



“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.

L507. Date: March 1960. **Text:** I Corinthians 15:12-20; Revelation 21:1-8.

Topic: Christ: Return of; Judgment: Of Men.

INTRODUCTION—The second coming of Jesus begins a series of events which very rapidly transpire. The first of these is the rapture of the saints. By “rapture” we mean “the act of seizing and carrying off by force.” It refers, in our lesson today, to the Lord's taking the saints from the earth up into heaven (the air) to meet Him. Some supernatural force will seize men in that day. The bodies of dead believers will be raised and the living believers will be changed. Then all will ascend through the air to meet Jesus in the sky! This is the rapture.

Immediately following the rapture will come the judgment of the saints (while they are still in the air with the Lord). This judgment will designate the rewards due each for his type of service and is known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. Following the Great Tribulation and the reign of Christ upon the earth for 1,000 years, the unsaved dead will be resurrected and they will appear before the Great White Throne Judgment. It is important to keep the fact of two judgments, separated by 1,000 years, in mind as this lesson is studied. Basic to the rapture and judgments is the fact of the resurrection of the just and another of the unjust. These will also be separated by a period of 1,000 years. See Revelation 20:4-6.

Men are today making the decision as to where they will be in the

rapture and how they will fare in the judgment. Each time one hears the gospel and has opportunity to accept it, he makes a decision that reaches into eternity. Never must the church become lax in her missionary or soul-winning ministry. Judgment is real. Men must experience eternity somewhere. God help us that this lesson may inspire to a deeper concern for souls.

EXPOSITION

I. The Resurrection of the Dead, I Corinthians 15:12-20.

1. The resurrection is based upon the resurrection of Christ, verses 12, 20. Our hope of resurrection is based upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul argues that if Christ is not risen we have no hope in Him beyond this life. Jesus assures us, *"Because I live, ye shall live also,"* John 14:19. Paul reminds us that, *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,"* Romans 5:10. The victory that Jesus gained over death and the grave is to be ours. He has gone before us through death and resurrection and we can confidently follow Him in death knowing that we will also follow Him in resurrection. Christ is designated the "firstfruits" of the resurrection. That means that as the farmer plucks the first ripe fruit from his orchard with assurance that the main crop will later be harvested, so Jesus has died and risen again to guarantee our victory. Even the Old Testament prophet had a vision of this. *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes,"* Hosea 13:14.

2. The resurrection of Christ is a basic doctrine of Christian faith, verses 13-19. Just suppose He had not risen from the dead. What effect would that have upon the believer? Paul answers this question by pointing out five drastic results. (1) If Christ is not risen our preaching is vain, verse 14a. To be "vain" means to be empty and meaningless. We preach that Jesus has died for sin; that He was buried and the third day arose victorious over death and the grave. Now if our preaching is such and Jesus has not risen, it means we are not preaching a message valid enough to save. All preaching that is not based on truth is empty and avails nothing for man's spiritual welfare. (2) If Christ is not risen our faith is vain, verse 14b. We confess to have been saved by faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. Even if that faith has brought an emotional experience we call conversion, it is empty and

useless if Christ is still in the grave. What advantage is there in faith if one believes a falsehood? Faith is useless unless Christ is a living Saviour. (3) If Christ is not risen we are false witnesses of God, verse 15. We bear the witness of the scripture that Christ is risen from the dead. If He is not risen the Bible becomes unreliable and we become false witnesses of the truth. God must be displeased with error and thus we come under His displeasure. There is no fellowship with God if Jesus is still in the grave! (4) If Christ is not risen we are still in sin, verse 17. Our hope of forgiveness through Jesus as personal Saviour is false if He is still in the grave. It is not just His death, but the victory over death also in which we have hope. If sin conquered Christ through death so that He has not risen, He has not delivered us. (5) If Christ is not risen those who have died with faith in Christ have perished, verses 18-19. Our hope in Christ extends through death or we have no real hope. Only by His victory over death can we be confident that He will deliver those who die with faith in Him. How miserable we would be if there was no hope that the dead Christians would be raised by the Lord Jesus! But, praise God, victory comes through Him!

