

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A White Throne: Righteous Judgment

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 which 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 whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11–15, KJV 1900)

I have passed over several verses in this context. I have thoughts about them, some related to the present theme and some related to other Bible topics. Whatever interpretation we make of any symbolic passage in the Bible should be carefully and thoroughly filtered by the literal teachings of Scripture on that same subject or doctrine. Simply stated, always allow the literal passages to interpret the symbolic. Sadly, all too often well meaning believers tend to follow the mirror opposite approach to Scripture. Ignore the literal passages and allow one's imaginative interpretation of the symbolic passages to wrest the clearer and more obvious meaning of the literal passages. In short, these misguided souls rely far more on their interpretation than on Scripture itself. The Lord promises in Psalm 12:6-7 to preserve the "words" of Scripture, not just the general themes contained in Scripture. However, Scripture never even hints that God intervenes similarly in the minds of believers who read the Scriptures and develop their own interpretations. I've encountered some of the most bizarre interpretations imaginable from people who invested much time reading Scripture without spiritual insights to rightly divide its meaning. (2 Timothy 2:15; to arrive at a right division, a correct interpretation of Scripture, one must be a diligent student of Scripture, not a Bible "Hobby" reader. I've heard interpretations that smacked far more of "profane and vain babblings," next verse, than sound and right divisions from folks who spend time in the Bible, but who rely more on their world view and private interpretation than on the actual teachings of Scripture. Often folks who rely too much on their own intelligence and private interpretations of Scripture also suffer a severe case of sinful pride in their ability).

While I tend to avoid excessive symbolic interpretations of Scripture, there are some legitimate symbolisms that we see in Scripture, symbols that are obvious to the literary sense—and spiritual senses—that do not require off-the-map IQ or an imagination that is undisciplined and boundless. From Scripture to modern movies, the

colors of black and white convey a near-universal symbolism of evil and good. For generations, western movies always depicted the hero by a white hat and the villain by a black hat.

The throne on which the Lord sits for this final and epochal judgment of humanity John upfront depicts as "White." Whatever judgments are handed down from that throne shall be wholly righteous judgments. We see so many miscarriages of justice in human courts that we are understandably doubtful of judgment, but we need not doubt our God's ability and character to judge righteously in every case, no exception whatever. While I do not agree, I do understand why sincere and thinking believers on occasion question the severity of God's judgment in Scripture against the wicked. Does the punishment truly fit the crime? Is it perhaps too severe? I offer one core observation. Given our present state, wholly compromised by our own sinful condition, we are in no position to evaluate God or His determination of justice. We are too close to the crime to assess its severity, especially when weighed against God's perfect righteous character. We cannot remotely imagine how odious sin is to Him or to His righteous law. We readily acknowledge that we cannot fully know the details about what heaven shall be. Can we honestly think that we are any more equipped to evaluate God's justice?

How many times for nearly endless reasons do we read of miscarried justice in human courts? Sometimes even the courts themselves knowingly wrest justice against the guilty. A man is undoubtedly guilty of a heinous crime. His defense attorney makes one slip in procedure. The man is sentenced, rightly so, for his crime. He hires another attorney who appeals to a higher court, not based on the man's innocence or on new evidence that would prove his innocence. The court fully accepts the man's guilt, but he appeals on the basis of the first defense attorney's procedural mistake. The courts agree that the procedure was wrong, and use that error to set the guilty man free. True, justice was miscarried. It seems logical that the

criminal, proved guilty by indisputable evidence, should still pay his debt, and the careless attorney should be the one punished for his procedural error. Ah, but human justice is not so simple, is it? Folks, in heaven's court, there are never—ever—any "Procedural" errors. There is never a misreading of evidence. And there is definitely never—ever—one instance of conviction based on "Circumstantial" evidence. The God who sits on heaven's "White" throne, knows every thought, word, and deed ever committed by every person who ever lived.

A famous atheist was once asked how he would react if after death he discovered that there is a God. He responded that he would complain to God because He failed to leave sufficient evidence in the world of His existence. When I read that comment, my first thought went to Psalm 19. If God were to allow such a protest by the man, I have no doubt that He would immediately show the man the overwhelming evidences that He planted in His created universe of His existence, evidences that this man spent a lifetime consciously striving to ignore. Some of the world's best artists, painters, are said to have always in some way depicted themselves in each of their paintings. Friends, our righteous God has planted overwhelming evidences of Himself throughout His created world. Only twisted minds of twisted men who choose consciously to ignore this evidence claim that they cannot see it. How vain of such a person to claim that he will only believe in what he can see. Has he seen electricity? You may not see it, but touch two live wires in an electrical circuit, and you'll definitely know that electricity is there!

