

Revelation 20:11

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the passage we read in Revelation, Revelation chapter 20 from verse 11.

One of the questions that we're concerned with this evening as we look at this passage is the question, does this world continue forever or does it come to an end?

Now that's a question that puts the book of Revelation, puts the whole Bible very much into the 20th century.

Because this is one of the questions that confronts scientists who are investigating the nature of the universe as they try to construct a cosmology, a philosophy of how the universe came into being and where it's going.

Now of course there are all different kinds of theories about that question. According to the prevailing materialism of our day, there is the belief that goes along with that, that the only reality actually is the material universe that surrounds us and of which we are part.

[1 : 37] And along with that goes the idea that there could not have been a time when there was absolutely nothing. But rather this material universe in which we live must have existed in some form or other always.

Now although that is the basic philosophy, and we see it in a different form and a prior form in Eastern religion, yet it does not have been a time when there was absolutely nothing. anything. The Zachary is coming of a matter where we've resistor and what is literally a way without needing everything to further witches from as they plant■■s up on as we fall over the whole?

in a different form and a prior form in Eastern religion, yet it does not tie in with what 20th century science seems to have discovered about the nature of the universe.

First of all, it appears that the universe began at a certain point. More and more science is tending towards what they call the Big Bang Theory, whereby it seemed as if the universe exploded from a certain point in time.

And it would also be implied by certain scientific laws that this universe is running down and coming to a final end.

[2 : 59] So it would seem that in this regard, at any rate, these tentative ideas of modern science are much more in line with what we discover in God's word concerning the nature of the universe than is the philosophy of materialism or what we may call impersonalism that imply that it only is the impersonal or material universe.

This passage in Revelation, of course, deals with the final events, or sometimes called the last things. We've noticed in the book of Revelation that each of the sections that we've looked at deals with quite a wide scope of history, the whole Christian period from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world.

And as we move on throughout the book, each section concentrates more and more on the last things so that this section is almost totally taken up with the last things, although, as I hope we saw last week, the first part of chapter 20 deals with this present era.

So as we come to this passage, we're dealing very much with what we call the last things, the end of this universe in its present form.

And I say in its present form because it seems from this passage and comparing this with other passages of scripture, it is not what you would call an absolute end of this universe, but rather it is a transformation of this universe into a new universe in which righteousness dwells.

[4 : 45] Now in this passage, if we take the whole of the section of chapter 20 leading into the final two chapters, the whole of this last section, we see a complex of events.

We are dealing with the end of the age, which very much involves Christ's coming. We have had that represented more in chapter 19 than in this section.

Christ's coming, but also that's implied by verse 9 of chapter 20, fire coming down from heaven. This reference given in other places of scripture to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in fiery judgment upon this world.

There is Christ's coming. There is also obviously the resurrection. The resurrection mentioned most specifically towards the end of the chapter, the part that we have read concerning the dead being raised for judgment.

And then also we have the description of the judgment itself and then the establishing of the new universe. Now, I tried to argue last week and it would be the position that I am still adopting as we look at this part of the chapter, that these events are contemporaneous.

[6 : 10] In other words, they are not spread out over a long period of time. According to the interpretation I gave last week of the earlier part of the chapter, there is not a gap of a thousand years between the coming of Christ and a first resurrection and then the final resurrection and the last judgment.

But rather all these things are contemporaneous. They lead immediately on one after the other. And this in fact is the position of the whole of scripture. There is not another scriptural text anywhere that would imply that there is a gap of any time between any of those events.

We read some of the passages that talked about some of these events, about the resurrection of the just and the unjust. We read about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, coming in judgment, and so on.

We could read many passages of scripture and there is not one passage where any gap is implied. The only passage that has ever been deduced, adduced as evidence for the position that there is a gap is this passage of Revelation chapter 20.

And I think it's better to understand this passage of chapter 20 in Revelation as fitting into the overall pattern of the rest of scripture than to try to force every other passage of scripture chapter 20 in Revelation chapter 20.

