

**Sermon      November 17, 2024      To Heaven and Beyond    Part 3**

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!**

Today is Part 3 of the 4-Part sermon series To Heaven and Beyond. Part One covered the exciting topic of death. Part Two was about the unexpected but true nature of heaven. Today is about the importance and meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Next week I hope to offer a glimpse of the world to come.

At a recent national convention of our denomination – the LCMS – the convention theme was We Preach Christ Crucified. Now as convention themes go, that's not a bad one. Hard can you argue with the importance of preaching Christ crucified, right? Well, it's not one I would pick. Christ crucified is exactly what the devil wanted, right? So how does that get to be the convention theme? I'm with the apostle Paul when he writes, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:14

If your car gets totaled in an accident, you don't focus on the wrecked vehicle. Your excitement and attention are focused on the new one the insurance company is paying for and is arriving next week. So, too, with the life of Jesus. We put much focus on Jesus' death. Not as much on his resurrection. In Lent we get 40 days of special services, extra devotionals and delicious fish fries. On Easter we get a little basket of chocolate eggs and we call it good. Is there something wrong in that? Yes!

You know, the great ecumenical creeds – the statement of faith and belief of the true Church, mentions nothing about heaven as we covered it last week. But it does highlight the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension to glory, and the coming eternal, golden age. Those are the topics for the sermons for today and next Sunday.

To be an apostles of Jesus, like Thaddaeus, Thomas, or Nathaniel, you had to be a witness not just of the ministry and death of Jesus, but also and especially of the resurrected Christ. We are people of hope. Not so much that we go to heaven when we die, but hope that in his time Jesus will appear in all glory, raise our bodies from the dead, reward us for the good we have done, and usher in that new age.

Since the beginning of man I think people have always been asking, “What’s new.” New things can be interesting, exciting, and maybe something to look forward to. Well God has news way back in the time of Isaiah.

Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert. Is 43:19

The new thing God is talking about here is the resurrection of Jesus. For a human to come back to life forever would indeed be a new thing. It is personified in Jesus. The news of this new thing goes back even farther, to the Psalms.

The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you. Psalm 2:7

Here God is speaking of the resurrection of Jesus, the one who was begotten/born from the dead. Now let’s see what this has to do with us.

God calls the entire collective of his redeemed people the harvest. There is one harvest. It hasn’t happened yet. With our souls resting in heaven and our bodies in the earth, we are like seeds planted in the ground, waiting to sprout, grow, and produce. The coming Resurrection of the dead is the day that great harvest takes place. Except for Jesus. He has already been planted in the tomb and sprouted to life forever.

“... that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:23

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. Colossians 1:18

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:20

In Jesus' resurrection we see and find hope for our own resurrection and pray God keep us in the faith so we will be found on the upward path of Jesus.

There is more. Not only did Jesus rise from the tomb, he rose to the highest pinnacle in all creation.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. Philippians 2:9

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Matthew 28:18

The Lord says to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool." Psalm 110:1

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you"?

Or again,

"I will be to him a father,  
and he shall be to me a son"? Hebrews 1:5

You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor. Hebrews 2:7

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Romans 8:34

So Jesus has obviously been exalted to the highest of the highest. And that is good news for us since he is on our side. You know how Jesus says he shares everything we have with us little folk? Well,

[God has] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6

Anyone feeling a little down? A little unfulfilled? A little insignificant? Well there you go! And as people who have already been lifted up with Christ, we look forward to the fulfillment of the rest of the plan – the New Creation that has already begun in Christ.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Galatians 6:15

Everybody talks about dying and going to heaven. You now know more about the spartan life of our souls in heaven resting in peace. Are we looking for the full restoration of creation or just to sit in something like a warm bath up in heaven? We want it all – the whole enchilada. And there's good news on that front.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Bible speaks about the ongoing nature of this new creation.

... according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. Ephesians 1:21

If, as it says, we are seated with Christ in glory, and his reign extends into the next age, then logically we will go on into that age with Christ and know all its wonder. From here it is very hard to make out the shapes and layout of that place and time as we see, as it says, through a darkened lens. Nevertheless, I will do my best to help us take a peek into the next world in the final sermon on this series next week.

God bless you in the power of Jesus' resurrection and keep you seated with him in glory. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.  
Amen.**

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