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I Thessalonians
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What Will Our Relationships Be Like in Heaven?

“Heaven” sermon series #5
I Thessalonians and Matthew 22:23-32

Virtually everyone in the US knows that **December** is preparation time for Christmas. Whether they love Christmas or are “*bah humbug*” about Christmas, you cannot get away from that fact. But that doesn't mean people understand **why** we celebrate Christmas or how to prepare so it is **meaningful**. What ultimately makes Christmas special are not the decorations, presents under the tree, fabulous food or family being together – all of which are wonderful things. What makes Christmas special is recognizing more of the greatness of Jesus coming to this earth and letting that change our perspectives and actions. You may wonder why we aren't speaking of babies, shepherds, angels or Mary and Joseph **yet** this month. That is because **Jesus Himself is the reason for the season** – specifically that as the eternal Son of God, the Lord left the glories of heaven and came down to become a man so that we might have an full & meaningful life for eternity. We call this “**the incarnation**”, God taking on human form. This year we are enlarging our understanding of the greatness of Jesus & His ways by focusing of what heaven will be like

- 1st message: Heaven is our real home that we long for. It is the place we belong and there will always be something missing inside us until then.
- 2nd message: **A new earth** is a part of heaven – heaven is not just ‘spiritual’. Appreciating the good things of God's creation here gives us a more transforming vision of what God has in-store for us for eternity.
- 3rd message: Heaven is the place where we will see God “face to face” with all the wonder, joy and glory of His very presence in our midst – God, our Father, will dwell with us, His adopted children forever.
- 4th message: Was on the many different things we will **do** in heaven. ^{Definitely} No boredom.

This week we come to an important ^{to} many Americans – “**What will our relationships to other people be like in heaven?**” I remember thinking about this around the time we moved into this building 21 years ago. There was a scholarly book on heaven just produced by Harvard University. That doesn't excite me as Harvard left their Biblical roots over 250 years ago. But as I looked into the book, I found that it was a scholarly review of people's view of heaven in different Christian cultures through the ages. Their conclusion was simple – They noted that the most important aspect of heaven for a Christian society **alternated between being in the very presence of God and being with loved ones who had died**. It is this second area we are looking at today – we did the 1st part a few weeks ago. What will our relationships with our loved ones be like in heaven? What about a husband or wife; Mom or dad; kids; best friends? **What happens to the most meaningful relationships we have here in this lifetime on earth?**

PROPOSITION: One of the greatest joys in heaven will be experiencing the totally awesome fulfillment of human relationships that God intended both in gaining new ones and deepening old ones.

I. Will we see our loved ones in heaven?

I Thessalonians

A. One of the earliest concerns

I Thes 1:9-10; 4:13

One of the earliest concerns of Christians was this question of loved ones, death and heaven. Now, I Thessalonians is one of the first books of the New Testament written and the people in that local church were super on-fire for Jesus. **READ I Thes 1:9-10.** Notice the radical transformation that has happened in their lives. They have turned from false worship to Jesus Christ – now they were eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus Christ. **So what concerns about the future and heaven might they have? Turn over to I Thes 4:13,** where we will see they were also concerned whether they would see their believing friends and relatives. **READ 4:13.** The Thessalonians were confident they would see Jesus in the future, but what about their loved ones and friends who were Christians (in Christ) but who had died? Would they miss out? We are tempted to grieve without hope when we don't think we will *ever see* that person again.

