

The final judgement

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[0 : 00] This is the second death and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. Last Sabbath evening we were considering together this great white throne and its greatness bespeaks its awesomeness, its whiteness bespeaks its righteous character and because it was a throne that bespeaks the regal occasion and how impressive these things were at that time.

Now this evening we're going to look at the parties who were summoned to this bar of judgment, this great final assize where we shall all gather.

In verse 12 it says, I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. The books were opened and another book was opened which is the book of life.

And as we said last Sabbath evening, what a sight to see the dead raised to life. And you might say to me, how can that be possible?

Here are trillions upon trillions we might say of people who have been dead for millenniums. How can they possibly be raised to life from the dead?

[1 : 34] You may say, just think, some have been buried. Others have been disposed of in horrifying ways.

Some may have been eaten by the wild beasts. Some may have been destroyed and fired. Some may have been blown to bits. How can you possibly think that they will be raised again from the dead?

And of course in John's day, people were terrified of being buried at sea. It was a distressing thing to think of anyone being drowned.

You see, the sea was mysterious. Down there it was deep, unknown. Mysterious.

And to be lost at sea, or to be buried at sea, was horrifying to the people in John's day. And here at the end of time, John sees them being raised to life.

[2 : 43] The sea gave up the dead. Death and hell delivered up the dead. That is to say, the state of the dead in which these people were could no longer hold them.

At the voice of God they had to rise. Just as when Jesus advanced towards the tomb of Lazarus, and commanded Lazarus to rise from the dead, and nothing could keep him back.

And Lazarus rose from the dead. So when the voice of God calls upon the dead to rise, they must rise. And rise they will.

Nothing can stop them. You remember the poem of Robert Murray McShane, when he was burying a twelve-year-old boy. I saw thee in thy narrow bed, the clods above beneath thee pressed, yet in my heart I said, Dear boy, one day we'll meet again.

And then he goes on to speak about the voice of Jesus coming, to summon that boy to life, at the end of the ages. You say it's impossible.

[3 : 58] My dear friend, nothing is impossible with God. And the God who created us, and who has placed us here, in this time, that we are living in, is the same God who can bring us back again, when he so chooses.

And so irrespective of how bodies may have been disposed of, irrespective of how long they may have lain in death, irrespective of how these bodies have decomposed and melted into their natural constituents, these bodies will be brought to life at the summons of God.

The significant will be there. The insignificant will rise. The old will come back to life, and so will the young.

The rich will be there, and so will the poor. They will be raised in power to appear before the judge of all the earth. That is what this passage is talking about.

And you see, when the charges are read out, and charges will be read out, the evidence of guilt will be based upon what is recorded of their lives and time.

[5 : 23] What does it say? Well, after the resurrection has taken place, it says this, the books were opened. That's significant, isn't it?

The books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. What are these books? Upon which the evidence of guilt is based?

Well, I might suggest to you that there is the book of God's omniscience. This is the book that's going to be opened, the book of God's omniscience.

What do we mean by God's omniscience? We mean this, that God sees and God knows all things. Listen to what the psalmist says in Psalm 11, verse 4. He says this, the Lord, he says, is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven.

[6 : 32] That says the psalmist, his eyes, behold, his eyelids, try the children of men. So you think things have been forgotten.

You think that your life is virtually hidden from God. It is nothing of the kind. Your life and my life is an open book to God.

His eyes see. His eyelids try the children of men. That's what the word of God says. And not only can we speak about the book of God's omniscience, but we can also speak about the book of God's remembrance.

You see, you and I look back over our lives, and in doing so, we can recall something of the past. But there is so much that we have forgotten. Isn't that true? Perhaps tonight, as you think back over the years, you can recall pleasant things.

[7 : 46] Pleasant things that have taken place in your experience of life. And you can even recall, too, at this moment in time, some of the errors that you made.

And some of the sins that you committed in the past. But having said that, isn't it true to say that so much has been forgotten?

You can't remember it. It's all in the dim and distant past and in the midst of the past. And you can't remember it.

But remember this, God hasn't forgotten. He has a book of remembrance. And I put it to you in the same way as the psalmist puts it in Psalm 50.

Where he is talking to the people. God is talking to the people in that psalm. And he's saying to them, These things hast thou done. And he's describing the errors that people have done.

[8 : 54] These things hast thou done and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such and one as thyself.

But I will reprove these as God and set them in order before thine eyes. One day, says God, I will bring it all back to your remembrance.

I will open the book and there the evidence will be. And you won't be able to say anything against it. In one of his warnings to the Pharisees, you remember and sometimes as I think of these words myself, they do make me feel very uneasy.

They are the words of Jesus and as I say sometimes when I read them they make me feel very, very uneasy. You remember how he said on one occasion, I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak and that word idle means is unprofitable.

Every idle word, every unprofitable word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. That is Matthew 12 verse 36.

