

March 10, 2024 by Steve Brandon



The Great White Throne

Revelation 20:11-15

- 1. All Will Stand Before the Throne (verses 11-13).**
- 2. All Will Be Judged by the Books (verses 12-15).**
- 3. The Book of Life is Your Only Hope (verse 15).**

Our world today is fascinated by "Reality TV shows." In recent days, shows like *The Bachelor*, *Big Brother*, and *Survivor* have met with great success in recent days. But these shows aren't the oldest "Reality TV shows." In the 1950's there was a television show entitled, "This is Your Life." It was such a success, that it ran for nine seasons (1952 to 1961). Since that time, it was revived several times for a few years. Further, many other countries have spun off versions (Australia, Denmark, France, Israel, Norway, Sweden, Spain, the United Kingdom).

The plot was simple. "Each week, an unsuspecting celebrity would be lured by some ruse to a location near the studio. The celebrity would then be surprised with the news that they are to be the featured guest. Next, the celebrity was escorted into the studio, and one by one, people who were significant in the guest's life would be brought out to offer anecdotes. At the end of the show, family members and friends would surround the guest, who would then be presented with gifts."^[1] After the show, the celebrity would often go off with the guest for a get-together, reminiscing old times.

In America, the long-time host was Ralph Edwards. When he came on stage, he had a big-red book, from which he described the surprise guests to the unwitting celebrity. These guests would often be family, father and mother and brothers and sisters. But they also included, elementary school teachers, or (for athletes) former coaches or trainers. or (for actors) former co-stars of their famous shows. These guests arrived in the utmost secrecy, so that the guest of the show would be entirely surprised as each of them came out.

For instance, let me tell you about the episode in 1958 with Donna Reed, the famous Oscar-winning actress, who played Mary in "It's a Wonderful Life." She was lured into the studio under the pretense that she would be one of the people to show up for a fellow show business colleague. So, she was backstage waiting for him to be lured onto stage. Then, Ralph Edwards proceeds backstage and tells Donna Reed that she is the guest on "This is Your Life." She was super-shocked to say the least.^[2]

Ralph Edwards ushered her onto the stage and showed her a silhouette of those who were backstage, ready to come onstage at the appropriate time. He said, "There are the real people back there, in silhouette. Each one of them have in some way played his or her part in your journey from an Iowa farm to your present eminence in Hollywood's galaxy of stars. This is the story we are about to tell. A story that might well be titled, 'A birth of a star.'" Then Ralph and Mary sat down.

Then Ralph Edwards said, "Let's journey backward in time and half-way across the continent to the rolling hills of an Iowa farm." He then asked Mary to turn around and look at the backdrop. It was an aerial photograph of the farmstead of her childhood home outside the little town of Denison, Iowa. She recognized the farm immediately and said, "That's home."

Then two voices came from off stage. She recognized the voices immediately. They were her parents, who still lived in Iowa, but traveled to Hollywood for this moment. After a little conversation with the parents, Donna's brothers and sisters all came bounding onto the stage. Keith from New York City. Ivy a wife of a doctor in Beverly Hills. Billy and Karen who still live in Denison, Iowa. Ralph Edwards mentioned how it was 16 years since they were all together like this. Each of them shared a short story of old family times. There was much laughter and joy.

Then came another voice from offstage, it was from Miss Marian Drake, her teacher, who then came jogging onto the stage. Donna said, "She was the best teacher I ever had." The teacher replied how Donna was the best student in the class. "She never made a mistake," she claimed. The next guest was her best friend from Denison High School, who lives now in Birmingham Michigan, Joyce Anderson. They reminisced about how they would sit on the steps and talk about how to be popular. Then, Donna's high school biology and chemistry teacher was brought on stage, Dr. Edward R. Tomkins, who is now a research scientist in St. Carlos, CA. Of all her high school teachers, he was especially influential in her life. Donna and the teachers sat down. The teachers talk about how Donna was the most popular girl in school, voted "May Queen." and had the lead in the senior class play, the night of January 16th. and how she was a member of 4-H and won a blue ribbon at the Iowa State Fair in the bread-baking contest.

They moved on to her college experience at Los Angeles City College. The backdrop showed a picture of the college's float in the Rose Bowl Parade that Mary rode. Then a couple came on the stage. Donna lived with them and affectionally called, "George and Auntie John," who now live in Carpinteria, California. They commented about how hard she worked at school and at the home, helping them out.

While at the college, she was crowned the "Most Beautiful Co-ed" at the college. That picture in the Los Angeles Times caught the eyes of Bill Smith, her first agent in 1941, who was now the head of radio and television for 20th Century Fox Studios. He opened the "golden door" in Hollywood for Donna Mullinger, whose stage name was changed to "Donna Reed."