B. Will we need only God in heaven?

Ps 73:25

(Gen 2:18; Heb 11:16; Matt 22:37-39; Luke 10:27-37)

Because of their strong faith and eager expectation of the future with Jesus, their concern doesn't come because they thought death was the end of the road for humans. They were confident there was life after death with God. But I do believe they were concerned they wouldn't personally *see or experience life fully* with their believing family & friends again. Maybe they thought those who had already died in Christ would be in different places than those who were alive when Jesus returns. Maybe they thought we'd so change that the things that brought us close now wouldn't be remembered – like what often happens years after High School when those we had so much in common with at that time, now seem so distant. Or maybe they were influenced by Plato's popular teaching that the body & physical ^{is} bad and the spirit can only be fulfilled when it finally got rid of everything physical. Take what Asaph says in Ps 73:25, **“Whom have I in heaven but you? And the earth has nothing I desire besides you.”** It is not a big step to turn this into saying that we will only need or have God in heaven – physical bodies and socializing with other people are totally unnecessary – in fact some would say unspiritual. This is what the early desert monks practiced when they lived solitary lives completely apart from any human companionship for 10, 20, 30 years.

Getting excited to be close to God above all is good & right, but does that also mean other human relationships will be unnecessary? Is it unspiritual to get excited about seeing our godly Grandma or Grandpa in heaven? Before sin ever happened, God specifically created another human, made in the image of God, to be with Adam. To have a close relationship with other humans in heaven doesn't require putting God off to the side, which can so easily happens here on earth. Jesus shared that the greatest commandment was to love God and that the second greatest was to love other humans. He never considered these commands to be incompatible. In fact, Jesus told the

parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 to rebuke the religious leaders' thinking that you could love God and ignore people.

C. Paul looked forward to rejoicing in other believers in heaven I Thes 2:19-20, 12
Turn to **I Thes 2:19-20**. **READ**. Paul isn't just excited about being with God in the future or being in a perfect place called heaven – he is also looking forward to being with those Thessalonians again. And notice Paul pictures that happening in the physical presence of the risen, returning Lord! He says those faithful believers are going to be his glory and joy. We should not think of heaven just as being with God or just as being with beloved believing family and friends – we need to see Heaven as BOTH. That is why Christian cultures keep going back and forth in what they emphasize *the most* through the centuries! Look back at I Thes 2:12 (**READ FROM 11-12**). Live a life worthy of God. Why? Because God is going to make you into a “**Kingdom**”. A kingdom has many people working & living effectively together – it is a group. We should look forward to being with many other people in heaven.

D. Future reunion with believing loved ones is assured I Thes 4:17-18
Now let's go back to I Thes 4 and finish that off. V 13-17 tells about how Jesus is going to return again and at that point He will bring with Him those believers who have already died. And we will be united TOGETHER! **READ v 17**.¹⁸ Notice the “**together with...**” and then “**We will be with the Lord forever...**” Paul is really excited about this upcoming reunion with other believers. Escaping tribulation or leaving earthly frustrations behind are not what is looked forward to here at the rapture – the **great reunion** with other faithful believers ^{primarily} **AND** being together with our Lord Jesus Christ forever is! Every Christian friend and relative who has died before us is going to give us an incredible welcome! Let's just picture 5 minutes after our death – we are utterly amazed standing in the presence of Jesus and experiencing love, joy and hope fulfilled beyond anything we can imagine. After a time of being overwhelmed with the greatness of God, an angel turns us around and we see a whole crowd of people we recognize who cheer, smile and hug us. It takes my breath away just thinking about it. As a Puritan Pastor named Richard Baxter puts it, “*I know that Christ is all in all and that it is the presence of God that makes Heaven to be heaven. But yet it much sweetens the thoughts of that place to me that there are there such a multitude of my most dear and precious friends in Christ.*” And all God's people said ... AMEN!

II. Will there be marriage and family in heaven Matt 22:23-32
TURN TO MATT 22. There is another question that we must deal with. **What about my close family** – are there families in heaven? – will we be together? – if we are married what about my husband or my wife – will we be married? What if we were never married, do we get a chance there? Starting in v 23, some Sadducees – these were people who didn't believe in the physical resurrection (*they would be like the secular humanists today*) – these Sadducees were trying to make Jesus look foolish – so they set up a situation where a woman had 7 husbands, each of whom died before the next marriage. Then in v 27-28 they asked **READ**. Jesus was not shy in pointing out their unbelief. **READ v 29**. Then Jesus answered

some of the questions we just asked in v 30. **READ.** Unlike v 33, many American Christians don't get excited hearing this. They don't see how they can really enjoy heaven when there is no marriage.

