

Sermon for 11/10/13
What is Heaven Like?

Heaven, the word conjures up images of angels playing harps and floating on clouds. Or images of angels and people bowed down in worship at the throne of God. Whatever our image of heaven may be; it only takes the questions of a second grader for you to realize that you know nothing about what heaven will be like!

The summer before I began as pastor here a six year old boy that my niece knew was killed in a car accident by a drunk driver. This was the first death that she had to deal with of a young person and she had questions. Since I had just graduated from seminary, I was designated the expert on all things religious!

So one evening while I was at their home she asked me the questions she had been struggling with since this boy had died. Her first question was, “Do we age while we’re in heaven?” Now I’ll be honest I never thought about this aspect of our heavenly lives at all. I always assumed that we’d stay the age we died, but I didn’t get a chance to answer this one when her next question stopped me cold because she was wondering, “If we age while we’re in heaven how will his parents know who he is?” Then she asked, “If we age do we stop at a certain age or do we just keep getting older and older without getting sick?”

I don’t remember just what I told her that night, but I know that I left that evening with more questions than what I answered for her! We have an innate curiosity about the unknown and what heaven is like is about as unknown as one can get! Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but none of the gospel writers thought that it was important enough to write about what he experienced while he

was dead. So today we have people writing books about their experiences in heaven. “Heaven Is for Real” and “90 Minutes in Heaven” are just a couple of these books. The fact that they’ve made the best sellers list shows just how curious we are about life after death.

What will our resurrected life be like? I don’t know for sure, but I do know that it will be more than just a resurrection of the spirit—our whole body will be resurrected and united with God in heaven. When God raised Jesus from death through the power of the Holy Spirit it was a bodily resurrection. Jesus could be touched, his healed wounds were visible and he could eat. Yet he was changed. He could walk through walls and locked doors and there were times when the disciples didn’t recognize him until he spoke.

Will we know our loved ones in heaven? I pray that we do, but that isn’t what Jesus is addressing here. He’s saying that our resurrected life won’t be marked by the same things that mark this life—marriage, childbirth, graduations, retirements, and so on. Resurrection life isn’t the same as this life; it’s different.

How different? There will be a new heaven and a new earth and there’ll be peace in every land. The lion will lie down with the lamb. We’ll turn our swords into plowshares. Sickness and death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. There will be no more fear. God will live among us and we will be able to see God face to face without fear of death. We’ll be able to see everything clearly and we will be God’s people. There will be no more want for God is making a feast of rich food and fine wines that are for all people.

These are the promises that I cling to as I continue in this life—sin and all. And when the tempter puts doubts into my mind I remember these promises. I remember that God wants to be in relationship with me and all of creation. I remember that the Father loves us and all of creation so much that the Son was sent to save us from sin, death and the power of the devil. I remember that all of this is a gift from God and that all I have to do to receive it is to believe. I remember that the Holy Spirit was sent into the world to give us the gift of this belief; even when my mind is full of doubt.

And when I remember all of this I don't fear doing the right thing here on earth because I know there is a place waiting for me where there will be no more pain, no more death, no more mourning—only joy!