

Sermon 11-09-2025

Heaven and the resurrection of the body – Rev. Markus Wegenast

Luke 20:27-38

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked him a question: “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies leaving a wife but no children, the man^[b] shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman and died childless; ³⁰ then the second^[c] ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶ Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive.”

1)

Do you believe in life after death? If you do, you’re in good company. About 71% of Americans believe in life after death. Not surprisingly the largest part of those 71% are Christians because life after death is one of the great features of Christian hope.

When it comes to what exactly this life after death looks like the ideas go into many directions, even among Christians. The Bible isn’t very explicit in describing what heaven looks like – it is only explicit in stating that there is a resurrection for those who put their hope in Jesus.

Not only does the Bible say that there will be a resurrection but also that this resurrection will be physical. Biblical hope in life after death is more than just a soul going to heaven to somehow join the eternal universe. Biblical hope in the hereafter is about a physical resurrection, just like Jesus rose physically as the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

That doesn’t make it any easier to imagine what this life after death looks like – does it? I think it actually makes it harder. Here, I want to illustrate that to you. I brought you a nice picture of my wife Carrie when she was little. I had to make a lot of concessions to her to be allowed to show this to you.



Here is a photo of her being in High School (Northwest here in Cincinnati, “Go Knights”!)



And here is a picture of her on the luckiest day of her life when she got to marry me (😊).



So, now. What does this mean in terms of the Christian believe of the resurrection of the body? It’s part of our Apostle’s Creed that every denomination professes: “I believe in the resurrection of the body...”

So, **what will Carrie look like when she is raised to life after death?**

What body will it be?

You may feel this is a silly question. I admit, it is an odd one – and at the same time it is quite serious. It leads us into the heart of today’s scripture lesson.

Let me give you some background....

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2)

Sadducees, a prominent religious group in Jesus' time, came to test Jesus. They knew he was a believer in eternal life (before holy week: John 3.4.6; Mt 10.16.19; Mk 10). The Sadducees were believers in the God of Israel, they were super religious, but they did not believe in a life after death.

To be fair: the Old Testament (OT) has only very mild references to a blissful life after death. Other Jews, though, they did believe in life after death and Jesus was one of them. He elevated resurrection to one of the central themes of his message.

The Sadducees wanted to test Jesus on that and argue against it. So they fabricate a pretty creative question. Their fabrication was much cleverer than mine with the different pictures of Carrie's life stages. They go a much more theological route.

They apply OT law – the very law that Jesus came not to abolish but to uphold. They remind Jesus that the law of Moses requires for a brother to marry his older brother's wife if the older brother should die without having had children. It was a good God-given law that was meant to honor the deceased brother's legacy and to help out the childless widow to have kids that would eventually be able to care for her when she grows old.

The Sadducees, now, apply this law to fabricate a scenario that would demonstrate how unreasonable a belief in life after death was:

“Suppose a widow was married seven times because each time a brother-husband passed away – whose wife will she be in your idea of heaven, Jesus?”

First of all, if there really was a widow that had 7 brothers who all die on her in marriage, you'd probably want to involve the ancient Jewish version of the FBI to see if there is any foul play going on!

But beside that point, the Sadducees really want to hear Jesus wrestle with the odd thought of the widow meeting her 7 deceased husbands in heaven. Whose wife will she be? In Jewish society it was unheard of that a woman would have several husbands. (By the time that Jesus lived polygamy was practically gone and it never was practiced for women – it started declining by 500 BC already and while technically still legal it was no longer practiced and later on banned. But that's all beside the point.)

The point is, that the Sadducees made up a real interesting and technically possible scenario. There could be a brother who happens to have 6 younger brothers who all follow the law and take their older brother's widow as a wife. Whose wife will she be in heaven? What do you say Jesus?

Jesus does say something, but it's not what the Sadducees expected. Actually, I don't know what they expected to hear but they clearly did not expect Jesus to go into the direction in which he did.