...from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. Although wicked men shall then seek to flee from the righteous Judge, they shall quickly discover there is no place to go. David realized God's omnipresence in the opening verses of Psalm 139, but instead of evading the fact, he praised God for it "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me."

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 which were written in the books, according to their works. No hiding, they all stand before God. Small or great, they all shrink before Him. John sees an interesting point often ignored by modern believers. Given the whole of humanity standing before God at that moment, there are two bases of judgment, not just one. Some were judged "*...out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*" The rest of humanity are judged out of the other "*...book...which is the book of life.*" It is not the book of memory of all that they said or did. It is not the book that keeps finite track of their thoughts, words, and deeds. These people are not judged by what they did. It could rightly be observed from this passage that the "books" by which people are to be judged "according to their

works" are the books of death. Conversely, John by inspiration describes the single book as the "book of life."

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. Regardless of when or how they died, they shall face God for their conduct. Their companions in this judgment is a lively commentary on the nature of their own judgment. They faced God in judgment along with "death and hell." There is only one basis for their judgment on this day, "every man according to their works."

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. Either specifically or by obvious implication, in this chapter John writes of two deaths and two resurrections. It seems as obvious that the resurrections in one way or another relate to the two deaths. I suggest that the literal passages of the Bible might remove much of the mystery of the point, along with much of the false imagination imposed upon these two pairs. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul writes pointedly of the fact that, prior to God's saving work on, in, and to us, we were "dead in trespasses and sins". (Ephesians 2:1). How were we delivered from this dreadful death? "And you hath he quickened." To quicken is to make alive. We were dead in and by our own conduct, our sins. We came to be alive by something that another did to and for us. Praise God; this is salvation by grace, by God's gracious and loving character alone and not by anything that we did or would do. Perhaps this "spiritual" quality of sin and death relates to the first death and the first resurrection. In Revelation 20:6, John offers some joyful insights for believers regarding this death and 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.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. It seems the both of these verses link with Paul's Ephesians 2 teaching. If we accept this view of the first death and resurrection, what is our conclusion? It is precisely the same as if we read Paul's teaching in a very literal context, and written in rather literal words. If the Lord saved you by His grace, quickened you, made you alive in Jesus, the second or eternal death has no power whatsoever over you.

John points out another glaring difference between the two classes of people and the basis on which they are judged. Anyone who was not written in the book of life, thus everyone who is judged out of the books according to their works, shall be cast into the lake of fire. By strong and obvious implication, John teaches us the opposite fact as

well. Everyone written in the book of life escapes the lake of fire. They are in Christ, so the second death has no power over them. Whatever we make of the first resurrection, the context that describes that event draws a tight association between its unfolding and Jesus. So much so that perhaps we can, as some preachers and commentaries do, refer to Him as the first resurrection. If John is referring to Jesus' resurrection or to our spiritual resurrection from death in trespasses and sins to life in Christ which occurs experientially at the new birth, we must link the two events together. Our one and only attachment to that "first resurrection" from death in trespasses and sins stands firmly on the ground of Jesus' life, death, and indeed His resurrection. And because of what He did for us, first, we shall not be judged according to our works. He was judged for them already when He suffered for them and atoned for them. By intent, human courts refuse to impose double jeopardy on a person for his crimes. Even human courts will not approve of punishing a criminal twice for the same crime. This is righteous judgment, for God agrees. Since Jesus already died for our sins, the ultimate price, the redemptive price, for them, our sins have in fact already been judged and their penalty paid. If we were to then face God in judgment again out of the books according to our works, that fact would constitute blatant double jeopardy. Not so, believer, celebrate your Lord's righteous and faithful redemption of you from the guilt of your sins, the price that you owed with nothing by which you could pay short of eternal separation. Do not live in fear of being judged at the Second Coming. Your sins already faced the Judge and were settled long ago. The only thing lying ahead for you on that day is joy at the realization that you were written in His book, and shall therefore not stand in any risk whatever of the lake of fire. "Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor