

Episode-265

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. Jeff and Kevin are joining me again today. We're going to continue our series on questions about the end times. We're kind of, sort of, mostly going chronologically as much as we can. The previous episode was about the Millennial Kingdom, the early parts of Revelation chapter 20, and, of course, elsewhere in Scripture. And the next episode will be on the new heavens and the new earth, what the book of Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture tells us about that.

Shea Houdmann

But at the end of Revelation 20, there's a short section, verses 11 to 15, that talks—or don't quote me on those references—but talks about the great white throne judgment. And then also elsewhere in Scripture, there's different passages that talk about the judgment seat of Christ. So we thought this would be a good place for us to discuss the final judgment, final judgments, both the timing of them and how they're distinct from each other.

Shea Houdmann

Generally speaking, the judgment seat of Christ, which is mentioned in Romans and also in 1 Corinthians—in Romans chapter 14—says, "...for we will all stand before God's judgment seat, so that each of us will give an account of himself to God." And then in 1 Corinthians—sorry, 2 Corinthians chapter 5—says, "...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." The great white throne judgment, Revelation 20, 11 through 15, describes what we think is a different judgment.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, Kevin, in researching this, there's some people who see these as two aspects of the same judgment, one for believers, one for unbelievers, some completely separate them both in time and in purpose. In your research, what did you guys find? What are the best reasons for considering these two entirely separate judgments?

Kevin Stone

Well, I think, one, what you just mentioned is different purposes. The purpose of the great white throne judgment is to judge unbelievers, and it looks like the result of that is that they are thrown into the lake of fire. It's their final judgment. It takes care of the evildoers and the sin problem once and for all. The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is quite different. Its purpose is to reward faithfulness among the believers. It is a judgment for believers and

not for unbelievers. So I see that as a big difference, and I see these two judgments as separate.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, I would agree. There's different terminology. It's kind of a different vibe that you get with the two of them. It is biblically possible that they could be the same and that they're different in terms of the philosophical implications of it or whatever, but timing also has something to do with it. The great white throne is described as happening after the millennial kingdom, after the defeat of Satan, and then right before the next subject, new heavens and new earth. So the way the timing of it works, it's sort of in that framework where it kind of makes sense that this would be a judgment of sin, not necessarily a judgment on good things.

Jeff Laird

But like you were saying, Kevin, there's differences between the two of them. There's two different words used. The word for the judgment seat of Christ has something to do with what we think of judging with athletics, whereas the great white throne is a little bit more intimidating. So reasonably, I think we can say they're almost definitely two separate events. But then again, when you're talking about judgment by God in eternity, it's all kind of one in the same anyway.

Kevin Stone

You also run across kind of a hybrid view that there will be some believers who are judged at the great white throne, specifically those who were saved during the time of the millennium, the righteous of the millennium. So there's a judgment at the end of the millennium as God puts down that Gog and Magog battle. But then the righteous have yet to receive their rewards as well. And so some people consider there's a portion of the great white throne judgment that will be devoted to just rewarding the righteous from that time of the millennial kingdom.

Shea Houdmann

Very true. And different passages that you look in Matthew 24, it talks about the sheep and the goats judgment. And there's some sort of ruling and reigning of believers with Christ in the millennial kingdom. So some people see the judgment seat of Christ happening before the millennial kingdom to help determine what our both our rewards are and what our roles are in the millennial kingdom. And then the judgment seat of Christ, sorry, the great white throne being the end of the millennial kingdom. So likely separated by a thousand years.

Shea Houdmann

But like Jeff was saying, we're talking about eternity, what's a thousand years between friends. But yes, I think it is important to see these as two very different things just based on the descriptions, which we'll get to here in a second. So Kevin, what is the judgment seat of Christ? What do we need to know?

Kevin Stone

Well, the judgment seat of Christ, or in Greek, it's one word, the bema of Christ, is this judgment that all believers will be experiencing. Paul says that all of us must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And this is a time where faithfulness will be rewarded and our works will be examined. You know, what did we do for Jesus? How faithful were we? How yielded to the Holy Spirit were we? You know, versus how much did we go off on our own and not live by faith and things like that. So there's a reckoning. There is an accounting that each of us will be making to Christ, and it'll be a time of reward for faithfulness.

Kevin Stone

And then for those believers who had periods of unfaithfulness or disobedience, they will suffer a lack of reward. And I think that's what Paul means when they're in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10. Shea, you read that verse, but we will receive the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. I think the bad there, or in other translations, the evil, is the loss of reward. We will suffer loss during that time if we did not make wise choices, godly choices, with the time and the resources that we had here on earth.

