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Presentation Transcript

Life After Death, Part 5 – Eternal Judgment

June 18, 2021

It's been observed that the further out we go in our study of God's salvation plan the more hazy it gets. It seems to become more ethereal and less detailed. And I see that as we move through the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth and then through the second resurrection. There are pictures that seem to convey an emotional meaning, but details of spiritual things – that are too much for us to grasp, since we're physical – are omitted. It causes us to wonder. References to events that are scant are lacking in detail. So, as we go through them, we'll try to differentiate between what the Bible actually says and what I'm trying to make of it. I think that will be obvious to you though.

I think it might be all right to develop different ideas about what all this means, as long as we stick to what it actually says, as our basis for our musing. I read a book once on logical thinking. People often leap to conclusions that aren't true because they don't follow the rules. They leave certain things out when they come to conclusions and so on. We'll try not to do that. I know that this comment is hazy in itself, but you'll see what I mean as we go along.

Today, we're going to look at two – or possibly three – events in the scriptures that are found in Revelation. But let's recap first. We first learned in this series that there is no immortal soul, but a spirit. We saw that, according to the word – for word translation – we *become* a living soul. That's what it says in Genesis. So it's not that we *have* a soul, but that we *are* one and that that soul is *not* immortal. Clearly we know that, if we *are* the soul – the body, the life and the psyche – and we die, then we can't be immortal. So there is no immortal soul. But we do have a spirit.

So how does God, then, plan to fulfill all the promises He makes to us about eternal life? Well, through a series of resurrections from the dead. Remember that we learned that there was – to use the words in the Bible – a *first* resurrection. That's how He's going to do it. This is made abundantly clear when we learn that Jesus Christ was resurrected to eternal life. And He is called the Firstborn of many brothers. So, if that happened to Him, we expect that to happen to us. Now, while He was in the grave for three days and three nights, He was dead. And then He was resurrected.

And we also, in this series, debunked – out of the Bible – the idea of ghosts. There is no such thing as ghosts – dead people wandering the earth or inhabiting houses or whatever they want to do. But there are evil spirits that do this. So we talked about that as well.

We then talked about the first resurrection. This occurs, as we saw out of the Bible, at the return of Christ. It is comprised of people who have known and were faithful to Jesus Christ to their death and will be resurrected in eternal form as members of God's family. They will have made it.

Then, there's going to be a thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth over those who survive end time events – and their progeny that come after them. And while that thousand years is going on and Christ is ruling, the risen saints, who are now immortal and like Jesus, will be kings and priests of Christ and participate in ruling the earth with Him. We read all those things right out of the Bible in Revelation and other places.

We then read of a Great White Throne resurrection after that thousand-year reign is over. We read that in Revelation 20. And we saw that this resurrection is to *physical* life and all those who have never had a chance in their first life to know Christ will have a chance now. It's not a second chance. It's just that they never had a chance until they're resurrected and given that chance. We also saw that it's not a sentencing, but a judgment – like when the saints lived a life and proved throughout their lifetime – their lifespan – that they were willing to follow Christ. So we see this Great White Throne Judgment period as just that – a period of time – a lifetime.

And with that recap, to bring us up to the judgment, here we go. I'd like you to turn with me to Isaiah 65 so that we understand the context of Isaiah's comments – 65:17 – God says:

Isaiah 65:17 – *Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.* And then in verse 20:

V-20 – *No more shall there be in an infant who lives but a few days, nor an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.*

Now, has there ever been a time that you know of when everybody is allowed to live for a hundred years? So that's something that's coming in the future. But when? Some think this may be a reference to that period of time when the people in the White Throne resurrection live again and get to have a chance to understand and draw close to God. And, if we look at the context of Isaiah's passage, he's talking about something that happens in that time period, which is a new heaven and a new earth. Maybe that is when this hundred-year period occurs. It seems very much likely to me that that's the case.

Now, the next passage that we're going to look at directly follows the thousand-year reign of Christ. It's Revelation 20:11 and 12.

Revelation 20:11-12 – *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

When the dead come to life, that's a resurrection, isn't it? But it's not the first one, because that's already happened. So this would be the second resurrection, even though it doesn't say *second*. But it is. So this is a resurrection to physical life, as we saw last time, where the book of life is opened – and also the Bible – *the books* of the Bible – the book of life, which is a book of the people who have made it. So those two things are going to be in play here. Everybody's going to have a chance to know God, and they'll know that, and their deeds are going to be compared to what's written in the Bible to see if they're matching up. Now, that's not that there isn't grace any longer. Some people think that grace means you don't have to do anything. That's not true. You have to commit to God. And, if you are able to do that – even imperfectly – then the grace of Jesus Christ is going to make up the difference and cover for the sins that you might commit, even though you don't want to commit them.

So how do we know this? It's simple. Before each resurrection, just simply ask, "Who's left?" And, if all the faithful were raised incorruptible before this resurrection, then who would be left for the second? Well, there are only two categories of people that are still in the grave at that point. One is all who have ever lived and did not get a chance to know God, and two, all who had a chance to know God, but turned away from Him. Everybody else was resurrected. And who would that be? Well, that would just be the saints – the people that knew God and had a chance to know Him and were faithful. Now we haven't spoken of this group that has turned away, but we will soon.