3. The rapture of the saints comes at the resurrection, verse 20. Paul is careful to assure us that Christ has risen from the dead and we are assured of our own resurrection. The resurrection and rapture is described in I Corinthians 15:12-57 and I Thessalonians 4:13-17. The rapture and resurrection is preceded by the appearing of the Lord, a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Then the resurrection of the just occurs. The bodies are raised, no longer corruptible and subject to decay, but glorious and like the Lord. The living saints are immediately changed to be like them and all are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and to dwell eternally with Him. The saints of all generations have a part in this event. This is the rapture to which we longingly look.

II. The Judgment of the Saved, I Corinthians 3:11-15; Revelation 21:1-7.

1. This judgment takes place in heaven. The saints are resurrected and caught up into heaven to meet the Lord Jesus. This group will remain there for a period of time (some say 3 years, others say 7 years). Remember that these are the redeemed of God who thus meet the Lord. What a happy time this must be for the thousands of saints who receive their glorified bodies and look upon their wonderful Lord! These have reached the ultimate in redemption. They have not only been forgiven and delivered from sin's rule, but now they are delivered from the very presence of a sinful environment.

Their blessed estate is described in Revelation 21:1-7, for this is their eternal destiny.

2. This judgment is for the saints, and only, for them. Remember that the resurrection which occurred did not affect the unsaved. It is the “dead in Christ” who arose. Only these will appear before this judgment. Not one single unsaved person will be there. This is another point of assurance on the security of the believer. The judgment of the saved will have only God's children there, and not one unsaved. One thousand years later the unsaved will be judged without one single saved person being among the number. The destiny of the soul—the judgment in which one will appear—is fully settled here in this life.

3. This judgment will settle all differences. Herschel Ford's book, *Seven Simple Sermons on the Second Coming*, suggests that here differences between the believer and the Lord will be settled as well as differences between believers. Complete harmony will come here when all memory of sin will be put away. The Bible says, “*They shall see eye to eye*,” Isaiah 52:8. Heaven could not be heaven if the differences and sins of earth were remembered and affected our relationships with one another and the Lord. All these things will be eternally forgotten.

4. This judgment will determine the rewards of the believers. I Corinthians 3:11-15 pictures this judgment scene. Some of the works of God's people are unworthy and will be burned up when passed through the fire of testing. There may be someone there whose whole life has to be burned and yet his soul is saved. It is only those works which remain after the testing that deserve reward and the proportion of the reward is determined by these, Revelation 22:12. The Greek word translated “judgment seat” (for this is the judgment seat of Christ) is *bema*. It is not the bench upon which the judge sat to pass sentence upon a criminal, but was the seat of the judge who issued the prizes to the winners of the games of sport. There shall our Lord Jesus sit to reward each of His people according to their service. God help us so to serve as to hear His bless- “Well done.”

5. This judgment will determine our place in the coming kingdom. Dispensation Premillennialists see the Judgment Seat of Christ as determining the place each saint will occupy in the millennial (1,000 year) reign of Christ upon earth. This is based upon the parable of Jesus in which the faithful servant was told, “*Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*,” Matthew 25:21. Evidence to support this point is found also in Paul's statement, “*If we suffer, we shall also reign with him*,” II Timothy 2:12. How wonderful it will be to share the glory of our

wonderful Saviour as He stands triumphant over a sin-cursed earth! Read Romans 14:10-12.

III. The Judgment of the Unsaved, Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8.

1. The unsaved are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment, verse 11. The description of this judgment is intended to strike a note of awe and fear into the hearts of men. Well it may, for this is the occasion when God will pronounce judgment upon the wicked and consign them to an eternal suffering in the lake of fire. It is a “great” judgment because all unsaved men of all generations and nations stand here to be judged. It is a “white” judgment because of the purity of the examination and the uprightness of the sentence pronounced. It is judgment from a “throne” because of the authority of God to pronounce judgment upon His enemies. Thus the “Great White Throne Judgment” is the occasion when sinners—and only sinners—stand before God to hear their final doom pronounced and to depart into eternal sufferings.