Then, Donna's husband at the time, Tony Owen, came on stage. He was a movie producer. When Tony left the stage, they re-lived four years before, March 4, 1954 at the Pantages Theatre, where she won an Oscar for her supporting role in the movie, "From Here to Eternity." A pre-recorded message from Buddy Adler the producer of the movie was played for all to hear. The last guests were Tony and Donna's four

small children, who came on stage with Tony.

Ralph Edwards said, "The lovely family of a lovely movie star... Well Donna, we hope we have awakened some happy memories for you tonight." Then, Ralph Edwards closed the show by giving her some gifts and saying, "This is your life. Donna Reed. The Iowa farm girl who became a great actress, but who always has time for her family, her friends and her church. We think that in whatever walks of life we may be, your example is an inspiration to all of us. God bless you." Then Donna said, "I don't know how you did it?"

That was just one of hundreds of reality television shows that Ralph Edwards hosted over the years (342 to be exact). I give that long introduction to give you all a flavor of what you all will experience someday. None of us will be famous enough in this life to be such a surprise guest on "This is Your Life." but at the final judgment, your segment of "This is Your Life" will take place for you and for the all the world to see. We see this in Revelation 20:11-15.

This scene here is not a stage set in Hollywood. This scene is the throne room of God, where the final judgment will take place. Unlike "This is Your Life," this scene is predominately not a happy one, not filled with joyful memories. Rather, the vibe is the sobering reality of the final judgment. The title of my message this morning is, "The Great White Throne." because, everything in the text revolves around this throne and what takes place before this throne. It is the final judgment, that all of the Bible has been waiting for. It is the time when God rights all of the wrongs in this world. It is the time of perfect justice.

Revelation 20:11-15

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. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then 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.

"This is Your Life" appears in verse 12.

Revelation 20:12

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.

Here's my first point.

1. All Will Stand Before the Throne (verses 11-13).

Now, depending upon your interpretation of the Millennium that we looked at last week in verses 1-10, you may view this judgment as only coming upon unbelievers. If you think this, you come to your conclusion theologically, and not textually. You have to put it all together in your eschatological system, about the nature and timing of the Millennium, and about what happens at the beginning and end of the Millennium. Many believe this.

However, the text seems pretty exhaustive to me. It mentions how all of the dead, the great and the small, whether buried at land or sea, all standing before the throne, with the books opened: 1) the books of their deeds, and 2) the book of life. This seems to me to be all of humanity. It seems to include all of us.

Your only hope in that day is that your name will be found in the book of life. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (verse 15). Verse 15 hints at the presence of believers at this throne of judgment, for it is their names that are written in the book of life. All of that sounds pretty exhaustive to me. That's why I say, "All Will Stand Before the Throne."

Let's look at how this throne is described in verse 11.

Revelation 20:11

Then I saw a great white throne

This throne is described with two adjectives: "great" and "white." "Great" represents the enormity of the throne. "White" represents the purity of the throne. This is the greatest of all judgment thrones.

In our country, our judgments come from the courts. The courts begin on the local level, if you lose your case, you can appeal your case to a state appellate court. if you lose at the appellate court, you can appeal your case to the state supreme court. if you lose at the state supreme court level, you can appeal to the supreme court of the United States. After that, there is no more appeals. But this throne we see in verse 11 is greater than our Supreme court. It is the highest court of the universe, upon which God himself resides. You can see that in verse 11.

Revelation 20:11

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.

God is seated on this throne, from where he declares the final judgment. As one can imagine, the thrice holy God, the holy, holy, holy God, will issue forth his perfect judgment from this throne. That's why it's a white throne. It is a perfectly fair and just throne, with no injustice. Look at how great and terrifying this throne is.

Revelation 20:11

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.

The earth and sky "fly away," and cannot find a resting place. The earth and sky could be anywhere in this universe. anywhere in our solar system. anywhere in our galaxy. anywhere between all of the billions and billions of galaxies in the universe. But here, "no place was found for them." Embrace the apocalyptic imagery here in verse 11. It all speaks to the greatness of this throne, where all of creation attempts to flee the judgment of God. but it is all in vain. In verse 12, we see those who stand before the throne.

Revelation 20:12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne.

This alludes to the resurrection of all who have died. because they are now "standing." That is, they are alive, having been resurrected. The adjectives "great and small" are inclusive, meaning that this is everyone: the great of this world, and the small and insignificant of the world. We see here that everyone who ever died, will appear here before the throne of God for the final judgment. We read the following in verse 13:

Revelation 20:13

And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

Whether you are buried at sea or buried in a grave, you will be raised to stand before the throne. That's my point: "All Will Stand Before the Throne" in judgment. The judgment then comes in the second half of verse 12.

Revelation 20:12b

... 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.

This begins my second point.

