



What will **Heaven** be like?

Luke 20:27-40

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Is there life after death? If so, what will it be like? How old will I be there? What will we be doing there? Will I know everybody? What will I remember from this life? Or, as stated by two brothers, ages five and six. "Is mommy in heaven? How long does it take to get there? Can we go and see her? Will she know us when we get there? What's it like in heaven? Is there anything to eat - anything to do - a place to sleep? Can I go there and be with her?"

In today's text, Jesus is drawn into a discussion on the resurrection - not by people who cared about the issue for personal reasons, but by those who were determined to show how absurd the idea of resurrection really is. Jesus enters Jerusalem for his final week. He's constantly being engaged by the scribes and religious officials who are trying to bait him.

Every time Jesus speaks, agents of the establishment are waiting to find some charge against him. Some way to discredit Him in the eyes of the people. To make a fool out of Him. Earlier, they try to discredit Jesus by posing a question concerning paying taxes to Caesar. (*Luke 20:21-22*) Jesus answers in a way they never expected, elevating His status with the crowds even more.

So on this particular occasion Jesus had just shut the mouth of one group of disingenuous questioners when a group of Sadducees steps up to the plate. Perhaps the easiest way to describe the Sadducees is to say that they are the opposite of the Pharisees. If a Pharisee said "white," the Sadducee would argue, "black." The Sadducees weren't in agreement with all the traditions of the Pharisees. They rejected the concept of the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels and spirits. (*Acts 23:8*)

They consisted mainly of the more wealthy families, mostly from priestly and aristocratic clans. They generally collaborated with Roman officials, not wanting to rock the boat since they were doing quite well with the way things were. Most Jewish people supported the Pharisees, because they resisted any intrusion of Greek and Roman culture on their religion and identity. (*lectionarysermons.com/nov98-2.html*)

The Sadducees ask Jesus a hypothetical question about the resurrection, even though they don't believe in the resurrection. We see their passion on this subject in the book of Acts. **Acts 4** *As [Peter and John] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day.*

Also in **Acts 23**. The Jews in Jerusalem are upset with Paul and a riot begins to break out. During his defense, Paul raises the question of resurrection before the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious counsel, in order to save his life. *Acts 23:6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."*

7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" 10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

And so, the Sadducees ask Jesus a hypothetical question about something they didn't believe. Why would they do that? To show that belief in a resurrection from the dead is both unbiblical and impractical. *28 "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. 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"*

The question is based on a command given in the law by God through Moses. *If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.* (Dt 25:5-6)

The purpose of this regulation was to assure that each family and tribe in Israel was perpetuated by the bearing of children. When the oldest brother married, but died before having any children, the younger brother was to take the widow as his wife so that the first son would carry on the name of the deceased. Here was a very practical law, given to assure future generations.

Of course, the Sadducees don't have this purpose in mind when they cite this text. Rather, like Satan did with Jesus out in the desert, they use this text in a way it was never intended to be used. They use it as a proof text for their denial of the resurrection of the dead. After all, if the resurrection were true, it would mean all kinds of impossible scenarios.

34 Jesus replies, *"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 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, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.*

Matthew 22:29 But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham ... (Ex. 3)

Jesus is arguing for a "new age," as very distinct from the "old" order of things. The Sadducees speak of the kingdom in terms of the present. Their entire argument rests on a single premise: in the kingdom of God (which they didn't believe in anyway), things will go on pretty much like they are now, marriage being one example. Thus, a woman who was married to seven brothers would be in a terrible predicament in heaven. Who would be her husband? (*Deffinbaugh*) How often do we make the same mistake the Sadducees made? What are we prone to do? We take life as we experience it now and project it into life after death. Heaven, we suppose, is a lot like things on earth – only perfect.

Jesus' response to the Sadducees translates to something like, "People don't get married in the resurrection. And why would they? There's no need to have offspring, to produce heirs. Parents won't be needed to raise children. They will be children of God, part of His eternal family. Brothers and sisters led and cared for by their Heavenly Father."

The entire arrangement of sex, marriage, reproduction, childbirth, and any laws pertaining to these, is valid for this age only. For this earthly life, and not for the heavenly age to come – for, like the angels, people no longer die there. No replenishment is necessary in heaven. People in this age die, and thus the need for God to spell out through Moses provisions for preserving the family name. And as the number of the angels was complete and fixed from the time of creation onward, so it will be with God's children in the age to come. (*Lenski*)

The Book of Revelation paints a picture of streets of pure gold (no cracks or pot holes) and yet, they're as transparent as glass. There is no sun or moon or artificial lighting, because God is the light. A river runs from God's throne through the center of heaven - the river is bright as crystal and it's the water of life. (Rev. 21) Obviously words fail, and the writer of the book of Revelation is reaching out for descriptive language to describe something that simply cannot be depicted by human experience.

There'll be no sickness or physical ailment. No one will ever have to hear a diagnosis of terminal cancer. There'll be no wakes, no funerals, no loss of loved ones. No saying good bye. There'll be no crying or tears (there'll be no need for them). (*Rev. 21*)

What's heaven like? The questions abound. Will infants be infants? Will old people be old? Is Jesus saying that in the age to come we won't know our spouses or our friends or our family members? No. He doesn't say we won't know those who are near and dear to us. He's saying that the ordinary events and relationships by which we track our journey through this age - marriage, childbirth, graduations, retirements and so on – won't characterize the age to come, because it's not merely an extension of this life, but something wholly different.

Words fall short of fully describing what the age to come will be like living in the presence and complete peace of God. The reality is, the Bible doesn't give us a complete description of the age to come. Any descriptions are

accommodated to our human ability to understand. We can't help, but think that the new life will be like life is now. We can only imagine what heaven will fully be like.

Author C.S. Lewis once told the story of a woman who was thrown into a dungeon. Her only light came from a barred window high above. She gave birth to a son, who had never seen the outside world. He couldn't reach the window to see outside, so his mother told him about green fields and waves crashing on the shore-but he couldn't imagine what she was describing. Eventually, she persuaded the guards to give her some paper and charcoal so she could draw pictures to show her son what the outside world was really like-but what the boy came to understand was that the outside world looked like black lines on a white piece of paper.

What's heaven like? We wonder. But Jesus doesn't give us all the details of what lies ahead for us in heaven. If he told us, how could we comprehend it anyway? Words wouldn't do it justice. Not even pictures. How do you express to three dimensional people what another dimension is like? Something they've never experienced before? It would be like drawing charcoal pictures on white paper. It just doesn't do it justice.

Death and taxes are not the only things you can be sure of. *37 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. 38 Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."*

It's hard to improve on Paul's words from 1 Cor. 13, *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."*

Jesus spoke of "this age" and the "age to come." What's the difference between the two? What distinguishes the two? One age is temporary, the other is eternal. One age is characterized by unbelief, and ends in judgment; the other is the age of the faithful and is home to the redeemed. The one event that forever divides them? The return of Jesus. Jesus is the one thing that's common to both ages.

"The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age ... The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous." (Mt. 13:39-49)

The return of Jesus is the key event in world history. An event that Peter describes as the "day of the Lord [which] will come as a thief. *The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*" (2 Pt 3:10) After this, the age to come, and new heaven and a new earth.

This age, characterized by war, famine, environmental distress, persecution, will pass away. And no one knows the exact day or the hour. Instead, we are warned again and again, to what? To be ready. How? Not by being preoccupied with signs of the end, but with the task of proclaiming Jesus in these last days. *(Kim Riddlebarger)*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 *Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*

... 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ [including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

2 Corinthians 4:16 *Therefore we do not lose heart. ... 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future. And life is worth the living, just because He lives!