[7 : 32] And so that is the line that we have been very much adopting as we have looked at the book of Revelation, seeing it in its full scriptural context.

These events then all coming at the great climax of this age. So I want to look with you at this passage under the two headings.

First of all, the last judgment and then the new creation. Now you might wonder at taking those two passages together, you might feel that we should finish at the end of chapter 20 and then begin another sermon at the beginning of chapter 21.

And that was always the way I thought of this passage and it perhaps just so happened the way that we've divided up the various sections into sermons that we've come up with this strange connection of the two.

Actually, in the copy of the Bible I've got in front of me, the chapter 20 ends at the bottom of the page and the new chapter 21 begins at the top of the next page. So there seemed to be a sort of barrier there.

[8 : 38] But in fact, when you take the two passages together, you begin to see that they very much follow on. They very much fit together. There are cross references between the two.

And I think it will be a great advantage to consider them both together. Apart from anything else, we will have a balanced presentation of what the scriptures say concerning the awfulness of the final judgment, particularly for those without Christ, but also the glory of the new creation for those who are in Christ.

First, then the last judgment in verses 11 to 15 of chapter 20. And first there we are introduced to the judge in verse 11. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.

Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. We are introduced to the judge and the words by which we are introduced to him give us an immediate impression of his absolute majesty and power.

Very few words are used here. Perhaps we might have tried if we were simply writing what we thought would be a description of the final judgment.

[9 : 55] We might have written pages and pages trying to get across something of the majesty of the great judge. But in these very few succinct words, it was revealed to John what the judge is actually like.

Seated on a great white throne. A throne from which this universe is governed. A throne to which we have already been introduced. Although now taking very much the form of the throne of judgment.

The throne of God. That throne in the midst of which not only is there God the Father and the sevenfold spirit of God, but also the Lamb of God who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And probably particularly in this section, dealing with God as judge, it is God as the Son. God the Son who is foremost in this judgment.

As we read in John chapter 5, the Father had committed judgment to the Son. And the expressions that are used of God, the one on the throne in chapter 21, very much remind us of the words used of the Lord Jesus.

[11:08] In verse 6. He, and that is the one seated on the throne. We're told that in verse 5. He said to me, it is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. All these words reminiscent of the descriptions given earlier in the book of Revelation of Jesus.

Jesus. And also the very expression he uses inviting people to come, those who are thirsty, to come, reminiscent of the words our Lord used when he was yet here on earth. Here then, it is very much the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ that is presented to us.

But of course, it is the judgment of the triune God. The triune God met to judge this whole universe and to judge particularly the whole human race.

The majesty of his person summed up not only by this description of the great white throne, but also the cosmic effects of the coming of this great day of the Lord.

[12:15] earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. Now this would seem to give a twofold impression. First of all, it stresses that there is absolutely no place to hide from this day of judgment.

We may think in our own foolish, human-centered way that we can hide from God. There are passages in the Psalms that imply that people thought that they could hide from God, that God couldn't see them.

And of course, we all sometimes suffer from that delusion. But in that day, there will be no delusion. We will be all perfectly conscious of our absolute nakedness before the judgment of God, that he will see everything that we are and everything that we have done.

There will be no place to hide. But also, this stresses not just a kind of poetic way of describing that there is no place to hide, but literally, there will be no place to hide.

Literally, this whole universe will be transformed. The whole universe as we know it, earth and sky, which really implies earth and heaven, the whole universe, it will flee away.

[13:38] It will simply not be there as it was before, because God is making out of it a new universe. So, in these very few succinct words, John was inspired to sum up the great majesty of the judge and the great awesomeness of this occasion of the last judgment.

Then, we must notice next, those who are judged. Verses 12 and 13. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne.

The books were opened. Then, later on, in verse 13. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them.

And each person was judged according to what he had done. In other words, it is made perfectly clear here at the end of the chapter that those who are to be judged on that great day of judgment are all the resurrected dead.