2. All Will Be Judged by the Books (verses 12-15).

In the show, "This is Your Life," the host always held a single red book in his hand, from which he read all about the life of the guest. These books here are similar, only they tell everything about your life, not just little snippet of a few people in your life. This is everything you have ever done is in these books. I say this because that's what the end of verse 12 indicates.

Revelation 20:12

And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Our deeds have been written in the books. Somehow, in some way, God has recorded all of our deeds in these books. And they will be opened. and we will be judged accordingly. We see the same thing in verse 13.

Revelation 20:13

and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

I think that this is what Jesus meant when he said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36). God has all of your words written down in the books. And in the final judgment, you will give an account for every word that you have said. And if you know what James says about the tongue, you know your peril. James said, "For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body" (James 3:2).

As these books are opened, I don't think that it takes very long for the guilt of anyone standing before the throne to be established. In our day, when a case goes to trial, the trial may last a few days or a few weeks. In the final judgment, the trial will probably last only a few minutes at best for everyone. Guilt will be easily established. I want for you to think about all of the careless words that you have spoken. Think about when you have taken God's name in vain, or spoken a lie, or presented yourself as something that you weren't, or spoken against someone behind his back. It won't take long to establish the guilt of anybody. This is to say nothing of what people have done, it's all written in the books. the proof will be there for all the world to see.

I want for you to think about your sinful actions. Those times you were angry and lashed out at your spouse. Those times you were drunk. Those times you looked at what you shouldn't have seen. Those times when you laughed at the dirty jokes. Those times when you coveted your neighbors possessions. Those times when you stole something from your friend. Those times when you cheated someone out of their money. Those times when you were disobedient to your parents. Those times when you were boastful and proud. Those times when you were faithless and cowardly. These sorts of things are written in the books that will be opened at the final judgment. When it's your turn to be the guest on "This is Your Life," these things will be shown for all to see. It won't take long to establish your guilt.

Then comes the final judgment in verses 14 and 15.

Revelation 20:14-15

Then 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.

We have seen this "lake of fire" before. At the end of Revelation 19 (in verse 20), we saw the beast and the false prophet "thrown alive into

the lake of fire the burns with sulfur." In Revelation 20:10 we see the devil "thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur." And now, at the Great White Throne Judgment, "Death and Hades" will be thrown into this lake of fire as well. (verse 14). Finally, all who were judged by the books were "thrown into the lake of fire" (verse 15). There, they will join the ones they followed in this life, the beast, the false prophet, and the devil, himself.

The only ones who will escape this judgment are those whose names are written in the book of life. This is my third point:

3. The Book of Life is Your Only Hope (verse 15).

I think that on that final day of judgment, it will work like this: Everyone in the universe will stand before the Lord. He will open the books and establish the guilt of everyone. This is because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). On that day, it will be clear that all of mankind have followed in the ways of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We all have sinned. We all deserve that dreaded, "lake of fire." But there are some who will escape the judgement. They will escape because their name is written in another book.

Those who escape are those whose names are written in the book of life. Isn't that the conclusion of verse 15? "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (verse 15). In other words, "Only those who will escape the lake of fire will be those whose name is found written in the book of life" (verse 15 stated positively).

This is the gospel in all of its glory! That everyone is judged in accordance with their deeds. But there is a group of people who go free, not because they didn't commit any sins, not because their books were squeaky clean, but because they had their names written in the book!

When you step back a bit, you see that Jesus is the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood (Revelation 1:5). Jesus is the one who "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Jesus is the one who gives the white robes, washed in his blood (Revelation 7:14). He saves these people, not because of their own righteousness, but because of his mercy through the cross.

You say, "Whose names are written in this book?" I think that Revelation 13:8 answers this question better than any other verse in Revelation. "and all who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain" (Revelation 13:8). In other words, before time began, God wrote names in this book of life. As history unfolded, those whose names were written in the book proved themselves to be faithful to the Lord, rather than worshiping the beast.

And so, the ones who are saved from the condemnation at this final judgment, are those who have followed the lamb wherever he goes (Revelation 14:4). But it's not their faithfulness that saves them. It's the grace of God, that would write their names in the book of life.

So the question is this: is your name in the book? The book of Revelation has been leading up to this moment. When the sixth seal was opened, we saw many hiding themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, saying "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17). They were anticipating the day of God's wrath, which comes here at the great white throne.

You say, "How do I know?" Again, Revelation 13:8, "and all who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." Are you worshiping the beast? Are you following in the ways of the world? Or do you follow the Lamb, wherever he goes? Do you desire the company of his people? Do you sing his praise? Is this your joy? Is your name written in the book.

This is the fundamental point of application here this morning: Is your name written in the book of life?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 10, 2024 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0044296/plotsummary>.

[2] You can watch the episode here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7gpBjhBFyE>.