

This Sunday's Sermon

I PROMISE...YOU WILL NEVER DIE ~ LUKE 20:27-38

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Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."



Dear children of God's promises,

On occasion, when I am not preparing a sermon or a Bible class, visiting people, or helping Kristin with the two kids, I tend to find myself looking at different pages on the internet. One of the pages I came across this last week was a blog that someone had referenced from Facebook. Now, there are some people that are absolutely crazy about blogs – either writing them or reading them, and that's fine, I'm just usually not the kind of person who could become addicted to blogging. Anyway, this particular blog told of a believer describing what heaven is like to an atheist friend. "It's a beautiful place" he said, "filled with joy and happiness. The grass is always green, there is no pain or sickness, you will be reunited with friends and family, even those ones who are dead." The atheist responded, "That sounds nice, I would love to go to a place like you described." He paused, "Especially, since you didn't mention anything about God being there."

Whoops! How could someone forget about the most obvious part of heaven? Whether that was an accidental omission or a Freudian slip, it is really a reflection of the way much of the world thinks about heaven, or at least life after death. If given a choice to go to a spiritual 5-star resort on the beach without God, or a one room dreary shack with him, plenty of people would pack up their beach clothes and pull out their sandals. But what people want based on their beliefs is not always going to happen, because what they want may not exist.

Today, we hear about Jesus talking about heaven a little bit. Certainly this is a wonderful topic to talk about. But like the Sadducees in the gospel for this morning, we can only see the true beauty of heaven when we abandon our human constructs, and remember this promise from God. I PROMISE...YOU WILL NEVER DIE:

1. Being considered worthy
2. Like the angels

As I said, heaven is certainly a wonderful topic to talk about, especially when we actually take a look at what God's word says. If we go back to the Sadducees for a moment, it's actually quite an interesting request that they made. Most of the time in the gospels we hear about a group called the Pharisees, the Sadducees were different. Think of these different Jewish groups almost as political parties. One of the things that made the Sadducees different was that they didn't even believe in a resurrection, and yet, they ask Jesus a question about the resurrection. This gives you an idea of the kind of deceitfulness people were trying to pull on Jesus.

Their question about the woman who married seven brothers was all smoke and mirrors. They didn't care about Jesus' answer, they were content in what they believed and their perception of the future. All they wanted was to discredit Jesus. But far from discrediting him, Jesus answered in a way only God's Son could – in a way that squashed their deceit and told of an even greater truth. This is a greater truth, that sadly, many people don't see the complete picture – similar to the earlier believer's description of heaven. Not only does this keep us from seeing the full picture or heaven, leaving something God says out could be dangerous. So we look at God's promise, **YOU WILL NEVER DIE**:

(1)

Jesus answered the question about marriage in an irrefutable way. He used the story of Moses and the burning bush, something the Sadducees believed in, and used it in a way to show God to be a God of the living. God said to Moses in that encounter, **"I am the God of Abraham, I am the God of Isaac, I am the God of Jacob."** Not "He was the God of Abraham." Abraham still lived. This was proof of life after death. But Jesus said this life after death was not to be the same as this life is. Marriage, he said, was just one example, **"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage...but those who will take part in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage."**

Now, many people, especially those who are happily married, might look at this at first and say how sad. I can't believe I won't be married to my spouse. Some people, including the Mormons, reject these words of Jesus and talk about eternal marriages and eternal families. But what Jesus says is certainly not sad, he is basically saying the marriage contract expires after this life. Our relationships with our spouse or family will be different because all those in heaven will be part of God's family.

Marriage is just one of the many human constructs people automatically apply to heaven, human constructs that can frankly be quite unbiblical. Another one that causes a lot of consternation is when Jesus says, **"those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age."** There's the thought out there, I'm sure you've heard of it, that says, it doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter what you believe, everyone is going to end up in heaven someday. Not only does this ruin the picture God paints of heaven, but it also is a dangerous heresy. Because Jesus says only those who are considered worthy. This certainly doesn't sound like everyone is going to get in. But what does Jesus mean by worthy?