Kevin Stone

Paul likens this time of judgment to a time of testing of a building.

And here in 1 Corinthians 3, he writes this, each one should build with care, for no one can lay any foundation other than that one that is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each one's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up—wood, hay, stubble, wood, hay, straw—the builder will suffer loss, yet will be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Kevin Stone

And so, notice it's not the person who goes through the fire, but it is the person's works that are tested by fire.

And that's the analogy that Paul uses. So, it's like somebody who escapes from a burning home. He's safe and sound, but he watches his building, his home, go up in flames. And what a loss that is, what sorrow there will be over

the loss of everything that he had built. So, Paul warns, hey, pay attention to how you're building in this life. What are you building on your foundation, which is Christ? How are you living your Christian life? It will be tested someday.

Kevin Stone

It's important to understand that this judgment seat of Christ, though, is not a judgment of sin. Sin has already been judged at the cross. Jesus has taken care of that sin penalty on our behalf. We will not be judged for our sins. In fact, we are secure in our salvation. Our destiny is sealed. Romans 8, verse 1, one of my favorite passages, I come to it a lot. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And I just want to underline that, no condemnation. We are not going to be condemned for our sins at this judgment. This is not a judgment where we are being sentenced to a punishment based on crimes we've committed. It's a different type of judgment where our works are being evaluated and we are being rewarded if the reward is indeed warranted.

Kevin Stone

I'm from a rural town in Kansas, small town in Kansas, and we have these county fairs. And the ladies in the community will often bake these pies and they'll have a pie contest. And there's a judge there, sometimes a couple of judges, but this judge will be tasting the pie and will be giving out blue ribbons to those whose pies are worthy of a blue ribbon. The judge's purpose is not to condemn the bad pies, to say how horrible that is. His only purpose is to reward the good pies. And this is the judgment seat of Christ. This is how we use the word judgment when we're talking about the judgment seat of Christ. His purpose is not to condemn anyone. Believers are forgiven of their sin. His job at this will be to reward faithfulness, reward godliness through life.

Kevin Stone

We are promised eternal life. John 5, verse 24, Jesus says, very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but is crossed over from death to life. Our curse is removed. Galatians 3 and verse 13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He took our penalty, and the price has been paid for. First Peter 2, verse 24, he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds, we have been healed, and our sin has been exchanged for righteousness. Second Corinthians 5 and verse 21 says, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So we are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We're going to give an account of ourselves.

Kevin Stone

Jesus told parables about how a king would go to a distant country. He came back, and then he'd call his servants in front of him and say, okay, give me the report. This is reckoning day. And so what did you do with the resources that I left for you? And then he gives out these rewards. Hey, you took, you had your 10 minas, and you added to them another 10 minas. I'm going to put you in charge of 10 cities. The reward is totally out of proportion with the work that was done. That's all because of God's grace. Even in this judgment, we're going to be magnifying God's grace because it's all by grace. It's the only reason we're in heaven, is God's grace.

Jeff Laird

I like the idea that we can understand that that judgment is not going to be about punishment. You're talking about county fair, made an analogy to children's arcades. Probably some people are familiar with, I won't use the brand name because we'll probably get slapped with something. But the places you go, you put money in the machines and they spit out the little tickets and you take the tickets up to the counter afterwards and you can get rewards for that. That's when you go up there, they will counterweigh those. That's a judgment. And it's the same thing. There's nothing negative about that. It's not like they're saying, well, you have to have a certain number of these or you can't stay. It's just saying, this is what you were able to come up with. What's the reward going to be for that?

Jeff Laird

Another analogy was something like a dog show where they're judging the dogs. All the dogs who are there at that final round are already in. They're already approved. They're already selected and redeemed in a sense in that way. So the judgment that's happening there is not about condemning anyone or anything. So yes, God's going to judge us as believers, but that's not going to be him condemning or shaming or embarrassing us for the things that are there. It's interesting to think that we are, he's going to weigh what we're doing, but he's not going to hold us accountable for the things that Christ has already taken the blame for.

Kevin Stone

That's good. Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

It's a good illustration, Jeff. I mean, there is a flaw in it though. I remember one time, I think I was at a Chuck E. Cheese as a kid and I think I played ski ball for probably two hours and had, in my opinion, the longest string of tickets I'd ever seen in my life. And I think I had enough to purchase like a pack of

gum. There was a little bit of disappointment going on there, but maybe that speaks more to my ski ball ability than it does to anything else.