Now this White Throne resurrection is for those who never had a chance. And they're going to be taught the Bible, and they're going to have a chance to commit to God and learn God's ways. And Isaiah indicated it might be like a hundred years.

So let's look at something Jesus said that's not going to make a lot of sense to us – Luke 8, verse 9.

Luke 8:9-10 – *When His disciples asked Him what this parable meant – He'd just told a parable – He said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others, they are in parables, so that "seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."*

Now modern Christianity thinks today that God wants everybody now. And yet, this scripture

plainly tells us that He was not calling everyone in this present age. In fact, He was deliberately cloaking His teaching so that only some could understand it – not calling everyone now. So, calling those He wants now, and then will call the rest later. So what those of us do who do understand His plan, when it comes to evangelism, is to seek the people the people *God* is calling – not everybody. Of course, we don't know who God is calling until He calls them, so we try to reach out to everyone. But we know that, if the people that we talk to and we reach out to, if they turn away from that, that does not mean that they're goners. It means that they may come up in another resurrection.

Do you remember when Jesus sent out His disciples and told them that when they were rejected to simply shake the dust off their feet and move on to the next village? No problem. That's why. Those who could not hear He was saving for another day – the day of visitation – the day of the Great White Throne.

So look with me at a scripture – curious to some, but clear if we know about this resurrection. It's in 1 Peter 2:12. Peter tells the church:

1 Peter 2:12 – *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable – Gentiles, by and large, didn't know God's plan – so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

So Peter's telling us here that many people who are hostile to us, who don't know Christ yet, have been blinded – until when? Until the day of visitation. You might not have known when that was until now, but now you do, don't you? You know that there is a Great White Throne Judgment – a resurrection – coming, when people are going to come up and have a chance, finally, to understand. And that would be a second resurrection.

Is it simply a sentencing? Well, if you think about it, Peter doesn't think so. He thinks it's a time of learning about God. People are going to remember what they did to us, and remember what we did in return, and realize that they were wrong, and we were God's people – through no good thing of our own, by the way. But they'll realize then, as they meet us as immortal beings, that they were lacking in knowledge at that point.

So here you go. Just put a note in the margin of your Bible at 1 Peter 2:12, and write there, “See Revelation 20:11 and 12.” Then, when you get to Revelation 20:12, put a note there that says, “See 1 Peter 2:12,” and you'll have a connection between those two verses. That's even more detail about the second resurrection.

But let's ask again, “Is there anybody left to be resurrected at this point?” So there's that question again. But let's look at it. Let's go back to Revelation 20 again, and verse 11.

Revelation 20:11 – *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His*

*presence the earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books – the Bible is a series of books – were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And this book of life is a book which lists the names of those who have been faithful to Christ in all ages. How do I know that? Well, because I'm going to read that to you in just a minute out of the Bible. But continuing on: And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. So these people, raised to physical life in this second, or white throne resurrection, are given a chance to live and prove faithful to the faith as shown in the Bible. And, if they do that, then they're names are going to be written in the book of life. And they would then be changed to spirit at this judgment – this period. So they made it. They accepted God once the blinders were off, once Satan was bound, once deception was lifted. Parables now made sense to them. And God has accepted them and they are now immortal members of God's family. They're now saints. At this point, is there anyone left who is dead to be resurrected? Well, verse 13 – this is following verse after what we just read: *And the sea gave up the dead who were in it – it seems kind of repetitive, unless this is talking about something else. Death and Hades – hades is a Greek word that means grave – gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.* This looks like another resurrection. This would be the third one. Who would be in that one? Well, who's left? Well, only the people that failed to respond to Christ in all the ages. That's who's left. So verse 14: *Then Death and Hades – that is, the grave – signifying that, after this, there will be no more death – Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* So there you have it. The book of life is a list of the people who are faithful to God. And, if your name is not there when it's that time, you are not going to live. You're going to come up out of the ground, after being dead, only to face the second death.*

So what is this lake of fire? Well, we're going to get to that, but first let's see what Paul says about those who don't make it – Hebrews 10:26 – Paul says...this is very important – to understand this:

Hebrews 10:26-29 – *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins – why is that? Well, because we have refused it – but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.* Adversaries is another word. It's people who plan to go against God and never surrender. They have the same attitude the devil has. *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy – it says in verse 28 – on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

So yeah, there are some people that aren't going to make it. And this is a deliberate decision they make to reject God. It says *deliberately* right there in verse 26. So this is not something that

comes on people because of weakness. It's because of resistance. It's a determination *not* to follow God. I know this sounds scary, and it should be, but... I have some friends – Guy and Jennifer Swenson – who wrote a booklet titled, *If God So Loved the World, Why Are So Many People Going to Hell?* Once we learned about the second resurrection, we can see that there are *not* so many going to hell. You know, all the African tribes-people of times past, the Muslims of every age, all the Buddhists, all the other pagans from times past, all the billions who never had a chance to know the true God are going to be resurrected in that Great White Throne Judgment into an Eden-like planet, where peace reigns. And they will learn that the God of Abraham caused it, and they will accept Him for the first time. And after a time of proving their new belief and commitment, just like we had to do in our lifetime, they will be resurrected to the same eternal life the saints received a thousand years prior.