First of all, there is the expression, great and small. And that expression is used in the book of Revelation as a universal description to sum up all classes and kinds of men.

[14:54] And that is a reminder to us, yet again, of something we were thinking of this morning in connection with the commandment forbidding murder, that God's law is absolutely impartial.

God is no respecter of persons. We noticed this morning that it didn't matter whether you were great and wealthy or insignificant and poor. If you were murdered, your life was considered as equal value to anyone else's.

Or if you were the murderer, you were accounted equally criminal, whatever influence you might have had in this world. And that principle of justice revealed in God's law in the Old Testament is the same principle of justice that always applies in God's word.

And it will apply that final judgment. In this life, no doubt, those who are great and influential, those who have wielded tremendous power over not just some other people, but over nations, they may think that they may escape the judgment of God.

But it is not so. All, great or small, will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Those who may have despised Christ in this life, those who may have viewed him as the pale Galilean, they will one day have to bow before him and to give an account of what they have done, great or small, before him.

[16 : 28] And there is no one who is too insignificant or too poor. There is no one who is too small in God's eyes to appear there. But all will appear in that day of judgment.

So that applies to every one of us here. Whatever we are, whatever we think of ourselves, we will all be there to be judged by God.

But notice also, it is all the resurrected dead. The emphasis in this passage is not upon the judgment of our souls, but upon the judgment of the whole person.

The dead are raised up. He saw this very fascinating expression that he uses. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne.

And then again, it's made clear in verse 13, the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. The whole picture being built up of those who have been resurrected, that is, their whole humanity reunited again, body and soul.

[17 : 43] That which was severed and destroyed by death, it is reunited, body and soul again. And that is extremely important as we consider this final judgment.

And it impresses upon us the awfulness of this great judgment day. And very much it has lessons for us with regard to the awfulness of eternal condemnation and the blessedness of eternal life.

It is full and complete in every way. Whether it is a judgment of death, it is a judgment of full and complete death upon the whole body and soul unity of the human being.

Whether it is a judgment of life, it is a judgment that affects the whole person, body and soul. So then, those who are judged are all peoples, great and small, gathered there before the throne of God.

Then thirdly, we need to look at the evidence. Because in any court, and this is very much a courtroom scene that is pictured before us, in any court there has to be evidence. This is not going to be any kind of arbitrary court.

[19 : 08] God is not going to deal in any capricious way with those before him. But he is going to hear the evidence. And the evidence will be there before him.

And the evidence is going to be exact and particular because it is recorded in books. The book in the ancient world was of course the most accurate form of recording of any information.

And this is the point that is being stressed here. That when the books were opened and they were judged according to what they had done, the implication is that what they had done was actually recorded in the books.

Now let's put that in a modern idiom. What it means is something like this. Imagine that throughout the whole of your life there has been a tape recorder recording everything that you have said or done.

We could imagine it being a video recorder recording everything that you have said and done. Not only that, imagine that if it were possible there were such a machine that would actually record not only your words and your deeds but also your thoughts.

[20 : 23] Well that is what is written in God's book. What you have said, what you have done, what you have thought. And that is the book that is to be opened on that great day of judgment.

No one knows the content of that fully and completely except God himself. We ourselves perhaps can hardly guess at the full contents of that book.

But on that great day of judgment that book will be opened. And that book will condemn every one of us. That book in itself will condemn every one of us.

Because we all know that in that book there will be great blots. There will be great evils. There will be great sins. That's the first piece of evidence that is adduced.

Now that stresses the scriptural truth stated many times that we will be judged according to what we have done.

[21 : 34] We will be judged according to what we have done. It's important that we stress this because throughout scripture from beginning to end there is the emphasis upon the kind of life that

we have lived.

Not just on the kind of ideas you may have, the kind of beliefs you may have, but the kind of life you have lived. Then let's look at the second piece of evidence.

The second evidence is another book. And this is only one book. The other evidence consisted of many books. In other words, books that were for all the people gathered there, everything that they had done.

