

Saints Triumphant - Third Sunday of End Time

November 14, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 20:27-38

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." (NIV)

Take a moment and just imagine heaven. Can you picture it? That is a difficult thing to do, isn't it? It is hard to imagine a place we have never seen or have no experience of whatsoever. People have tried to paint pictures of heaven. I've seen it as a big golden city taken from the imagery of Revelation. Others portray it as clouds with everyone floating around with wings and playing harps. Some have drawn pictures of a big stairway leading to God who looks like a grandfather type figure with the big white beard. Others paint a pearly gate with people waiting to get inside. Martin Luther once said that for us to talk about heaven is like twin fetuses talking about what life will be like outside their mother's womb. In other words, we won't really know what heaven is like until we get there and experience it for ourselves.

Part of that is God doesn't give us many details regarding heaven. His Word almost tells us more about what is not there - no pain - no sorrow - no tears - no death. But throughout the Scriptures we are given details about heaven. If we take note and listen carefully we find little bits of information about what a believer's life will be like for all eternity. We are told more about life after death in our lesson. We get this information because some skeptics want to hear how anyone could possibly believe in a place like heaven. Just like it is today, whether there is a resurrection from the dead was a question debated in Jesus' day and there were many varying opinions about life after death. Thankfully, we get an answer from the person who knows best this morning. We get an answer from our eternal God and Savior of mankind. We get an answer from Jesus, even though this question was asked as a way to trap Him rather than learn from Him. Today, may we listen to Jesus and learn more as we ask: **What is heaven like?**

It is the Tuesday before Jesus will be crucified. Jesus' enemies, in their hatred toward Jesus' and jealousy of His popularity, are looking for evidence to bring against Jesus. The Pharisees and Herodians band together first and try to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes. They fail miserably as Jesus gives them a brilliant answer once again astonishing the people. So now another group takes their shot at Jesus. Here come the Sadducees. They were fewer in number than the Pharisees but they had much

power and influence on the high Jewish Council. Their leanings were more political and they worked with the Romans to keep their power. The Sadducees were very much like the rationalists of our age who refuse to believe what they cannot see with their own eyes or understand with their own minds. They denied anything supernatural. They only accepted the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as the inspired Scripture. They denied angels and also the resurrection.

So they turn to Jesus saying **“Teacher,”** and put before Him a wild scenario in an attempt make the teaching of the resurrection look ridiculous and Jesus look foolish. They refer to the levirate law which God put into place for the nation of Israel so that when a man died his name would not die out. If a man died while childless, the closest brother would marry his wife so the oldest male child would take that name. So using this law Moses handed down to them, they say what if this happened seven times and this woman was married to seven different men and then she died. They ask: **“Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”** Now in their minds they had Jesus for sure. How could Jesus ever get out of this one? There is no way Jesus could answer whose wife she would be in heaven. They finally thought they had an unsolvable question to stump the Teacher.

Do we ever approach Jesus and His Word in a similar way or question things we do not really know about? When we don't like something God says or don't understand what the Bible is saying, do we ever try to turn or twist things to come out our way? We may not directly approach Jesus trying to prove His Word wrong, but do we ever have our doubts like well-known Thomas did? Do we ever doubt what happens on the other side of the grave? Do we ever look for proof we can see with our own eyes and facts we can understand with our own minds? Do we ever join the world in asking questions like: *God if you really are so loving why is there so much evil in this world? Or if you want it so bad why don't you just make everyone believe? Or if God is so powerful why doesn't He just get rid of Satan?* Or any other questions where we attempt to back God into a corner? First of all, any time we speak without knowledge or try to challenge God in this way, it is sin. Any time we doubt or question God or His Word in this way, it is sin. And in the end it will never be God who looks ridiculous and foolish, but the sinner who doubts or tries to back God up against a wall.

All the Sadducees end up doing with this question is show how foolish and faithless they are! Before Jesus replies, Matthew and Mark record for us how Jesus turns to these high ranking people of society and says: ***“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”*** They did not know what they were talking about because they did not listen to God's Words. They were talking about things of which they did not have a clue. Nor did they trust or recognize the power of God. They only believed what they could see or rationalize. So Jesus gives a little lesson saying: ***“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.”***

What is heaven like? Jesus tells us a little bit more, doesn't He? There is no need for marriage in heaven because it is an earthly institution. No children will be born in heaven and no one can ever die in heaven so the number of people will be set. We will be like the angels who are elected in a perfect state without any sin. But more important than giving us a few more details about what heaven is like, Jesus assures us there is a heaven. There is life after death. Did you catch the point Jesus makes to these Sadducees? Notice Jesus quotes from Exodus - the part of the Scriptures these leaders said they believed to make this point. Jesus says even Moses shows that the dead rise for the Lord is called the God of three men who were buried a long time ago. The Bible does not say God was the God but that He still is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are alive because the Lord has taken them to be with Him. The Lord will raise their bodies too on the last day. There is no question about it because God has spoken on the subject. The dead will rise. There is a heaven.

But once again there is something more important than knowing about heaven. Far more important, than trying to find out what heaven will be like, is making sure that one day we are there. As Jesus puts it that we are counted worthy of taking part in that age. That's why Jesus wants everyone to listen to His Word. He wants us to listen to Him so that we may be God's children and one day be children of the resurrection to life eternal. Jesus wants us to listen to Him as just days earlier He comforted Mary and Martha at the grave of their brother Lazurus saying: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"*** (John 11).

Jesus wants us to listen to Him because Jesus is the only reason we will be counted as worthy of taking part in that age. Jesus is our only ticket into heaven. That's because Jesus never questioned God's Word, not even two nights later in the Garden when God tells His own Son "No." Not even when sweat like blood dripped from His forehead as Jesus prayed for another way but was told by His Father the only way to save sinners is the way of the cross. Jesus makes us worthy because Jesus never doubted the power of God, not even a few days later when He was nailed to the tree with all our sinful questions and doubts. Jesus never wavered, not even when He was forsaken by God the Father and left to suffer the wrath of God for the sins of the whole world. Even as He bowed His head in death Jesus never doubted the power of God to raise Him from the dead. And God's Word did not fail Jesus as He was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus did not spend all His time telling us what heaven will be like, because Jesus was busy opening heaven for us. He made sure we have what we need to get there. He gives us forgiveness and righteousness. Through His Word and Sacraments He brings us to faith making us saints - victorious saints. We are God's children. That's the comforting truth of our lesson. We will live eternally as children of the resurrection. There is life after death. There is a heaven. God doesn't give us all the details, even today, of what heaven will be like, but I'm positive it is better than any picture we could ever paint. And far better than knowing exactly what heaven will be like, is knowing that because of Jesus that is where I want to be and that is where I am going. When Jesus calls our names and our bodies come out of the grave and we are taken with all believers into glory, when we are experiencing the joy and comfort of heaven, eternal pleasures at

God's hand, only then we will say: "*so this is what heaven is like, thank you Jesus.*"
Amen.