



“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,” I Corinthians 15:58.

The Rapture and the Judgments

Lesson Aim: The study of Articles 23, 24, 25. 23. The bodily resurrection of the dead. 24. The reality of heaven, involving divine assurance of eternal happiness for the redeemed of God. 25. The reality of hell, involving everlasting punishment of the incorrigible wicked.

L337. Date: December 1964. **Text:** I Corinthians 15:12-20; Revelation 21:1-8. **Topic:** Christ: Return of; Church: Rapture of; Judgment: Of Believers; Judgment: Of Men.

INTRODUCTION —The consummation of this present age will be the Second Coming of Jesus. As studied last Sunday, the return of Jesus will bring a rapture of the saints. “Rapture” means “the act of seizing and carrying off by force.” It is used in this context to refer to the Lord taking up the saints to meet Him in the air, I Thessalonians 4:1. At His appearing the dead bodies will be resurrected glorified bodies, the living saints will be transformed into glorified bodies, and all Christians will be caught up to meet Him.

Immediately following the rapture come the judgment of the saints at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This will determine the rewards received by each redeemed person. While these events are transpiring in the air (along with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb) the Great Tribulation will occur on earth. At the end of these seven years, the Lord will return to earth with His saints. After He has reigned here 1,000 years, He will raise the unsaved dead and all redeemed men will stand before Him at the Great White Throne Judgment. The wicked will be consigned to the Lake of Fire while the righteous will become inhabitants of the new heaven and earth.

It is important to remember that the wicked and righteous are raised

from the dead at two separate times and stand before separate judgments. These two occasions are separated by the 1,000 year reign of Christ, Revelation 20:4-6. Men are making decisions today about where they will be in the rapture and how they will fare in one of the judgments.

EXPOSITION

I. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, I Corinthians 15:12-20.

1. The resurrection and rapture are based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ, verses 12, 20. If Christ is raised from the dead it is proof that a resurrection is possible.

If Christ is not raised from among the dead, we have no assurance concerning the prospect of our resurrection. Jesus has proven Himself victorious over death, hell, and the grave (Revelation 1:18) and assures us, **“Because I live, ye shall live also,”** John 14:19. The same victory which He gained in the resurrection is assured to all believers. He has gone all the way through death, was buried, and came forth from the grave. We follow Him into death without fear knowing we shall also follow Him in the resurrection.

Paul speaks of Jesus as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection. The farmer may walk through his orchard or field and pluck some of the first ripe fruit knowing that the main harvest will soon follow. So Jesus arose from the dead as the “firstfruits” of all the redeemed who will follow Him.

2. All Christian hope relates to the resurrection of the body and the resurrection of Jesus is basic to our resurrection, verses 13-19. Five drastic consequences would follow if Jesus had not risen from the dead. (1) If Christ is not risen our preaching is vain, verse 14. To be “vain” is to be empty and meaningless. We preach that by His death and resurrection Jesus paid the debt for sin. However, if Jesus is not risen—if He is still dead and still in the grave—the message we preach is not true. A message based on falsehood is useless—“vain.” Every Christian message is empty and meaningless unless Christ has arisen from the dead.

(2) If Christ is not risen our faith is vain, verse 14. We confess to have been saved through faith in a crucified and risen Jesus. But what benefit is faith if Christ is still dead? Even if one has had an emotional experience which he calls “conversion” it is useless unless Jesus lives. What advantage is there in faith if one believes a falsehood? Faith is empty unless Jesus is a

living Savior.

(3) If Christ is not risen we are false witnesses of God, verse 15. We testify that God has raised Christ from the dead. The Bible says so. But, if Christ is not risen the Bible is proven unreliable and what we testify concerning God is not truth. There is no fellowship with God if Jesus is still in the grave. Falsehood cannot bring a man to God for peace and reconciliation.

(4) If Christ is not risen we are still in sin, verse 17. The only way of forgiveness is through Jesus Christ, Acts 4:12. The only way to God is through Jesus Christ, John 14:6. But if Jesus is still in the clutches of death, unable to extricate Himself, there is no way open to God. Therefore, forgiveness of sin is impossible. No one has forgiveness therefore, if death has conquered Christ.