Again, people attach their own definitions of what it means to be worthy. They might say being worthy is trying to be good here on earth, helping others out etc. They might say being worthy is belonging to the right church. They might say being worthy is dependent upon how I feel my relationship

with God is. Most of these sound great, but that's not the definition of worth God uses. Those who are worthy enough to take part in the resurrection are perfect, something that we certainly are not. So now our worth must rest on something else, on Jesus.

When our worthiness rests on Jesus, it means we give up our own thoughts about the Bible or what heaven will be like and let him not only paint us the picture, but do all the work in getting us there. Getting there isn't even dependent on our faith, it is dependent on him. Our worthiness is connected with the promise of God we have this morning – I PROMISE...YOU WILL NEVER DIE. Our fear of physical death may still accompany us all our days, but a believer knows physical death is not the end, because of the promise, YOU WILL NEVER DIE.

We are worthy to be called “**God's children...children of the resurrection.**” Think of what an amazing thing it is to be able to call God – dad. God is the perfect picture of what a dad, of what a father should be – always caring for his family, giving his family what is best. And that's true not only in heaven, but even while we are here on earth.

(2)

Today is the Sunday in the year that we call Saints Triumphant Sunday. And when we say Saints Triumphant, we are not just going to focus on St. Peter, St. Paul and all those other really, really, good people, but we are going to focus on you and me. You are saints, you are saints triumphant because of Jesus' blood. It doesn't matter which direction your life may be taking. This is something you enjoy right now, this is something that makes your life worth living right now, because Christ has triumphed. And what you see in part now, you will see completely in heaven. What you see as a shadow now, you will see as reality in heaven. Because YOU WILL NEVER DIE...you will be like the angels.

Now what exactly does like the angels mean? When most people hear that they imagine floating up in heaven on clouds, playing harps, flapping your wings, going through an everlasting practice session for a concert. But that is not the way Jesus describes it at all, and this is another place, where we should not let our own opinions about heaven taint the way God describes it. He paints a wonderful picture.

The original comparison Jesus gave of us being like the angels is that we will not marry and be given in marriage. Angels do not have husbands or wives. Neither will we have spouses in heaven, instead we will be part of a new family structure, God's family structure. How else will we be like the angels? The picture of angels racing about on clouds and playing harps is not a Biblical one. We will be like them in that we will be in the presence of a holy and perfect God. The book of Revelation paints a vivid and wonderful picture of this great setting with the God sitting on his throne, he is surrounded by all the hosts of heaven and being worshiped and praised endlessly.

Now maybe an endless worship service may not seem like your cup of tea, you would rather be racing around on clouds. But that again is a human perception of something heavenly. While we are here on this earth, we will always be accompanied by a sinful nature that wants to do everything it can to draw us away from God. When we are in heaven, we will not have that. We will not think the same way about this scene. Perhaps something to compare it to might be going to a game of your favorite sports team, or a concert of your favorite musician.

But also think about what worship is. Yes, we normally think of worship as coming to church on Sunday, and that is worship. But worship is also done in your lives – when you're at home, when you're at work. You worship the Lord your God in everything you do. Our endless worship in heaven will likely not be like an earthly worship service we have here. But just as we worship God in all we do here, we will be worshiping God in all we do there. Compare it perhaps with the only perfect time our world enjoyed – Adam and Eve in the Garden. They were given the task to take care of the Garden of Eden. And they did that, they enjoyed that, they worshiped God. I think that is more what it is going to be like in heaven.

If you can remember all the way back to the beginning of this sermon, I began with a believer's description of heaven. He described heaven as this wonderful place, but he forgot to insert God. It is God who makes heaven, heaven. The best part about heaven is not the living forever, it's not the streets paved with gold, it's not some great family reunion. It is standing face to face before a holy God. It is something we are only able to do because we have been made worthy, being washed clean by Jesus' blood. Rejoice in your destiny fellow saints. Rejoice in your triumph. Amen.