life which we ourselves should surely see is such an attractive possibility everybody wants to believe in heaven everybody wants to reach and achieve God's utopia and God's bliss everybody wants to get rid of death and of pain and of sorrow and of suffering but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life shall actually ever see it and ever be part of it and that to my mind is why it is so important that we have our names recorded there perhaps just in closing we could say this the importance of the book of life in the present tense the importance of the book of life to us now it is no wonder that Jesus says to his disciples do not rejoice that the spirits are made subject to you but rejoice rather in this that your names are written in heaven but we ask ourselves well if the disciples could know how can we know how can we be sure that our name is so recorded in the

[40 : 19] Lamb's book of life are we to see well either it is or either it's not and well it's nothing up to me either Jesus has put my name down or it's not down are we going to be so fatalistic as to conclude that way or are we going to be so feeble and faint and faltering in our faith that we have just a hope well I hope I shall be saved I hope that I shall be part of God's new universe I hope that Jesus will save me but I don't really know how can we know that our names are written down in glory let us go back to verse 6 chapter 21 second part for Jesus the same Jesus the author and the omega the judge of all the earth says this and I will give him that is a thirst of the fountain of the water of life freely he that overcometh shall inherit all these things and I will be his God and he shall be my son now what is saying here this merely the words of

Jesus warning us oh yes we are bound to come into judgment and if we do not sort our lives we are bound to land up in hell is that the message of what John is recording not exactly it is part of it but the message that he is really recording is this that this same Jesus the judge of all the earth is speaking to us in a day of grace and he is inviting us with wide open arms and in as powerful a voice as he judges he is saying come unto me whoever is a thirst whoever wants a place in my new universe whoever wants to inhabit the new Jerusalem and the new earth whoever wants to live with Christ through all eternity let him come if we have a thirst for God and a thirst for Christ and a thirst for his salvation don't let us quench our thirst on the sorrows of this passing world but let us come to Christ because he asks us to come and then when we come to

Christ we know we do not think we do not imagine we do not hope but we know that our names are recorded in heaven on the assurance and the authority of the word of Jesus himself he says whosoever comes unto me I will have no wise cast out and there is no way that anybody could come to Jesus and ask for his salvation and find himself in the lake of fire at the end there is no way that we can come to Jesus for salvation and stand condemned to the judgment there is no way that we can come to Jesus and he has no place for us in the new Jerusalem death that John speaks of here we know only too much as a reality and a harsh one but we ask where is this world heading what is the point in the purpose of life and here we are told that there will be that resurrection and there will be that judgment and when we are resurrected and brought before that

Christ the books shall be opened your name is there so is mine and all of you are every detail of our lives is the cost but in view of that what is all important for us not in the future not just for eternity not just to the judgment but what is important for us between God and our own souls today and now is this that we come to Christ that our name is recorded and that we know it is recorded in the book of life thank you