

Will We Know Our Loved Ones

Series: Heaven and Hell: Separating Fact from Fiction

1 Corinthians 15:35-44

August 28, 2016

Welcome again to Germantown UMC. I'm glad you are here. If you are here for the first time, thanks a lot. If you've been here before, thanks a lot. See, I was kind of worried that you wouldn't come back after last week's message. Or worse, heaven forbid, that someone would have been called home to glory, found out what the afterlife really was, and came back to tell me how wrong I am.

Today, we continue our series: "Heaven and Hell: Separating Fact from Fiction." Last Sunday, I dealt with the question, "Where Do You Go After You Die." The feedback that I received indicated that it was very thought-provoking. If you were not here, you can go to our website germantownchurch.com, click Glorify and click Sermons.

Next week, I will deal with the question "When Will the Rest of Us Go?" This morning, we are going to look at "Will We Know Our Loved Ones?"

As I said last week, we rarely talk about heaven, except at funerals, or in a joke. Like the one about a couple from north Oklahoma who decided to go to Florida for a long weekend to thaw out from a particularly icy winter. Because they both had jobs, they had difficulty coordinating their travel schedules. It was decided that the husband would fly to Florida on Thursday, and his wife would follow the next day. Upon arrival, the husband checked into the hotel, and decided to send his wife an e-mail back home. However, he accidentally left off one letter in her address, and without realizing the error, sent the e-mail, which mistakenly went to a widow in Houston who had just returned from her husband's funeral. He was a pastor of many years who had been called home to glory. The widow checked her e-mail, expecting messages from relatives and friends. Upon reading the first message, she fainted and fell to the floor. Her son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen which read:

TO: My loving wife

FROM: Your departed husband

SUBJECT: I've arrived!

MESSAGE: I've just arrived and have been checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. I am looking forward to seeing you then!

Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

P.S. Sure is hot down here.

We have experiences that make us feel like "this is what heaven will be like." When the boys were little and in car seats, we took them on a shopping trip. Back then they were small enough that they would fall asleep in the car, and when they woke up, we were walking into "Toys R Us." Now that sounds like heaven to me.

But a great mistake we make is trying to describe heaven. That's one reason why it is so hard to understand the book of Revelation. John was trying to describe sights and experiences he had never seen or felt before. If one does not have a common reference to describe something never seen before, it is very difficult to put into words that which cannot be put into words.

We make the same mistake of creating heaven in the image of earth. We have always done this. The American Indians, who were by nature hunters, conceived of a heaven which was a happy hunting ground. The Vikings, who were by nature warriors, thought of a Valhalla where they would fight all day, where at night the dead would be raised and the wounded made whole again. The Jews hated the sea and thought of heaven as a place where there would be no more sea.¹

But this whole view of heaven starts from a basic error, the error of thinking of heaven in terms of earth, and of thinking of eternity in terms of time. Heaven is not going to be simply a continuation or an extension of this world.² We cannot create heaven in our own image. Paul quoted Isaiah when he wrote, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."³ The life of heaven will be greater than any conception this life can supply.⁴ Keep that in mind today. We cannot create heaven in our own image.

And that's what happened one day when a group of religious leaders called Sadducees questioned Jesus. They insisted that the only part of scripture which they regarded as binding was the Pentateuch, the Law, the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not accept the prophets or the poetical books as scripture at all. As a result, they completely denied any life after death because it could not be proved from the Pentateuch.⁵

So when they came to Jesus, they used the issue of resurrection to try and trap Him. "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother's name.' Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children, so his brother married the widow. But the second brother also died, and the third brother married her. This continued with all seven of them. Last of all, the woman also died. So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her."⁶ So, the Sadducees were trying to create heaven with an earthly image.

But Jesus affirms the belief in life after death. He says, "For when the dead rise..."⁷ He has no doubts about it. He echoes Isaiah, who wrote, "But those who die in the Lord will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy!"⁸

So, if we will be raised from the dead, will we recognize our loved ones? Well, before I can examine that, we need to look at the nature of the resurrected body, and folks, this has been a question for a long time. Jewish teachers who believed in the resurrection would be asked, "What happened if someone died at sea, or the body was completely destroyed by fire?" The rabbis decided that the body would be resurrected from a particular bone in the neck which they believed to be indestructible. But the Apostle Paul argues that, regardless of what physical material remains, at least the

¹ Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), Mark 12:18

² Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), Matthew 22:23

³ 1 Corinthians 2:9; Isaiah 64:4

⁴ Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), Mark 12:18

⁵ Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT), Matthew 22:23

⁶ Matthew 22:24-28 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁷ Matthew 22:29-30 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁸ Isaiah 26:19 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

pattern of the old body will always remain as the seed for the new body.⁹ He writes in 1 Corinthians 15:35-44:

But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed...

It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.¹⁰

Here's what Paul is saying: Like a seed that is sown and then grows into a glorious new plant, it is the same way for the resurrection of the dead. Believers' present physical bodies will be different from their resurrection bodies. Earthly bodies die and decay, but resurrected bodies will never die. Physical bodies disappoint us, but resurrection bodies will be full of glory. Physical bodies are weak but resurrection bodies will be full of power. Physical bodies are natural and human, but resurrected bodies will be spiritual.