Kevin Stone

But there's no grace there. Judgment seat of Christ, it's going to be rewards based on grace.

Jeff Laird

You'll get a better rate of return in heaven, I'm pretty sure.

Shea Houdmann

For sure. With the judgment seat, the only other question I think that we get in common was from people who are fearful of it. They hear the term judgment and they just think condemnation. And I love the focus that you two have both emphasized about how this is about rewards. And yes, we may see some things that we did in this life that we did for the wrong reason with the wrong attitude, see those burned up, but it's not about condemnation. It's not about our salvation. It is about just recognizing what we did for Christ. And I believe everyone at the judgment seat of Christ, which will be every believer in Christ, will hear good and faithful servant. Degrees of rewards, the amount, the quantity of rewards might be different, but we're all entering God's kingdom. We're all entering the new heavens and the new earth, which we cover next week, most glorious place imaginable.

Shea Houdmann

So I don't want to minimize the importance of rewards, but remember that we're all receiving the tremendous award of spending eternity with Christ on the new heavens and new earth. So whatever judgment there is, whatever disappointment there might be, it's stuff being burned up. It's not entirely clear, but remember, we're all saved. That doesn't change, and where we'll be spending eternity will not be impacted either at the judgment seat of Christ.

Kevin Stone

For those that are fearful of standing before the judgment seat of Christ, I would point to a couple passages in scripture that are really good to meditate on. These are good passages to hide in your heart and just have available to you. If you know Jesus, I mean, if you are in Christ, then you can come boldly before that throne of judgment, the bema, as Jesus is going to be asking for us to give an account.

Kevin Stone

But here are those passages. Psalm 62 and verse 12. With you, Lord, is unfailing love. You reward everyone according to what they have done. But focus on that unfailing love, never-ending mercies that are his. And then Psalm 103 verses 10 through 12. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the

earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so are, as he removed our transgressions from us. These passages and many more just stress the fact of God's forgiveness and his grace. If you are in Christ, then you have the inheritance that Christ receives. He shares it with us. And this time of judgment, as we call it, the bema seat of Christ, is a time of his reward for the faithful. And we just need to pray that we would be faithful always.

Jeff Laird

I remember when I was a kid, people used to ask, and you'd be worried about saying, is God going to play a video of everything I've ever done in my entire life in front of everybody? You know, because the Bible talks about how, you know, everything secret is going to be made public and, you know, nothing's going to be hidden from God's sight and things like that. And I'm inclined, first of all, to think that's not likely to happen. But I also know that we need to understand that when we're at the judgment seat of Christ, this bema seat, we're going to be in a condition where we've been translated from this world that we're dealing with right now. And frankly, at that point in time, we're not going to care. Every single person around us is going to be a fellow sinner redeemed by grace. And I don't think that even if that did happen, that that would be something that would really concern us.

Jeff Laird

But I really come down to, I love Hebrews chapter four, verses 15 and 16. And I bring these up to people all the time, because those verses tell us that Jesus lived as a person, he knows what temptation means, and he knows what it's like. And it's because of that, that we should be able to have the perspective of coming to the throne of grace with confidence. In other words, we go to God at this, this kind of judgment, and even in our daily lives, not feeling a fear of retribution, but knowing that he's willing to forgive because we're coming to him that way.

Jeff Laird

So I think that the overall mood at the bema seat is going to be very joyful. I don't think there's going to be anything there that's going to be negative in any sense whatsoever for us when we're there, which, as we were saying before, is another reason why we think that there's probably a completely different event from the white throne judgment, which has a totally different attitude.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, excellent segue there, Jeff.

Jeff Laird

I do what I can.

Shea Houdmann

The judgment seat of Christ, again, there is judgment that's taking place there, judgment of our works, and I don't want to minimize that, but it's not a judgment of our salvation. It does not impact where we spend eternity. And passages talk about us receiving various crowns. There's, I think, five, six, seven different crowns that believers receive based on various things. And then most Bible scholars say these are the crowns that we'll eventually throw at Christ's feet anyway. So not minimizing rewards. If God promises rewards for something, I think we should treat that very significantly. But at the same time, in light of what Christ has done for us, no award we're going to earn is going to compare. So let's just keep the right perspective about what's taking place there. So back to the segue, Jeff, what is the great white throne judgment? What do we need to know?