[10 : 25] So at the judgment seat of Christ the charges will be read out and proof will be given upon which these charges are based.

You see, God is a righteous judge. He's not going to read out these charges without supplying the evidence as proof that these things have been done.

and you know it is a frightening thing to have the whole of one's life exposed and laid bare before all.

I think it's a very frightening thing here at this great assize size at this final judgment when all appear before God suddenly your name is summoned and as you come forward as it were God opens this book of your life and God shows you your whole life both inside and outside and not only that but it's exposed to everyone.

Oh my dear friends may God grant that our names will be in the book of life. You know I was reading Dean Vaughan and I've often referred to him I think he's got a splendid volume on lectures

and revelation and he's he puts it like this the old Anglican he's been dead for many many a long year but you know the Anglican church produced some fine preachers and some fine theologians too and this is how he puts it there are many books of death one book of life and he goes on to say this the books were opened many a book of death many a long and overflowing page of the records of sin and ungodliness histories of the paths by which souls have passed to ruin deeds of darkness long hidden now flashing with terrible surprises upon the eye of the guilty man and of a beholding world many books of death says Vaughan one book of life and he says no element shall keep back one soul that has ever been brought into being from presenting itself at that scrutiny the sea gave up the dead which were in it death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them and they were judged every man according to their works now it's an awesome thing for the sinner to think that his book of death is up to date it never goes out of date the sinner's book of death is up to date and it will be opened at that greater size what will it be like well will it not be like a video of your whole life being shown a complete video of your whole life being shown only there is a difference the video only shows the outside of your life but God's video will show the inside because on that occasion the secrets of the heart will be revealed but oh how thankful to

[14:47] God we are for the book of life when we come to Christ and accept his finished work as the ground of our reconciliation with God doesn't it mean this that Christ becomes our great high priest and as our great high priest he has gone within the veil and why has he gone within the veil to lay claim to a possession that he purchased and the possession which he has purchased is his people and he has purchased them at the cost of his blood and no wonder the Bible says that with regard to Christ's people that their names are inscribed on the palms of his hands that's the book of life and if our names are inscribed on the hands of Christ if our names are in his book of life it means that we have no charges to answer because you see Christ our substitute has met and satisfied the charges by his life of obedience by his death for our infringement of God's law as it has been put payment my God will not demand first at my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine well you might ask me what's going to happen to us then as

Christians when we appear before God at that great white throne for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and so here am I going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ before this great white throne and you dear people along with me you will be there too our time is moving on to that grand occasion when we will all stand together before the judgment seat of Christ well you ask if I'm a Christian what's going to happen to me surely my life is not going to be exposed surely I won't have to answer for all these sins that I've committed in my past life no thank God you won't have to answer and your sins won't be brought against you nothing's going to happen to you except this one thing the sentence of acquittal will be passed on you that's what's going to happen it is

God's acquittal of you before this vast universe of people and what will Christ say to you come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world oh to hear these words ringing in the ear to listen to Jesus as he selects you and you and you and you and me and as he says to us come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you and I ask you will you be there have you committed your life to Christ have you given to him your heart that's the important thing my dear friend it really doesn't matter very much what's going to take place in this world after all does it and it doesn't matter very much how you and I may get on in this world and in this life the all important thing is to be ready to meet our saviour and to stand before the great white throne and be acquitted now what we'll do now is pass on to look at this the sentence that is going to be passed upon the guilty and

I have to preach like this I can't but do it because it's the word of God you see what does it say about the sentence that is passed upon the guilty they were judged every man according to their works were judged and this is the sentence and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire this is the second death the first death you see is the death that you die physically when your life is over and done and you're put in the grave and your soul is in its eternal state that's the first death the second death is when you're at this great assize and when God passes his final sentence and whosoever is not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire and you know this sentence has to do only with the ungodly those who have lived their lives in disobedience to God those who have shunned the grace of God and the mercy of

God in Christ I think it's a terrible thing to shun the grace of God and the mercy of God it's passing strange to me and yet knowing what I am as a sinner it's not passing strange at all but I say this it's

passing strange that here are people who come to the free church of Scotland where the gospel is preached in all its earnestness where men are offered Jesus Christ as their saviour and they will go out the door of the church and refuse to come to terms with Christ Christ I can't understand is there someone here tonight and you've been like that my dear friend will you not come to your senses do you not understand that you're standing on the brink of hell you see perhaps many think that with death well that's the end of it for them you see they think that death is simply annihilation total destruction but the

[21 : 59] Bible never teaches that what the Bible does say to us is that the body dies only to rise at the resurrection the Bible teaches that the soul never dies what the soul does is this it passes at the time of death it passes from our time scale into God's eternal dimension when death takes place the soul and the body these two things are sundered that's what happens at death the soul is sundered from the body and then on the day of the resurrection what happens is that what was sundered at death is reunited that God brings back the body and God sends back the soul to its body and both are reunited and you see what the resurrection is all about is this that the total person is now once again before almighty