A. There will be marriage

Eph 5:31-32

Actually there *is* marriage in heaven. Now before you brand me a heretic for not rightly believing Jesus' words here, listen to these words from Eph 5 **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church."** The Bible makes it clear there will be marriage in Heaven. Ephesians says there will be one marriage – between Jesus Christ and the Church – and we will all be part of it. The perfect marriage will happen between the church as the Bride of Christ and Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Because we think in physical terms, trying to picture this is like trying to accurately illustrate God's nature as Trinity – only 1 God but in 3 persons. What we clearly know is that total unity – the two becoming one – will happen between us and God. Attraction, closeness, intimacy, fulfillment and joy will be there in abundance. In fact, it will be far greater than the best we have ever imagined on earth. Earthly marriage is a copy, a shadow, a reflection of the true and ultimate marriage. Once that ultimate marriage begins at the Lamb's wedding feast, all human marriages that pointed to it will have served their noble purpose and will be assimilated into the one great marriage that they all foreshadowed. As one person said, **"The purpose of marriage is not to replace heaven but to prepare us for it."** There is also one family in heaven – we are all part of the family of God. No true believer will be left out, loneliness won't exist and everyone is going to get along!

B. There will not be human marriage

Matt 22:30

What Jesus is revealing in v 30 is that *there is no human marriage* – having fulfilled its purpose, it will end. Now here's the point we miss: there is something better. While the institution of human marriage will end, Jesus never even hints that the deep relationship between married people will end. Picture this – here on earth two people can be partners – business partners, tennis partners, bridge partners, lab partners – you get the idea. When they are no longer partners, it doesn't mean their friendship ends. The relationships positively built during the partnership can carry on to be a permanent friendship that lasts far beyond that. You haven't wasted any energy or effort in drawing close to other believers and family members here on earth. Yes, they each need to be genuine Christians AND they need to persevere to the end – they can't give up on Jesus and His truth as told us in the Bible. Even without individual families and individual marriages in heaven, you aren't going to lose any of the closeness you have now and you will gain so much more.

A corollary question is **"Will there be sexual relations in heaven?"** From Jesus' answer here, the answer would be **"no"**. Unlike what some may think, this is not be-

cause sex is bad and thus unworthy of heaven. We know that because God created sexual relations before sin came into the world. Just as human marriage foreshadows something better in heaven, so sexual relations within marriage also foreshadow something much better in heaven. It will be different though, so guys you don't have to get any creepy feelings thinking about the marriage between Christ and the church. As to warmth, intimacy, romance and excitement – nothing on this earth can compare to what we will experience in heaven.

C. We will be closer to people we love than now

What about our children or our parents? Or what about our relationships to our closest friends or most admired associates? *There is every reason to believe we will pick up in heaven right where we left off on earth.* I think we will constantly be saying, **“Did you ever imagine Heaven would be this wonderful? Did you ever imagine a relationship could be this great? Did you ever imagine you would feel so complete and fulfilled.”** *Simply put we will be closer to the believing friends and family we love now than we ever thought was possible.* In I Thessalonians, Paul had this intense anticipation he would see individual Thessalonians again and there would be more joy between them than the best earth can offer.

Now the fact that God has one marriage and one family for all, means that any who never experienced family or marital closeness on this earth will in heaven. Turn back a couple pages to **Matt 19:28-29**. Peter has just asked Jesus what they would get since they had given up all earthly things for him. **READ.** How do you receive a hundred times as much brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers or children? Because we are going to be part of a bigger family! If you never had a brother or sister who was close to you, you will have hundreds who are closer to you in heaven. If you never had a parent who was stable or encouraged you, you'll find trustworthy parents everywhere in Heaven all reflecting the perfect Father God. If you never had children on this earth or you were separated from your children, God is going to give you relationships in heaven that will value your guidance, help and service.