(5) If Christ is not risen those who have died with faith in Christ have perished, verses 18-19. Our hope in Christ extends past death or we have no real hope in Him at all. If Christ Jesus is still in the grave and no man has forgiveness through Him, then those who trusted their souls into His grace have been betrayed and have perished. Even if they were somehow saved by His death, there would be no hope of their resurrection, for a Saviour who could not raise Himself from the dead surely could not resurrect His disciples.

But, praise God, Jesus has risen! **“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming,”** I Corinthians 15:20, 22, 23.

3. The rapture of the saints comes at the first resurrection, verse 20. Since the resurrection of Christ is a “firstfruit” of the resurrection of Christians, their resurrection will be in like manner to His. Paul speaks of this grand event in I Thessalonians 4:13-17. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, “and the dead in Christ shall rise.” This is the first event following His appearing. Their resurrection bodies will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual, I Corinthians 15:35-54. These bodies will bear the image of the glorified Lord! The living saints will also be transformed immediately so that they all (whether dead or alive at Christ's appearing) will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, This is the “first resurrection,” **“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years,”** Revelation 20:4-6.

The resurrection of the saints is called the “first” resurrection because there is a “second” resurrection to follow—the resurrection of the unredeemed. **The rest of the dead** (that is, the unsaved dead who had no part in the first resurrection) **lived not again until the thousand years were finished,**” Revelation 20:5. Though there is an interim of one thousand years between the first and second resurrections, every human being will be in one or the other, John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2-3. You, dear reader, will be in one. Which?

II. THE JUDGMENT OF THE SAVED,

I Corinthians 3:11-15; Revelation 21:1-8.

1. Where? The redeemed saints of God will stand before the “Judgment Seat of Christ” as described in I Corinthians 3:11-15. This event will take place in heaven. At the first resurrection the saints are raised up, glorified, and “caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air,” I Thessalonians 4:17. They will remain in the air for a brief period of time—some scholars say seven years and others three and one-half years. During this time they will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Meanwhile, the Great Tribulation will occur on earth. What a blessed day when the glorified saints, delivered from the very presence of a sinful environment, behold their glorified Lord!

2. Who? Only the saints will stand before God in this judgment, I Corinthians 3:14-15. Only the saints were resurrected from among the dead and only the living saints were raptured with them. The unsaved dead were left in the graves and the unsaved alive on earth were left on earth. Since the purpose of this judgment is rewards, not punishment (as will be seen below), only the saved will be there. Judgment of the unsaved will come one thousand years later and no saved person will stand in that judgment. The destiny of the soul is fully settled in this life, not in the day of judgment.

3. Why? There are two great purposes in the judgment of the saved. First, an examination of the works of every child of God will guarantee equality in the conferring of reward for faithful service. Jesus Himself will examine each one and announce the reward due him. Second, according to Matthew 25:21, this judgment will also determine the place each one will occupy in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. There will be no mistakes or injustice in that day when **“Every one of us shall give account of himself to God,”** Romans 14:12. What a challenge to each Christian to be faithful in his daily duties for the Lord, knowing **“ . . . we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,”** Romans 14:10. Blessed, indeed is the one who

hears the Lord say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant . . . I will make thee ruler over many things,”** Matthew 25:21.

4. What follows? Soon after the saints have stood before the Judgment Seat of Christ and participated in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, they will descend to earth with the Lord Jesus. Satan will be bound for one thousand years and Jesus will reign with the saints in a millennium of peace and righteousness. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed and will lead a rebellion against the Lord Jesus. His power will be canceled and he will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The unsaved dead will be raised and all the unsaved will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment to receive their just condemnation. Eternity will then be issued with the passing of the old heavens and earth and the creation of the new. There the saints will remain with God in the blessed condition described in Revelation 21:22. Blessed day! In the city of God, the tabernacle of God, and the garden of God, the redeemed will share the bliss of God’s unveiled presence.

