

**HEAVEN BOUND!
MATTHEW 22:23-33
SERMON**

An elderly couple, having been married for almost 60 years had died in a car crash. They'd been in good health the last 10 years, mainly due to the wife's interest in health food and exercise. When they reached the pearly gates, St. Peter took them to a beautiful mansion, decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite and Jacuzzi. The old man asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. "It's free" Peter replied. "this is heaven!". Next, they went out back to see the championship golf course that the home backed up to. They would have golfing privileges everyday and each week the course changed to a new one representing the great golf courses on earth. The man asked, "what are the green fees?" Peter replied, "This is heaven, you play for free!" Next they went to the clubhouse and saw the lavish buffet lunch with the cuisines of the world laid out. "How much does it cost to eat?" asked the old man. "Don't you understand, yet? This is heaven, it's all free!" Peter replied. "Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol foods?" the old man asked timidly. "That's the best part" Peter replied, "you can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is heaven!" The old man looked at his wife and said, "you and your bran muffins! I could have been here 10 years ago!"

I want to speak about heaven this morning and specifically what our *relationships* will look like with one another in heaven.

Two old men had been best friends for many years. One of them suddenly fell deathly ill. His friend visited him on his deathbed and they reminisced about their long friendship when the dying man's friend asked, "Listen, when you die do me a favor. I want to know if there's baseball in heaven" The dying man responded, "I'll find out for you. Then he died. A couple of days later his surviving friend is sleeping when he hears his friend's voice. The voice says, "I've got some good news and bad news for you. The good news is there's baseball in heaven. The bad news is that you're pitching on Wednesday".

If you believe in Christ as your Savior and Lord, you're heaven bound! In today's text Jesus sheds some light on what our life will look like in heaven. In essence, Jesus says that **personal relationships will rise to a new level in heaven. Our personal relationships will rise to a new level in heaven.**

Before we investigate this point further, I want to provide some information about the Sadducees, a Jewish sect who appear periodically in the Gospels. They were the conservative, aristocratic, wealthy, high priestly party. Josephus, the great Jewish historian, tell us in his well known book, *Antiquities* that the Sadducees rejected oral tradition and accepted only written scripture. Further, they denied the afterlife and resurrection, the whole doctrine of rewards and punishments beyond the grave. Note that Matthew makes this theological point about them in **vs.23** (read). The Sadducees were greatly influenced by Greek culture and teaching. **Vs.24** The Sadducees begin their question about the resurrection with reference to Levirate marriage. Turn back in your Bibles to **Deuteronomy 25:5-6** where we find the explanation and requirement for Levirate marriage:

“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”

This text explains Levirate marriage. Simply put, if a man died without leaving a son, someone to carry on his name, his surviving widow would have to marry his brother and have children.

Vs.25-26 The Sadducees develop a hypothetical situation in which there were 7 brothers. The first brother married but died childless. In obeying the law of Levirate marriage, the second brother married his widow. The second brother also died and then all the others in turn married her and subsequently died. When I read this, I thought, “what on earth did this woman do to these men”?! It makes you wonder!

Vs.27-28 Finally, the woman died and the Sadducees wondered, “whose wife will she be in the resurrection since all seven brothers were married to her?” Clearly, the Sadducees thought that a definitive answer from Jesus was impossible. Thus, the impossibility of an answer from Jesus demonstrated the impossibility of the resurrection.

Vs.29 Before Jesus answers their question he makes a bold statement about their Biblical illiteracy. Note the comment, “you are in error”. This literally reads, “*you are being led astray*”. Why? “*because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God*”. Jesus explains how relationships will take on a new dimension in heaven and then adds comments in **vs.32** (read). In other words, the Sadducees deny the resurrection but the Bible continually reveals a God of the living not the dead.

Jesus’ comment provides a timely warning for us. Here’s the warning: ***Failing to know our Bible can lead to theological errors.*** The Sadducees didn’t grasp the significance of God’s comment, “I am the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob” and this ignorance led to a major theological error, namely, denying the resurrection of the body. Knowledge of scripture protects us from theological heresy and error! So, read and study your Bible!

Jesus’ unexpected reply must have shocked the Sadducees and confounded them! Jesus told them **personal relationships will rise to a new level in heaven.** In modern parlance, Jesus might tell them, “Be careful of assuming heavenly relationships will be just like earthly ones”. What will our heavenly relationships look like?

1. We will relate to each other as sons and daughters of God.

Vs.30 In Jesus’ day, the Jews who believed in an afterlife viewed it basically as an extension of our earthly life with some minor modifications and improvements. But Jesus rejects this line of thinking. Jesus says that life in heaven will be substantially different than life on earth. As a key example of this, *marriage will no longer exist*. One New Testament scholar writes about heaven,

“The marriage relationship is transcended in a new level of personal relationships and the basic point being made is that marriage as a means of procreation is no longer necessary”.