Jeff Laird

Well, the great white throne judgment is sort of the other side of the coin of this idea that scripture tells us that every single person is going to have a face-to-face meeting with God in one way or another. And at the great white throne, what we see is this is where God is sending out his decree, his sentencing, his punishment on sin and the evil things that have happened. So you see where it's tucked into Revelation after the defeat of Satan, after the millennial kingdom, but before the new heavens and the new earth. And it's the results of the great white throne that sees all of those who are not part of Christ, who are not part of that relationship and family, wind up being separated from God forever.

Jeff Laird

So this is the moment where God is going to possibly more likely, we were talking about this idea of a public hearing, is he's going to open up these account books and he's going to be able to say, you did this and said this and thought this, and this is where you were. And the people who cannot say, I have no other excuse other than I'm a sinner and I came to Christ in faith, that person's just going to be out of luck. There's going to be nothing there that's going to rescue them. And the consequences for that are really terrible. So in that sense, we should think of the great white throne with sadness, not with fear in any sense. If you're in Christ, you have nothing to fear from it, but it's definitely not something that we should look at and think, oh, this is going to be a celebratory or a triumphant moment. So the dead are going to be judged by what's written in the books according to what they had done is what scripture says. And then everything there is going to be judged.

Jeff Laird

If we don't have a saving relationship with Jesus, you're basically going to be standing in front of a judge who's going to say, you owe me something you could never possibly pay. And you have no mitigating circumstances whatsoever.

Jeff Laird

We also have to remember that the whole book of Revelation, Revelation especially, is God reiterating the idea that I'm going to make myself known. I'm going to make myself clear. Book of Romans says that he does that in our daily lives to begin with. So all through our lives and all through history, God's going to make himself known. And if we don't choose to come to him, there is no excuse. There just is no way for us to get away from that. And the great white throne is essentially the sentencing where God says, this is what's going to happen now that you've done that.

Jeff Laird

On the flip side, at least for believers, there is a good aspect to the great white throne is that Jesus has covered the cost, the penalty, the punishment of the sins of believers already. And at the great white throne, this is when the last of that bill is going to be paid. So when the great white throne is over, every single sin, every thought, every action, every consequence, everything evil that has ever happened is going to have been settled and punished. And the very next thing that happens is God making all things new and wiping away tears and so on and so forth.

Jeff Laird

So when we see evil and we see bad and we see horrible things, it's good to remember that absolutely all of that is going to be paid for and fixed one way or the other. And we really mean everything. Romans 2:6 says that every single person is going to be judged according to their works. Matthew 12:36 says that every idle word is part of that. And verses just before the ones I was talking about in Hebrews in verse 13, it talks about how everyone's naked in front of God, basically. Nothing's going to be hidden. Nothing's going to get away. So nobody gets away with anything.

Jeff Laird

So there's a terrible aspect to the great white throne. There's a fearful aspect because that's the moment when the eternal consequences finally kick in for all these things. But it is also the point where God completely fulfills all these promises that he's made that sin and evil are going to be dealt with forever. So that will be the moment where that aspect of God's plan in creation is finally complete. And for the believers in Christ, that's a good thing.

Kevin Stone

Yes, that is a good thing, Jeff. And I'm glad you bring that out, that it's going to be a, there's going to be a note of finality to the great white throne judgment. What a somber time, very serious time as God judges all sin throughout all of history. And the wicked are resurrected in order to stand before this final judgment of God. And the books are opened, all the records are read, and nobody's going to have a leg to stand on. I mean, they committed sin against a holy God, and they rejected their only hope of salvation. And they will be thrown into the lake of fire that burns forever and ever. It's very somber time, and yet a very necessary time. God has to close the books, as it were, on sin and quarantine evil forever in that lake of fire.

Kevin Stone

So I think we have the record of this, the prophecy that this will happen for some very good reasons, one of which is it's a wake-up call to anyone who is outside of Christ today, to those who think that they can live however they want, and nobody sees them. They will never have to give a reckoning. You know, the end of Revelation says otherwise. The end of Revelation says there is someone on the throne in heaven, and he sees all, and he keeps records, careful records, accurate records in the book. And those books will be opened, and it's by those actions that sinners are committing today that they themselves will be judged. And there's only one escape, and that is to trust in Jesus today. Today is the day of salvation, and it is God's gracious gift, his own Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jeff Laird

And that's me, and you, Kevin, and you, Shea, and everybody listening, and everybody else. There is not a single person in the world who doesn't need that, and there's only going to be redeemed former sinners and sinners in the end. There's nothing I'm going to be able to present to God to say, well, there's a reason that I'm here and other people are not. The reason is literally just going to be God's grace and his mercy in that. So it's encouraging also to remember that, because that means there's nobody who hears something like this who's outside the reach of that. So everybody's got a chance to avoid the great white throne and experience the Bemis seat if you're willing to act on it, and that's also a good thing.

