

Sermon: What Would Jesus Say Now that We've Made Heaven so Cozy by Pastor Jenn

Scripture Lesson: Luke 20:27-40

It is Memorial day weekend in our country. For many it's the exciting kick off to summer. Picnics are held, public pools are open, traditionally we can begin to wear white. But originally it was meant to mark a national day for us to honor and remember those who have given their lives for our country. The first Memorial Day was observed on May 30th, 1868, following the Civil War when family members would decorate graves with flags. In fact it used to be known as Decoration Day. Memorial Day became an official federal holiday in 1971.

Many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries, to honor and remember our loved ones who have gone on before us to that eternal kingdom. In our scripture lesson today the Sadducees question Jesus about marriage in that eternal kingdom, and as we look at this passage, we wrap up this sermon series about discipleship with this question: **What Would Jesus Say Now that We've Made Heaven so Cozy?** What I mean by that is, when we think about heaven, we tend to think of it as a form of paradise, don't we?

We may consider the story Jesus tells of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16. Remember Lazarus was a beggar outside the rich man's house, and the rich man never stopped to assist Lazarus. And when both Lazarus and the rich man die, Jesus says Lazarus is in heaven, near Father Abraham "comforted" v 25 while the rich man is in Hades, "tormented" v23. This is known as the traditional form of heaven, where we will rest, and we aspire to that destiny.

There is also the restored earth idea of heaven, that heaven is the new form of this creation and we can enjoy activities we may not have enjoyed before, but can now in the redeemed estate. We sense this idea in Philippians when we read, *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*" (Philippians 3:20-21)

And then there is the heavenly earth idea of heaven, that is the balance between the best of earth and best of heaven. Isaiah 65 speaks of this heaven, *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind."* (Isaiah 65:17)

You can read about these in the book, *FOUR VIEWS ON HEAVEN* by John S. Feinberg, J. Richard Middleton, Michael Allen, Peter Kreeft, Michael E. Wittmer, Stanley N. Gundry. The fourth view being the Roman Catholic Beatific Vision which is about seeing God face to face like Revelations 21 speaks of, when God will wipe away tears from our eyes.

Anyhow, while there are these different ideas of heaven, that ultimately seem to point to being the best of what we know, possibly what we dream of, the question we will ponder today is, does that limit heaven? Or more importantly, does it limit God?

Let's look at this text. It begins, ²⁷ *Then Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees were an elite group from which the chief priests would be chosen. They did not believe in the resurrection, as the text states, and yet they ask Jesus a question about the resurrection. The question refers to the practice of levirate marriage, which was not about the Levites, but came from the word, levir, which mean's husband's brother. Cultures beyond the Ancient Hebrews practiced this tradition that when a man dies, his brother should marry his widow and the first child will be considered the offspring of the deceased. You may remember this coming up in the story of Judah and Tamar. And it is stated when Moses shares the laws of the Hebrew community in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. The purpose of this is to perpetuate the name and family of a man who died childless. The Sadducees present the case of seven brothers who had the same wife because of this practice to Jesus, and they want to know whose wife she will be in the resurrection.*

Now keep in mind, they do not believe in the resurrection. So why are they asking him this? Because they wanted to make Jesus look foolish, and undermine him, so people would start to turn on him. Once again, Jesus is upsetting the apple cart with his new ideas and new ways of understanding God and God's will. And communal leaders like the Sadducees or chief priests, see Jesus as a threat. So are they able to catch Jesus on this question? Nope.

³⁴ *Jesus replied, "Marriage is for people here on earth. ³⁵ But in the age to come, those worthy of being raised from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage. ³⁶ And they will never die again. In this respect they*

will be like angels. They are children of God and children of the resurrection. I want to break down this passage for you, because I know some people get a little upset if they believe that there is no marriage in heaven. So let's begin by looking at the levirate law again. In that law, how are women viewed? As property. A property to carry on the patriarchal name, right? If her husband dies, she is forced to marry the next to kin if there is one, *and if there isn't one, then she is cast out, left on her own.* Think of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi lost her husband and sons and so she is left alone except Ruth who is determined to be with her and help her. Marriage in this example of one woman and 7 husbands is not about love and honor and mutual respect, it is man and his property, and a woman's hope of survival. This marriage will not be in heaven, Jesus says, because they will be children of God, men and women alike, where there is equality in being God's, regardless of gender. No one person is assigned to anyone else, each is a child, of God, cared for and loved in the resurrection, that's what Jesus means.

You see the Sadducees were a people focused on this world, and they did not understand what the resurrection was for, and who the resurrection is about. It's about the living God and God's power over heaven and earth, over life and death. It's about having a faithful God whose fidelity to us is eternal. That's what Jesus gets at when he continues, ³⁷ *"But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—even Moses proved this when he wrote about the burning bush. Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, he referred to the Lord as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* Jesus is referring to Exodus 3, when God informed Moses of God's identity to Moses and the enslaved Israelites *verse 15, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' " "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation." Exodus 3:15* Jesus says in that definition is an eternal relationship. God did not say, *"I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"*, rather as *Jesus says in verse 38, ³⁸ So he is the God of the living, not the dead, for they are all alive to him."*

Hearing this lesson, what can we discern about heaven? I think we are reminded in Jesus' *teaching that heaven is not about us, it's about God.* And when we consider that, we recognize heaven is about justice, about equality, about righteousness. Where each person is a special gift of God and that realization is lived out regardless of challenges in this life. It's about being a place where God's intentions for creation are fully realized and God gets what God wanted all along for us.

So in answer to the question: **What Would Jesus Say Now that We've Made Heaven so Cozy?** I believe he would say as he says in Matthew 5:3 introducing his ministry: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Meaning, heaven is where we rely on the living God who cares for us, honors us, nurtures *us to be made in God's image*, and when we think of our loved ones who have gone on before us, and those precious victims of gun violence in Texas, doesn't that sound like that is all that is needed to make heaven, heaven? A place with the living God who makes things right.

Let us pray: O God, you know all things on earth and in heaven. Give us the faith that by day and by night, at all times and in all places, we may without fear commit ourselves and those dear to us to your never-failing love, in this life and in the life to come. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.