Some of you have had to part with a loving, spouse of many years. Jesus’ words might be difficult to accept for you long to be reunited with your spouse in heaven. We will enjoy a special relationship with our spouse in heaven but it will be much different,

much greater than the marriage relationship we had on earth. Our new relationship in heaven will not include disagreements, unfulfilled expectations, the hassles of work, problems with money, issues of child raising and so forth! With our spouse we will share a closeness and intimacy as children of God without all the hassles and problems!

Lucille Heimrich shares a story of God's companionship. She writes:

“Several years ago my husband, George, died of complications following an automobile accident. Ours had been a long, happy marriage and his death left me deeply depressed. When I broke my leg a few weeks before my 90th birthday I felt more confined-and alone-than ever. “If only George was here” I despaired. “he would chase away this sadness with words of wisdom and encouragement”. “Dear God” I prayed, weeping “please give me strength to get through this hour”. *Get your Bible* a quiet voice inside me nudged. Then I remembered my small travel Bible. Hadn't I seen it on the living room bookshelf? I found it and opened it, surprised to discover that it was George's old travel Bible instead of mine. They looked alike and I thought I'd given his Bible away. I turned the pages until I reached my favorite scripture. Suddenly a letter fell into my lap. Carefully I unfolded the yellowed pages. It was a love letter from George. In it, he expressed his deep affection for me. His words of comfort went straight to my lonely heart. My cheeks wet with tears, I continued to leaf through the Bible. In the back pages I found more notes from George. According to the date, he'd written these in the hospital prior to an early surgery. He must have feared that he would not return home. After he recovered from the surgery, the letter and notes were forgotten. But no, I realized. They were never forgotten. God knew exactly where George's words of comfort were hidden and exactly when I'd need them the most. Laughing some and crying some, I spent the rest of the afternoon basking in the company of both my husband's letters and my Lord. I never felt less alone and now I knew for certain that I never would be.

The companionship this woman describes gives us a glimpse of what heaven will be like between spouses.

2. We will relate to each other without pain, suffering or death.

Vs.30b Besides the lack of marriage in heaven, we will relate to each other “like the angels in heaven”. What does this mean? Turn to a parallel passage in Luke. **Luke 20:36**, **“and they can no longer die for they are like the angels”**. Angels do not die! John, in his apocalyptic vision writes of heaven in **Rev 21:1-4**:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away”.

Did you hear that last line: “no more death, mourning, crying or pain”? Just think: no cancer, war, automobile accidents, arthritis, heart attacks, chronic back pain, rare diseases, natural disasters in heaven! No more pain, suffering or death!! Praise God!

Further, after the second coming of Christ, we will have new spiritual bodies. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in **1 Corinthians 15**. These new spiritual bodies that God will give us will be imperishable and not made of earthly elements. God will give us new spiritual bodies! With these bodies the deaf will hear, the blind will see, the paralyzed will walk. Those of us who wear glasses, contacts, or hearing aids, won't need them in heaven! You won't need crutches, walkers, wheel chairs, any of those things!

These new spiritual bodies will be recognizable to those who knew us in our time on earth. The disciples recognized Jesus after he resurrected from the dead. Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. We will recognize each other in heaven!

3. We will relate to God as children who enjoy great intimacy!

Turn over to the parallel passage in **Luke 20:36c** "they are God's children since they are children of the resurrection". One of the great joys of heaven will be looking at Jesus, face to face. The Apostle Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 13:12**:

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face".

Imagine getting to know someone by communicating with them on the internet. You've never seen their face. You've written to them, perhaps spoken to them on the phone. You make arrangements to meet in person. When you finally meet them face to face, your relationship can move to a deeper, more personal and intimate level. So it will be with Christ! Our intimacy with Christ will increase in heaven!

In early June, 1995 I attended a small gathering of pastors at Silver Falls State Park, near Salem. We met for prayer and study. Two days after the conference started I experienced tremendous abdominal pain. I struggled with it for a day and by Friday I decided I needed to go home. I remember explaining my situation to the 10 other pastors and getting in my car. I started driving and the pain seemed to intensify. As I drove, I sweated profusely and though I wanted to stop, I knew that if I stopped I might not be able to get going again. Home never sounded so good! After four hours of driving I finally pulled in our driveway, stumbled in the front door and collapsed. How relieved I felt to finally be home!! Sally quickly took me to the doctor and we discovered I needed to have my gall bladder removed.

Sometimes our Christian journey seems like that long drive home. We struggle desperately through painful times longing to get to our final destination where we can find some relief and solace. During those painful times it comforts us to know that our pain will not go on forever, that we worship a God who understands our pain, has suffered greatly himself and will provide relief for us. God will minister to us in heaven because He knows us intimately and loves us dearly!

Everyone who confesses Christ as Savior and Lord has a blessed hope! Heaven awaits us! We're heaven bound! Heaven will not simply be a continuation of life on earth. Oh no! Listen to this carefully: *Heaven will be far superior to anything we can even imagine on earth!* **Personal relationships will rise to a new level.** We will relate to others as sons and daughters of God. We will relate to each other without pain, suffering or death. We will relate to God as his children who enjoy great intimacy with him. We have a lot to look forward to! Let us pray.