2. Books will be used in this judgment, verse 12. Present in the judgment will be the book of life and other books with records written in them. (Some believe the other books are the books of the Bible which is used as a standard of judgment. Others hold it refers to records of the conduct of the unsaved there to be judged.) Those who are redeemed have their names written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, Revelation 17:8. Jesus tells His disciples that having one's name written there is better than being able to perform miracles and should be a cause of great rejoicing, Luke 10:20. The book of life will be there to be the unanswerable argument to those who would try to enter heaven. The very absence of their names from this book is evidence they are unsaved.

3. The Judge at this judgment is Jesus Christ. *“He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead,”* Acts 17:31. Therefore, it is the crucified and risen Jesus who is to be the judge at this dread occasion. How helpless will the sinner feel when he stands before a Judge who could have been his Saviour! Those who pretend salvation because of goodness, good works, observance of ritual, or any other basis will have to face the Judge who is the true Redeemer. He will know whether one has trusted in His sacrifice for salvation. Whatever man's excuse, the answer to these sinners will be; *“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity,”* Matthew 7:23.

Their destiny will be sealed with these words, *“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,”* Matthew 25:41. There will be no escape from justice here.

4. The purpose of this judgment will be to determine, degrees of punishment and execute the final sentence of doom. The Great White Throne Judgment will have nothing to do with salvation. It will not be to determine if one goes to heaven or hell. Those who stand there are already condemned because they have not trusted in Jesus Christ as Saviour, John 3:18. If one hopes to gain heaven he must receive forgiveness while he lives. Judgment will acquit no one who has neglected to believe in Jesus Christ to the forgiveness of sins.

This judgment will also determine the degrees of punishment for the unredeemed. Just as there are differences of reward for the just, so there are differences of punishment for the unjust. Some will find it “more tolerable” in judgment than others, Matthew 11:20-24. While some will be beaten with “few stripes” others will be beaten with “many stripes,” depending upon their knowledge of God's will and their response to it, Luke 12:27-28. Let no man think that he can go on in sin and rebellion without suffering the results in eternity.

5. The sentence passed at this judgment is condemnation to eternal suffering. The destiny of the unsaved is described by many terms. It is called outer darkness (Matthew 8:12), a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30), a place of everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46), the second death (Revelation 20:15), and like names. The punishment here decreed will never end but will be as enduring as eternity, Revelation 20:10; Mark 9:42-48. The sufferings of the condemned will last just as long as the bliss of the redeemed! How this thought ought to inspire Christians to win their relatives and friends and keep every person possible from this dread fate. How long has it been since you tried to lead someone to trust the Lord Jesus?

CONCLUSION — Let each reader keep this fact in mind: The Lord Jesus will come in the air to receive all the redeemed, living or dead. The unsaved will be left on earth. The redeemed will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive due reward for their service. The unsaved will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment to be consigned to the lake of fire (commonly called, “Hell”) for eternity. There will be no transfer from one to the other in eternity. The decision for Christ must be made in this life. Trust Him today. Witness to others that they may know Him, too! To reject Jesus as Saviour will be to face Him as Judge, John 5:22.

QUESTIONS

1. Define: “rapture.”
2. Distinguish between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment.
3. How is our resurrection related to the resurrection of Christ?
4. List the five results (mentioned in I Corinthians 15:13-19) if Christ is not risen from the dead.
5. List in order the series of events following the coming of Christ in the air.
6. What is the purpose of the judgment of the saved?
7. What is the purpose of judgment of the unsaved?
8. Who will be the Judge at these two judgments? (See John 5:22.)
9. Discuss the sufferings of the unredeemed.
10. What difference should this study make in the lives of Christians?