God and sentenced one way or another let me put it to you the way the confession of faith does and this is our subordinate standard as a church you know I sometimes feel I wish I had my ministry to go over again in some ways in some ways I'm glad it's not going to be going over again but if I had to do my ministry over again I would pay more attention to the confession of faith and to the larger catechism as well as the shorter catechism I think these great and gracious godly men of that day who wrote these symbols for us were unique and this is how they have put it with regard to death the righteous go into everlasting life and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord but the wicked who know not God and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be cast into eternal torments and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power oh these men didn't mince their words did they these men didn't tone down anything to please the ear of people these men made statements which were based on God's truth whether men liked to hear them or not one of the outstanding commentators of our present day is Leon Morris and he puts it like this in the end men either share in the bliss of heaven or find their place in the lake of fire I like Leon Morris for that he calls a spade a spade doesn't he in the end men either share in the bliss of heaven or find their place in the lake of fire the lake of fire what is it we spoke about this a few sabbaths ago

I just refresh your mind on it there was a place outside of Jerusalem called Gehenna it was a valley it lay outside the city boundary it was the place of refuse that was the place you see that the children of Israel in their dark paganism when they had gone to idolatry away back in Old Testament times that is the place where they put their children to death in the fires of Moloch they immolated to use that word their children they burned them in sacrifice you say do you mean to say that that's what they did in those ancient times these unbelieving Israelites yes that's what they did or they thought they were being very religious and so here was one of their children and they said no we must sacrifice you to appease the wrath of God and so they burned them in the fire to the god

Moloch and later on when they were brought back again from these terrible days of paganism the children of Israel realized what they had done and this place Gehenna became a valley that was associated with burning and to show their contempt of the place they brought all their refuse to it and burnt their refuse there and they even brought the dead bodies of criminal to be disposed of and sometimes these dead bodies would lie there and you know what happens to a dead body when you leave it lying there it begins to crawl with worms and the body was lying there to be eventually destroyed in the fire and Gehenna you see was taken by Jesus to express in a very graphic picture the terrible end that awaits the ungodly and he used it with such telling effect when he was speaking to the scribes and to the

[28 : 25] Pharisees and when he spoke to them about the place where the worm never dies you scribes and Pharisees just take a walk go outside the city walls of Jerusalem see there the bodies of the criminals lying and see them crawling with worms see the smoke of the fires continually burning day and night to destroy the refuse that is how you dispose of your waste well let me remind you says Jesus how God is going to dispose of his waste it will be in the fire that never goes out and in the place where the worm never dies and that is why Jesus said on one occasion if thy hand offend thee cut it off it is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go

into hell into the fire that never shall be quenched are you listening these are the words not of me they're not my words these are the words of Jesus if thy hand offend thee cut it off it is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell into the fire that never shall be quenched where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched and my dear friend

I cannot tone it down you might say minister can you not ease up how can I it would be dishonour to Christ if I did so and so hell is the lake of fire it's a symbol that is left to your imagination to think of a place that must be awful indeed and as one of my own old teachers in the free church college put it in his book on James his commentary on James I'm referring to the late Dr. Ross who was our teacher of Greek he says the lake of fire is the rubbish heap of the universe the lake of fire is God's rubbish heap now how soon or how far from us the judgment day may be is immaterial death will summon us away soon enough even for those who are youngest here it will summon us soon enough and the important thing for us is not when this is going to be but the important thing for us is to be saved to be saved from this second death the important thing is to know the

Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour the important thing for us is to be resting on his finished work for if we are then these things will not affect us let me just finish by quoting to you from that famous hymn of Augustus Topladdy and he expresses these thoughts of mine so well it's his famous hymn called Rock of Ages at the end of the hymn he says when I draw the splitting breath when mine eyelids close in death when I soar to worlds unknown see thee on thy judgment throne Rock of Ages that's Christ Rock of Ages cleft for me let me hide myself in thee oh thank

God for Jesus Christ the Rock of Ages and to be hidden in Christ we are safe and secure from the second death and from the lake of fire let us pray we give thee thanks oh God for thy word of truth which is so full of meaning and so full of warning to us bringing us to a realization of our most immediate need which is to be saved from our sins gracious God save us cleanse us in the precious blood of Christ hide us in thy dear son and when the day of death comes may we go to be with thee for the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory and their bodies still being united to

Christ to rest in their graves till the resurrection and so may we live with Christ after we have died and when the resurrection comes and we are reunited with our bodies and the total person stands before thee may we be welcomed into the everlasting paradise of God to be forever with our Lord forgive forgive forbid oh Lord that we should experience the second death and its consequences in Jesus name we ask it Amen