So, the "natural" body, the body we have right now, is suited to life in the present world; however, this body is not fit for the world to come. That future world, where Christ will reign in his Kingdom, will require a "spiritual" body. Paul did not mean that this will be "spiritual" as opposed to physical or material, for that would contradict all that Paul has just written about resurrected bodies. Believers will not become "spirits." Instead, "spiritual" refers to a body that suits a new, spiritual life.¹¹

Later, Paul writes,

While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.¹²

While we groan and sigh in our present bodies, we don't look forward to a time of having no bodies at all. As Jesus' own resurrection body shows, believers will have bodies that to some degree correspond with their own physical bodies. Through Christ's saving work, their resurrected bodies will be better than they can imagine. We will slip into these new bodies and will have everlasting life.¹³

So, we will receive new bodies, but what will they be like? I think we have an answer to that. Once again, as we do with everything in our lives: our behavior, our trust, our actions, our prayer life, our conviction to fulfilling God's purpose, we look to who? Who is our model for our living? Jesus. That's right, and I believe Jesus is the model of the resurrected body.

Philippians 3:20-21 reads,

⁹ Bible Background Commentary, 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

¹¹ Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:4 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

¹³ Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary, 2 Corinthians 5:4

*“But there’s far more to life for us. We’re citizens of high heaven! We’re waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, **who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own.**”¹⁴*

I believe Jesus’ post-Easter, resurrected body gives us clues as to our future spiritual bodies. Let’s review what Jesus did after the resurrection:

- Jesus meets the women who had gone to the tomb Easter Sunday morning. They grasped his feet, and He speaks to them.¹⁵ He also appears individually to Mary Magdalene¹⁶ and to Peter.¹⁷
- He walks with two men toward Emmaus for miles, discusses Scripture with them, and disappears when He breaks the bread.¹⁸
- No sooner had the two Emmaus men returned to Jerusalem and told the disciples their story, Jesus appears to disciples “behind locked doors”¹⁹ and says, “Peace be with you.” They think they were seeing a ghost! He invites their examination: “Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” Then He eats some fish as they watched.²⁰
- A week later the disciples were together again, including Thomas. Once again, the doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side.”²¹
- Jesus finds Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and his brother John, and two other disciples fishing. He points out an abundance of fish from the shore, and once the men come aground, Jesus has fixed breakfast.²²
- He meets the disciples in Galilee, gives them the Great Commission.²³
- Then Jesus led them to Bethany, lifted his hands to heaven, blessed them, and ascended into heaven.²⁴

Jesus’ resurrected body was different. It was no longer subject to the same laws of nature as before his death. He could appear in a locked room; yet he was not a ghost or apparition because he could be touched and his wounds were still visible.²⁵

Many have found it fascinating to observe the capabilities of the resurrected Jesus and speculate on what being “like Him” might mean. For instance, the resurrected Jesus could be touched. Others have noted Jesus’ sudden appearance among His disciples in a locked room. Is this teleportation? Or can a resurrected person move between the atoms of the physical universe? While such speculation has a fascination, we do best to let the issue rest with God, as John and Paul did. We do not yet know

¹⁴ Philippians 3:20-21 (The Message)

¹⁵ Matthew 28:9-10

¹⁶ John 20:11-18

¹⁷ Luke 24:34

¹⁸ Luke 24:13-33

¹⁹ John 20:19

²⁰ Luke 24:36-43 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

²¹ John 20:26-27 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

²² John 21:1-13

²³ Matthew 28:16-20

²⁴ Luke 24:50 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

²⁵ Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary, John 20:24-31

what we will be, but we will be like Him. The limitations of our physical nature will be gone, and, whereas now we are perishable, then we will be imperishable. Power will replace weakness; immortality will end mortality.²⁶

Ok, so we will have new, resurrected bodies. They will not be like our current bodies, but the question remains, “Will we know our loved ones?” I believe we will. There are several passages of Scripture that indicate that.

Jesus’ appearances are proof. Though occasionally those around Him didn’t recognize Him, whether because of unbelief (in that they could not fathom Jesus rising from the dead) or Jesus hiding His appearance until later, people did recognize Him.

There are others. When Jesus met a Roman officer in Capernaum who asked that his servant be healed, Jesus was so impressed with the man’s faith, He said,

“... many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven.”²⁷

What He is saying is this: non-Jews will sit with Jewish patriarchs, and the assumption is that they will recognize them.

Paul tells of the last days.

*“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, **together** with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”²⁸*

Now, we will deal with this passage next week, but I want to point out that we will meet Jesus **together**.

Honestly, I am looking forward to being with my loved ones again, aren’t you? Those who have gone on before me and those who are still with me. And we are just going to have a great time together - the best ever - it’s going to be awesome.

And do you know what will make it particularly awesome when we will leave our flimsy bodies behind. Paul wrote,

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.²⁹

Think about it:

- What is it that gives a widow courage as she stands beside a fresh grave?
- What is the ultimate hope of the cripple, the amputee, the abused, the burn victim?
- How can the parents of brain-damaged or physically handicapped children keep from living their entire lives totally and completely depressed?
- Why would anyone who is blind or deaf or paralyzed be encouraged when they think of the life beyond?
- How can we see past the martyrdom of some helpless hostage or devoted missionary?

²⁶ Teacher’s Commentary, 1 Corinthians 15:34

²⁷ Matthew 8:11 (NLT)

²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

²⁹ Romans 8:22-23 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

- Where do the thoughts of a young couple go when they finally recover from the grief of losing their baby?
- When a family receives the tragic news that a little daughter was found dead or their dad was killed in a plane crash or a son overdosed on drugs, what single truth becomes their whole focus?
- What is the final answer to pain, mourning, senility, insanity, terminal diseases, sudden calamities, and fatal accidents?

The hope of bodily resurrection. BUT THAT HOPE ONLY COMES THROUGH JESUS.

When we give our lives to Jesus, we become children of God. “And that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him.”³⁰

³⁰ 1 John 3:2 (The Message)