So Paul is probably talking about a relatively few people who won't accept Christ. But, if they don't, what happens? Well, lake of fire. But what is that? Peter explains more in 2 Peter 3:8.

2 Peter 3:8-13 – *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved – so don't overlook it – that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* So Christians have been patiently waiting, and longed for, and prayed for the return of Christ. And here Peter tells us...some people think, “Why is He taking so long?” Well, Peter tells us shy. God is waiting for *us* more than we're waiting for Him. He's calling people now. And He's giving them a time to commit. And He won't send Christ back until every last one of those people that He's calling is ready. Then verse 10: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief – How do thieves come? Well, they come when you're not expecting them – and then the heavens will pass away with a roar – the heavens! Everything you can see out there. The heavens will pass away with a roar – and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

So think back with me again before the fire? Who's left? Every grave has been opened, and all who have accepted Christ are now beyond what the Bible calls this event – the second death. They're immortal – not affected by fire. And the only ones that are left are the people who failed to accept Christ and who have resisted Him – the ones Paul is writing of, that we just read about. They are resurrected. They have not been changed to spirit. So they will die in that fire. F

So let's think about what that will be like. Well, Peter tells us that this fire will not be like anything that has ever happened in the physical world, because when this fire occurs, it will be end of everything physical. It's going to be like the big bang in reverse. It will be the elements

returning, not just to energy and then a thermonuclear explosion, but back to what God started with. What will that be like? And what will it be like to be in that – be present on the earth as physical being when that occurs? Well, it will be like nothing. It will be so fast a person wouldn't even know it. God is interested in weeding out those who would not be happy in His Kingdom and who would cause unhappiness in His Kingdom. But He is *not* interested in causing them to suffer for it. The reason we suffer is to learn. At this point, all the learning is over. They've already had enough suffering in their first life, based on how they behaved. So, He's just going to end all of that. That's hell. That's death by fire, but not eternal punishment by fire. And it's not like a house fire. It's like a thermonuclear explosion. Think about the people that lived at the epicenter of the explosion at Nagasaki, which was just a tiny atomic explosion. They never knew what happened. They were vaporized instantly – faster than instantly.

Okay. So, at this point, there are no more humans, no more earth, no more universe. There are people who have committed to God and have been changed to immortal beings, and they're present. But after the whole universe melts, what's left? Well, Revelation 21:1-4:

Revelation 21:1-4 – *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven – since the heavens were destroyed, this can't be talking about that, and you're right. The Bible talks about three heavens: the heaven that's our atmosphere, then there's the rest of the universe – that's a heaven – but then the third heaven if for God – and that still exists. That wasn't burned up, because it's not physical – the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

So, do we go to heaven when we die? Heaven, we are clearly told, comes down here. Heaven is where God is. And He's coming down here to be with us. Now, I say, "Down," because that's what God says in the verse. I think, however, that there will be no *down* as we know it now. He says that to help us from our tiny human perspective to understand that God will be with us where we are. And that's going to be better than anything we've ever imagined, because we can't imagine that much yet.

So, we started today with me telling you that, as we get deeper into the plan, it gets hazier. I mean, I read Revelation 21, 22, 20, and huge questions come to mind. But it's foggy. There's detail, but not the kind of detail I'm looking for. I think that's true for two reasons. God is first concerned about getting us there. And there is so much to understand, He adds the most detail where it's needed – specifically what we need to do to be a part of it. And two, because we won't be able to understand it all, because of our human limitations. So He uses symbols of physical things that we can relate to, sort of, such as, there will be no night there, to help us. And think

about it. Of course, there won't be night there, because the earth is no longer there, so it can't rotate between light and dark. Neither is there any sun to cast a dark shadow we call night. But there will be the light of God everywhere. And maybe we can get a tiny glimpse of that. Of course, *everywhere* no longer exists either. So there you go.

In all this symbolism, there are some things we can bank on. The scripture we just read is one of them – 1 through 4 – pretty specific there – and Revelation 22:3 through 5.

Revelation 22:3-5 – *No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him. We're going to worship Him. We will see His face, and His name will be on our foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.* That's what we're going to do.

This makes one think concrete in our minds. However it happens, God is going to give us everything and we will be in unrestricted relationship with Him forever.

Well, that concludes this series, *Life After Death*. Now I left out a very great deal today. We can only absorb so much at once. But, if you really want a lift, if you really want to be inspired, read Revelation 21 and 22 straight through without stopping and have fun trying to wrap your mind around it. I'm sure that whatever you come up with, as long as it's based on what you read there, it eventually is going to be yours.

Don't forget to check out our Website, liferesource.org. I talked to someone this past week who is working their way through every one of our presentations, from way back in 2004, and that was encouraging to me. But I think I might need to do the same. It's been so long.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.