III. THE JUDGMENT OF THE UNSAVED, Revelation 20:11-15.

1. Where? The unsaved are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment, verse 11. The very reading of the account of this dread judgment moves the heart to awe. This is a “great” judgment because all the unsaved people of all generations and nations will appear to be judged. This is a “white” judgment because the Judge is pure and the examination and verdict will be according to righteousness. This is a “throne” judgment because God sits on His throne of authority in that terrible day. The judgment of the “Great White Throne” will be for all unsaved—and only for the unsaved—to account to God for their failure to trust Jesus. From here they will be consigned to the torments of the Lake of Fire and eternal death.

2. What evidence? Will men be permitted to give evidence and “argue their case” “before the Great White Throne? Certainly not! The evidence to be presented will be specific and true. There will be books there that contain all the evidence necessary. (Some hold “The books” to be the Bible, while others see them as records of the conduct of those being judged.) Of special importance is the presence of the Book of Life. The redeemed have their names written therein from the foundation of the world, Revelation 17:8. Jesus said it was more important to have one's name written there than to be able to work miracles, Luke 10:20. The absence of one's name from this book is the unanswerable argument to man's claim for righteousness and evidence of his unsaved condition.

3. Who will be the Judge? Jesus Christ will be the Judge at the Great White Throne. God has already appointed a day in which He will judge the world in the person of Jesus, Acts 17:31. His resurrection is God's proof that this is so! Think of it: the Judge of the unredeemed is the same One who would have been their Savior if they had trusted him! What argument would man have to offer when he stands before the Savior of those who believe? To how many will He have to say, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity," Matthew 7:23, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal," Matthew 25:26

4. What is the purpose? The purpose of the Great White Throne Judgment is to determine the degrees of punishment for the wicked and execute their final sentence of doom. This judgment will have nothing to do with salvation. Those who stand before this judgment have already missed salvation. That is why they appear here instead of at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Just as there are differences of reward for the saved, so there are differing degrees of punishment to be endured by the unsaved. Some will find it more tolerable in the day of judgment than others, Matthew 11:20-24. While some are beaten with "few stripes" others will be beaten with "many stripes" depending upon their knowledge of the things of God, Luke 12:27-28. He who persists in sinful rebellion will surely suffer the consequences thereof in all eternity.

5. What fate? Those condemned in the Great White Throne Judgment will be consigned to eternal suffering in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. This is the eternal death, Revelation 20:14-15). There, in that place of "outer darkness," will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matthew 8:12; 24:30. Those condemned thereto will "go away into everlasting punishment," Matthew 25:46. This is the place where "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" Mark 9:44, 46, 48. It is the place where the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are tormented day and night for ever and ever, Revelation 20:10. **"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire,"** Revelation 20:15. The sufferings of the condemned will last as long as the bliss of the redeemed! Be sure you are safe in Jesus. Win every other person you can to trust Him also.

6. When? The Great White Throne Judgment will come immediately following the final insurrection of Satan against God at the close of the millennial reign of Jesus and His saints. It will mark the absolute end of this present world order. Following this judgment, **". . . the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,**

the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up,” II Peter 3:10. Then there shall remain only the places of eternal destiny: the Lake of Fire for the condemned and the new heaven and earth for the redeemed. Eternity will have come and time will be no more.

CONCLUSION—The Lord Jesus will come in the air and receive all the redeemed, living or dead. They will be caught up into the air to meet Him while the unsaved are left on earth. The saints will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive their rewards. Then they will return to earth to reign with Christ for one thousand years. At the end of this time the unsaved dead of all ages will stand in the Great White Throne Judgment to receive their sentence of condemnation. The wicked shall be turned into hell and the righteous will inherit the joys of life eternal. There will be no transfer of destiny in eternity. Be sure you have been redeemed by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God. His person and work is the subject of study next week.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the “rapture”?
2. How is Christ the “firstfruits” of the resurrection?
3. What consequences would follow if Jesus be not risen from death?
4. What are the differences in the first and second resurrections?
5. What differences are there between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment?
6. Where will each judgment be held and who will be in each?
7. Do you believe in degrees of punishment for the wicked?
8. Who will be the Judge in the judgment?
9. How does the Bible describe heaven? hell?
10. What is the order of events regarding the Lord’s coming?
11. How is this lesson a challenge to Christians?