But then the other piece of evidence was only one book. And it was given a title for this book. It is the book of life. Another book was opened, which is the book of life.

Now this book is the same book that's mentioned earlier in the book of Revelation. First of all in chapter 3 verse 5, and then again in chapter 13 and verse 8.

[22 : 49] Perhaps if we look at that latter passage, we'll see what is meant. Revelation chapter 13 verse 8. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast.

All whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. In other words, there the clear distinction is made between Christian and non-Christian.

Between believer in Christ and unbeliever. And those who are believers in Christ, those who are Christians, their names are written in the lamb's book.

And the emphasis is upon the lamb that was slain. So the emphasis is upon those who bear a relationship to the Christ who died.

In other words, they put their faith in Christ who died. Now it becomes apparent, therefore, that there are these two pieces of evidence.

[23 : 56] How is this to work out? How is this evidence going to be adjudged by the great judge? Well, we must put it like this.

It is quite clear for those for whom there is only one book. That is, the book of their own deeds. That book condemns them.

Were it but only one blood on that book. Were it but only one sin. Were it only simply the sin of hatred against their fellow men?

That was enough to be an assault against the image of God as we noticed this morning. But one sin makes us guilty of the whole law of God. And of course we know that that is far from the truth.

It is not just one sin but many sins. So if we only have that book then we are condemned. But then if our name is written in the other book in other words if we have put our faith in Jesus Christ then those two pieces of evidence are taken together.

[25 : 14] And this is what we must stress. The other book the book of our deeds is not discarded or thrown away. but it is considered with the other book.

And then that book is seen in a different light the book of our deeds. Because then it is demonstrated that things that we did maybe very poorly maybe very imperfectly maybe just giving a cup of cold water to someone but it was done in the name of Jesus.

We see from what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 25 that in as much as we did it to the least of these we did it to Him.

The things that we did that were maybe very imperfect Jesus accounts to Him. And in fact they were done for Him. They were done because of Him.

They were done ultimately because of the transforming power of His grace in our lives. And that is where there is the tie-in between the two books and the experience of the Christian.

[26 : 25] Yes, we are judged according to what we have done. But we are judged also in the Lord Jesus Christ. And because we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ His righteousness is accounted to us but more than that His righteousness is made available to us in practical living so that the things that more and more we seek to do are done because of His righteousness.

They may be done imperfectly but they are done for Christ and they are accounted as righteous because of that. So then on that great day the key to the whole of a person's salvation is what relationship they had to Jesus Christ.

Whether the things that they did were done for Him. And that is the great point of salvation. What think ye of Christ?

That is the great question whether our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. If they are written there written because of what He has done for us and because of our faith in Him then we have assurance of salvation.

So then there is the evidence and from that there comes the sentence. And really we can concentrate here on the one sentence that is made clear in this passage that is the sentence of death.

[28 : 01] Because you see there has been sin. There has been sin in every one of these books that has been opened of all the lives of everyone that has been sin.

And the only judgment the only sentence that can possibly be for sin is one thing and that is death. The wages of sin is death.

It is an abiding unchangeable law of God's. We may say a law of this universe that is written into the very fabric of this universe the very fabric of our being and our relationship to God that the soul that sins it shall die.

Now we see that this is made quite clear in verse verses 14 and 15 death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire the lake of fire is the second death if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Lake of fire is symbolizing the second death that is eternal death death standing for separation from God and this in this case eternally.

[29 : 14] Now then if the wages of sin is death what happens to those who have believed in Jesus Christ those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life well the answer to that is that their sins have already been judged their sins have already been punished the sentence has already been passed not on them but upon the Lord Jesus Christ of Calvary he went through that awful fiery ordeal of separation from God crying out my God my God why have you forsaken me in the depths of that God forsakenness he took all that was due to us in our sin and so that unchangeable law of God has been shown to be true that indeed all sins deserve death merit death and will receive death either at Calvary or at that great last day of judgment the emphasis here in this section is upon the awful fate of those who reject the Lord Jesus