Shea Houdmann

Yes, for sure. Again, trying to think of different questions that we receive about the great white throne, and again, the passage is Revelation 20, and in verses, Jeff, you mentioned this briefly, like, Revelation 20, verse 12, and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done. 13, each one of them according to what they had done. And then

all of them were, everyone who's at the great white throne is thrown into the lake of fire. But those, the repeated references to judged according to what they had done leads some to conclude that in addition, like, if there are different levels of reward in heaven, that there are also different levels of punishment in hell. What are your thoughts on that possibility?

Jeff Laird

Me specifically? I think that it's reasonable to believe that that is something that makes sense for exactly the reason that you just said. If there can be heavenly rewards that vary based on what we have or have not done, it would seem to make sense that there can be eternal consequences that vary based on what we have or have not done.

Jeff Laird

I also know that, you know, there are some scales that we use in things like science, music, even finance, where there's one end point, and then the other side of that equation goes into infinity. I think that there comes a point where being eternally separated from your creator in a state of hopelessness and shame and loneliness, you probably peg the needle at some point in time on that, to where it really, it's hard to imagine how it could be worse. Like, how does it get worse for one person rather than another?

Jeff Laird

Whereas on the other side, you can imagine that there could be, you know, an ever greater and greater sense of good things in heaven. So I would be open to the idea that, yes, there's levels of punishment and ranks of punishment for what happened to people in hell. But then again, I think that whatever distinction is there isn't going to make the slightest bit of difference to anybody who's in the new heavens and new earth, and it's certainly not going to make a whole lot of difference to the people who are suffering from it in hell at the time.

Kevin Stone

Yes, I'm also open to the idea of degrees of punishment in the lake of fire. It would seem to naturally be the case if, since there do seem to be degrees of reward in heaven, and that's the purpose of the bema seed, so just, you know, corresponding to that, you know, it would make sense for there to be degrees of punishment in hell. And then there's also Jesus' parable, and I'm not going to be able to give you the reference here, but where the end of the parable, the master is beating his servants, his disobedient ones, and Jesus speaks of those who receive many stripes versus those who receive few stripes. And it's based on their knowledge of the master's will, and then their obedience or disobedience in carrying it out. So that seems to also indicate degrees of punishment in the final judgment.

Jeff Laird

Nothing as extensive as what you read in classic of literature is Dante's Inferno, where there's separate circles with these custom-designed tortures and things like that. There's nothing in scripture that describes anything specifically when it comes to that sort of stuff. The great white throne does not include any mentions of something that specific. You know, so that which could be, you know, different degrees, we really have no idea exactly what that means.

Shea Houdmann

Maybe another hint, clue, of this possibility is in the verse immediately preceding verses 11 to 15 of Revelation 20, where it says, And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. So if you were to name the big three—three of the most worthy—they also seem to be the first three who were thrown into the lake of fire. So the antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan, and presumably the demons along with him.

Shea Houdmann

So the possibility of different levels of judgment, of torment, yes. But how exactly that will work, as you said, Jeff, so well—eternal separation from God, and loneliness, and despair, and hopelessness. I don't know how you make that worse, but there are various passages we talk about that at least seem to hint of that possibility.

Shea Houdmann

But the key point of all of this is that you want to stand before the judgement seat of Christ not the great white throne. And thankfully the way to determine that is up to you. My Calvinist friends aside might dispute that statement to a degree but the Bible says, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That if you understand that Jesus died for your sins, was resurrected demonstrating his victory over sin. You're trusting in him and Him alone as the full atonement, payment for your sin, relying on Him as your Savior according to the Bible, you are saved and you will stand before the judgement seat to receive rewards rather than the great white throne to receive final and unending judgment. So obviously any questions about salvation, how to guarantee your spot at the judgement seat rather than the great white throne please submit a question at Got Questions or read the different articles on how to be saved or what does it mean to trust in Christ as your personal Savior.

Shea Houdmann

But Jeff, Kevin thank you as always for this conversation today. I hope you hear our heart in this, our desire. Not only here is what the Bible says about these two judgments but why we believe they are distinct and why you definitely want to be at the judgment seat rather than the great white throne. So hope our conversation has been helpful today. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.