

# **The Final Judgment**

*A call to hear the Judge's voice*

*David Gooding*

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## **The Final Judgment**

I'm sure that as you've listened to the news this week the account of the murders in the mountains of France has chilled your very heart because of the sheer deliberate cruelty of the way those murders were executed. If I were to say to you that it doesn't matter, you would regard me as a moral reprobate. How could I possibly say it doesn't matter? And if I were to ask how much it matters, you might say, 'What do you mean, "How much does it matter?"' I mean, does it have repercussions for this life only? What about the next? And is there a final judgment? Because the fact is that if there is a final judgment then of course our sins matter immensely.

So many of my former colleagues held that there is no final judgment, that this life ends everything. The New Testament asserts the contrary. And it doesn't assert it simply as a warning, as the alarming side of the gospel; it is part of the gospel itself that there is going to be a final judgment.

We are told that when the Christian apostle Paul addressed the Stoics and the Epicureans in Athens, at their request, he preached to them the gospel. As a part of the gospel he included its call to everyone everywhere to repent, for God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). What a glorious fact that is. Who amongst us would wish that the world would carry on as it is, in all its carnage and its folly? It is not going to be carrying on for ever. There will be a final judgment. How much do the murders in France matter? How much do our personal sins matter?

### **The great white throne**

By your leave, I wish to read a biblical account of the final judgment. It is to be found in the book of the Revelation:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15)

It is only a few verses, but there is no greater solemn message in all of Scripture than this. There will be set up a great white throne, and the dead, small and great, will stand before God. And then the books will be opened. We are repeatedly told that the dead will be judged according to their works; it is not one universal sentence that is the same for all. Punishment, there will be; and it will be according to people's works. The *books* shall be opened.

### **The books and the Book of Life**

If ever someone claims that he didn't do such a thing, or he didn't have such thoughts, God will play it back to him. That person will see himself, in his memory, doing the thing. God has his books. They may not be like our books, with leaves and pages and binding, but God has his record.

In particular, however, we should notice verse 15 of the passage: 'Whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.' This, as you may expect, is very, very carefully worded. Twice over, the repetition has been made that the judgment will be according to people's works. That will determine their individual fate. But now notice that whether anybody is cast into the lake of fire or not isn't said to be that their deeds, on recollection, were so bad that they had to be cast into the lake of fire. That is not what it says. It says that the determining thing that will cause anybody to be cast into the lake of fire was this: 'Whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.' That tells me that life's most important decision I could possibly make touches this question: Is my name written in this Book of Life? I confess to you that if it were not, and if I were not absolutely sure, I'd be scared to put my head upon my pillow this night. For it says, 'anybody's name who was not found written in the book of life . . .'

As we read the New Testament we shall find that believers in Christ are told their names are written in the Book of Life. The loveliness of the gospel is that you don't have to wait uncertainly to discover whether your name is written or not; you could know it now. And knowing it now, you could be sure that you will not be cast into the lake of fire.

### **Your names are written**

When our Lord was here on earth he sent out his apostles to evangelise, and they came back very excitedly (like evangelists do sometimes today). And they reported to the Lord, 'You know, Lord, even the demons were subject to us in your name. Oh, we had a tremendous time!' And the Lord quietly said to them, 'Well, that's okay, but don't rejoice in that small mercy that the demons were subject to you. Rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven, registered as citizens of heaven, and of glory' (see Luke 10:17-20).

I give you permission for the next minute to sit and enjoy it together. Is your name written in that Book? Well, then you have the Lord's permission to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! It is a fact that the disturbances of life cannot overturn.

In the church at Philippi all the believers were keen, but when all believers get keen there can sometimes be trouble, usually because one wants it done this way and another wants it done that way and, before you know where you are, there are differences of opinion. And writing to some who were in that situation in Philippi the apostle says, 'But in this rejoice,

that your names are written in heaven' (see 4:1–3). It's glorious, isn't it, to have our names written in heaven, to be registered as citizens of glory?

## The Judge

That then is what depends on our name's being found written. So, let me address the question to you once more: Are you certain your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life? Since there's going to be a judgment, let me, if I may, introduce you to the judge himself. And I now read some of his own words from the Gospel of John:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do: for whatever things he does, these also the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does: and he will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises up the dead, and gives them life; even so the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honours not the Son, honours not the Father which has sent him. Verily, verily, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed over already from death to life.' (John 5:19–24)

What a magnificent thing this is. It wouldn't be right in British law, I suppose, that, if you were up before the judge, you should try to influence him in his home before he went out to court, or to expect some statement from him before the sentence was given. The glorious thing is that, while there's going to be a final judgment (and Christ shall be the judge), you could have the judge's word on what your fate will be. 'The Father judges no man but has committed all judgement to the Son,' says the Lord Jesus. And then he opens his next remarks with that famous quotation of his: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you he who hears my word and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life.' This, my good friend, is the word of the one who shall be the judge at the final judgment. How marvellous to have his verdict from his own mouth.

## The Creator

That is, so to speak, the legal side to our salvation. And while we rejoice in the tender-heartedness of Jesus Christ our Lord, yet we should remember who he is. For our Lord has just declared that whatever he sees the Father do, he himself (the Son) does likewise. These are astonishing things for Jesus of Nazareth to declare as he stands in the streets of Jerusalem.

Does the Father make the sun to rise every day? Well, God himself originated it. Then the Son does the very same. It is the blessed Son of God who is behind the rising of the sun, for at creation he was the Creator. Hence his ability to give us eternal life for, as the Father raises up the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. We are told in the

book of Genesis that God made man of the dust of the ground, and then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (2:7). Here, in John's Gospel, our blessed Lord is claiming that it was he who breathed the breath of life into our forefather Adam. He holds every human life in his hands. It is that blessed Lord Jesus who appeals to our hearts now.

'Verily, verily', say the older translations, or 'Truly, truly'. Some say the Aramaic phrase he used means, 'Believe me when I tell you'. Just imagine the Lord Jesus standing in front of you and saying, 'I beg you to believe me'. What would you say? 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who hears my word and believes on him that sent me *has* everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed over from death to life.'

### **His call to us**

We have thought how there is going to be a final judgment, for which we thank God. Things are not going to be allowed to carry on as at present with endless injustice and defilement and disorder. It is God's world; he will bring it to its end. Before he does so he calls to us: 'Believe me,' he says, 'I want to give you eternal life so that you will never perish.'

We have our option then, as we face the Son of God. Thankfully he's saying to us, '*Truly, truly*—I'm not deceiving you; I'm not spinning fancies, for what I assure you of is the utter truth.' Our blessed Lord suffered Calvary for it, to bear our sins in order that we may not come into condemnation. To neglect and reject him, of course, is to go ahead on our own steam and suffer that eternal condemnation. If there is a doubt in any of our hearts now as to what our eternal destiny shall be, let me exhort you to come and meet the judge himself and get the judge's own assurance that if you put your faith in him you will not come into condemnation but have everlasting life.

So may that same risen Lord speak his word into our hearts and give us the assurance that when life is done, or when he comes again, we shall be transferred to his immediate presence.

The Lord bless his word for his name's sake.

## **About the Author**

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.