Christ those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life and that awful prospect is of an eternal and tormented separation from God being left only and always to one's own putrid and rotten sinful nature to go on experiencing the disintegration and decay that is implied in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when he talks of the worm that dies not a fire that is not quenched that is the prospect the only alternative prospect that is held out to the human race apart from trust in the living God in his son Jesus Christ salvation through him so then we pass on to the final section this evening and that is concerning the new creation now in verse 5 of chapter 21 we have something of this new creation brought before us by the words of the Lord

Jesus upon the throne he who was seated on the throne said I am making everything new when that time of final judgment comes and is over there is a great transformation a renewal of all things a restoration of all things these are the expressions used in scripture by the Lord Jesus and by his apostles concerning this great time and we see therefore first of all that there is to be a new environment in verse 1 then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away they had passed away at that time of the great judgment receding from God but the restoration or renewal of all things means that out of the ruins of that creation there is made a new creation a new heaven and a new earth and therefore a new environment for the people of God for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for those who have served him in this life there is that new environment and the whole of the rest of these two chapters tell us a great deal in vivid picture language of that new creation that new environment and it is an environment fitting for those who are new creations in Christ Jesus but notice that terminology is used that implies a continuity between this life and that which is to come yes it will be glorious far more glorious than perhaps we can even imagine but we are human beings even then we will still be human beings we will still be those who have a physical side albeit a glorified physical side but a physical side our bodies our resurrected bodies and we will still have minds we will still have minds albeit totally transformed and perfected minds we will still have personalities albeit transformed and perfected personalities but still personalities and all the language that's used here implies that that new creation that new environment will be entirely fitting and fulfilling for everyone who believes in the Lord

Jesus Christ fulfilling for persons made in his image who have been transformed to be like him in other words what I'm saying is that this universe in which we live now is in many ways a shadow or type of that great universe which is to come and the more that we enjoy and explore this universe that God has created here it would seem the more we will be able to enjoy and explore that new universe that he is creating there will be a likeness between the two the pictures that are used here

are all taken from this world whatever picture you like to take whether it's the picture of the city or the picture of the river the picture of the tree of life any of these pictures that are used they are all taken from this world so the more that we know of God's dealings in this world the more that we know of history the more that we know of science the more that we know of human thinking the more that we know of every area of life then the more we will be helped to understand that great new universe so here there is an impetus to us to explore all that

[35 : 30] God has revealed in his word concerning this universe in which we live there is an impetus to us here to explore the great truth of the lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole of life here and now because in that new universe he will be perfect lord over all that then exists a new environment but also there are new people for that new environment in verse 2 of this chapter I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband here is the reference back to the wedding supper of the lamb the bride beautifully dressed for her husband referring to the Christian church the new Jerusalem not the old Jerusalem but the new Jerusalem but even that picture is taken from the history of this world taken from the people of God as represented by the city the city of Jerusalem but it is to be a new Jerusalem Jerusalem that is gloriously transformed a people of God that are perfectly transformed made beautiful made perfect made fitting for that new environment all those old things the old order of things as we'll notice in a minute they have all passed away everything that would make us unfitting for such a perfectly beautiful environment will have passed away all our sins taken away through Jesus

Christ all of them taken away because Jesus fully accomplished all that is required by God by meeting the requirements of his law so there are new people for that new environment and the only way to be a new person is to begin here and now it is not something that you can wait for and say that well you'll become a new person someday you have to begin to be a new person here and now Lord the apostle Paul said that we are new creatures those who believe in Jesus Christ those who are reconciled to God are new creatures and this newness this renewal this transformation must begin here in this life eternal life begins in this life those who believe in the son of God have eternal life something that we have here and now a new relationship with God so the new people that are going to populate that new city that new environment they are new people who began to be new here and now in this life and we are called to that now every one of us here is called by the invitation of the gospel to be transformed by the renewing of your minds and to go on being transformed by that renewal we are called to obey the gospel of Jesus