- Jesus says that marriage is a thing for this life, not the life to come.
- We'll be like angels, children of God (note: "like" angels, not "are"!)

And then Jesus makes a genius swing against the construct of the Sadducees and goes back all the way to Moses to proof his point that with God things are completely different than with us people. He refers to the story of the burning bush in the OT where God introduces himself to Moses.

Jesus said: "...the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." – Luke 20:37

Let me ask you: Where were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the time when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush? They were all dead! They had died 400+ years prior. This is the human answer and it is humanly absolutely correct.

But not for God, because God is not a God of the dead, he's a God of the living! While Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not experienced resurrection yet – that didn't become a reality until Jesus came and was raised as the first fruit from the dead – in God's book they were not dead because he is not a God of dead people.

O my, this is a logic that is hard to capture for us people. This really is divine logic – it goes completely against our fabrications and norms. And that's why Jesus says:

Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive."
– Luke 20:38

It's that easy; and it's that hard to understand! To us death is a finality that hurts bitterly. To us death is the end of things because we can't see beyond death. But God can, God is not a God of the dead – because he is the inventor, and the giver, and the sustainer of life.

To make Jesus' complex answer a little bit more tangible, we can just say this:

Life after death is just very different from life in this age.

Life after death is not something we can capture with our human ideas of what life looks like. Do you spend much time thinking about what it's like to be in heaven and to live forever in eternity and be reunited with others? It's really, really hard to imagine such a thing because it just goes against human experience and there is probably a good reason why God in his wisdom and love did not give us a book in the Bible that describes what exactly resurrection life looks like.

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Can I tell you a story?

“The Two Monks and the Secret of Heaven.”

Two monks, close friends for many years, often talked about heaven. They wondered what it would really be like — whether it would match all they had imagined through prayer, scripture, and art.

Finally, they made a pact:

“Whichever of us dies first will come back, if God allows it, and tell the other in just one word what heaven is like.

*If it is as we imagined, say **talis**.*

*If it is somewhat like we imagined, say **quails**.*

*If it is different, say **aliter**.”*

(Talis = “such as we thought”; quails = “something like what we thought”; aliter = “different.”)

Years later, one monk died. The survivor prayed faithfully that his friend might keep their promise. One night, in a vision, the deceased monk appeared — radiant and serene.

The living monk asked breathlessly:

“Brother, tell me — heaven! Is it talis? qualis? Or aliter?”

And the friend smiled and said:

“Totaliter aliter.” - totally different!

Then he vanished.

3)

I have no idea what Carrie is going to look like when we meet again in the resurrection to the next life. I kind of like that the Sadducees used the example of marriage to test Jesus – because the Bible compares our relationship with God in Christ in the imagery of marriage also. The Book of Revelation speaks of the great marriage feast when Jesus comes again and reunites with his bride, the church.

Who is the church? It is people, people like you and me. The reason why I find the image of a marriage so powerful is because marriages are such a special form of relationship.

We promise to stand up for each other even if things don’t always go so well: “for better for worse, in sickness and in health.”

This is the kind of relationship that God wants to have with you in Jesus Christ because he is a God of the living – things are different with him. We may not always be so able to hold up to our end of the bargain, we may struggle staying faithful in the snares of life – but because God is a God of the living and in that so completely different than what we deem is logical, he is faithful and does not give up on us when things go “for worse and for poorer.”

This faithful God is the one who invites you to trust him. Don't get hung up in fantasies about what the afterlife might be like – Jesus got hung up on a cross to die for your sins so that you can trust him in matters of this life and the next and nothing is going to disrupt his faithfulness.

There is no need in living our lives wondering if heaven will be as good as we imagine it – because we can't imagine it. We have an unimaginable God, a God who came to save us and draw us near to him. Trust him, and in your trust find that God is a God of the living and that whether you live or whether you die you are alive in him. Amen.