Christ to believe in him and to be transformed by him and it is only they who have obeyed that command that will be in that new population of that new universe and then finally there is a new experience a new experience made clear perhaps especially in verses 3 4 and 6 of this passage I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God he will wipe every tear from their eyes there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away the old order of things has passed away in the old order of things and the new

I want to look with you just at three of those things here in this passage this evening we hope to notice others in coming evenings but first of all there are three here first of all that new experience will involve peace perfect peace and that summed up by the expression in verse one there was no longer any sea may seem a strange rather mysterious expression to us at first but it simply taken in its whole biblical context means this the sea stands for restlessness and hostility throughout the old testament and even in the new it is constantly used as a symbol of restlessness and hostility in this world hostility to man in particular the sea which may be called the cruel sea and also its ongoing restlessness never at peace symbolizing something of the restlessness of our existence here in this life but in that new creation there will be no more sea there will be no more restlessness there will be perfect peace there will be peace because we are at peace with god there will be peace because we'll be at peace with one another there will be peace because we will have peace in our hearts all our deepest longings will be filled and will go on being fulfilled and so there will be true peace but also there will be no longer any hostility there will be no danger such as symbolized by the sea there will be no enemy of our souls to distract us or to tempt us from god there will be no evil one to seek to oppose every work of christ in our hearts seeking to destroy and to pervert and to twist every good gift of christ there will be no longer any hostility but also there will be life with

god not only peace but life with god in verse three they will be his people and god himself will be with them and be their god now here it's as if the whole of the bible was tied up into one statement the one statement that is at the heart of the old testament the covenant with god's people i will be your god you will be my people is the central promise of the covenant here we have it right at the end of the new testament they will be his people and god himself will be with them and be their god in other words we see here a very important truth that what is said concerning that new universe that new people that new experience is in fact a continuity of what we experience in this life of god's grace because that is god's covenant with us here and now he is our god and we are his people though in this life our experience of that great fellowship is often marred and broken yet it is a true experience but it is this experience that will be increased to perfection in that new environment and we will know all of what it means for him to be our god for us to be his people for him to be all the things that every title of his implies every title by which he has revealed himself father shepherd friend redeemer savior all of these things will have found their absolute fulfillment in our experience and we will know what it's like for us to be truly his children truly his sheep truly his friends implied along with life with god

is the fact that there will be no death we're told specifically there'll be no death there'll be no therefore no separation death always stands in scripture for separation first of all obviously physical death separates friend from friend husband from wife father from son but there will be no death in that new environment there'll be no death in that new experience because there'll be no separation we will never be separated from god anymore never separated from each other anymore no longer any death there will be no death either in any of the other senses of death no death in decay no death in disintegration none of these ways will there be death and because there is no death then there will be none of these other things that we are told about here there'll be no mourning or crying or pain there will be no tragedy there will be no tears there will be no need for any of these things because the old order of things has passed away all that caused those things will only be but a memory and they will no longer be cause even for tears because we are told that

[44 : 47] God will wipe every tear from their eyes God himself will erase everything that is sad everything that is tragic we will only have the eternal happiness of concentrating upon his face and upon his revelation of himself and his eternal friendship and then finally there is in this new experience lasting fulfillment and this is something that has been undergirding a lot of what we've been saying in verse 6 where he introduces himself as the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end to him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life the Lord Jesus there graciously taking the same kind of words as he used when he was here on earth talking about the great blessing of the gospel and people believing in him and using this very ordinary everyday picture of thirst and drinking to quench thirst and he says that everyone who is thirsty will there be given that drink of the water of life which will quench all his deepest thirst in other words all his deepest longings for fulfillment for ultimate satisfaction in life will be met now we know something of what's involved in this thirst that the Lord

Jesus Christ talks about something of the thirst for meaning for love for purpose thirst for friendship the thirst for something satisfying for something lasting in this world where things are passing in this world where people let us down in this world where there are tragedies this deep longing Jacqurical chapter 24■ changing and turn it together to know that just die die our who rules the charter the to know the you you