D. Many new friends, deepening of old friendships

Not only will heaven be a place where we grow closer to the believers we knew on this earth, **but it will be a place where we will discover many new relationships and friendships.** I used to think the millennium, or a thousand years, seemed like an incredibly long time. And eternity? How could there ever be enough to do in eternity to keep my interest that long. NOW the millennium seems too short a time just to meet all the people that were touched by this one local church and I'm beginning to wonder if eternity will be enough time to fully develop all the deep, meaningful relationships we can, discover all of marvels of the universe and learn deeply of all of God's character & the awesomeness. How long is it going to take to learn all the stories of those who received the 60,000 pairs of boots and shoes, 45,000 pair of socks and 40,000 pieces of clothing we helped release? How will we even meet all those impacted from our efforts in training pastors in India, helping the Bible be translated in 28 languages

in Papua New Guinea or the many thousands of refugees we have helped in the Middle East? When your mind starts getting overwhelmed with these kind of thoughts, I'm confident our Lord is smiling in heaven saying, "Now you're getting the idea!" **Heaven is a wonderful place – it is filled with glory and grace – we get to see our Saviors face** AND we get to deepen & straighten old relationships while making hundreds of millions of new ones. **Heaven is a wonderful place.**

III. Additional questions

A. Will we be united with infants who died?

(II Sam 12:23; Matt 19:13-14, 18:2-4; Luke 18:16; Ezek 16:21; Matt 18:10; Ps 8:2; Lk 1:15; Jer 1:5)

We know we will be united with other true believers in Jesus, **but will we be united with infants who have died** because they were too young to believe – the same question could be asked of the profoundly mentally handicapped? Since we are after truth and not sentimentality, simply saying "Of course God saves all the children and profoundly mentally handicapped" doesn't rigorously answer the question since they are born with the same sin nature every other human is born with. God doesn't answer this question directly as He alone is the judge and we have no business judging the judge – but God does give us some very great encouragements in this area.

I personally believe that those under the age of accountability – the age of true understanding ^{they} are specially cared for by God and the blood of Christ is applied to them if they die early. In II Sam 12:23, David says of his son who died after birth, "I will go to him (in heaven), **but he can not come to me** (here on earth)." Even though this son was born & died prematurely because of David's own sin – God made special provision for the child himself. This fits the rest of the verses that are listed in your outline – they all show the special care & concern that God has for young children. *As Jesus said while holding a young child, the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.* I also believe that one of the reasons God did not make this clearer is because of our human inclination to rationalize. We can never think that abortion, infanticide or child abandonment to death is somehow OK because the child will be better off since they are so young they will go to heaven. Sadly, humans have the capacity to warp any positive promise of God to cover their own sin or self-focus.

B. Will we pursue relationships?

Will we pursue relationships in heaven? I'm not sure where the idea comes from that everything will be static in heaven, but we will need to get to know people in heaven, just like we do here. Our new resurrection body has lots of new abilities but it is not "all-knowing"! One of my goals for this church is that we, in some way, impact so many people here and around the world that we will not have enough time in 1,000 years to hear all of their stories. Just picture the thousands of the kids who received encouragement from the Christmas Child boxes we have sent over the years! Don't you want to talk with the angels who helped you, ^{those} who lived faithful for Jesus

thousands of years ago or those who have been nice to you or helped you but it was only a brief encounter and you never even knew their name!

C. If our loved ones are in hell, won't that spoil heaven?

(Matt 25; John 5:22-29; Rom 2:5-16; 12:19; II Thes 1:7-9; Rev 18:1-19:3; 20:11-35)
What about the flip side – every one of us knows people we care about who aren't showing any desire to follow Jesus. ***If our loved ones are in hell won't that spoil heaven for us?*** I believe the answer lies firmly in the character of God. **First**, we will be so overwhelmed by our own unworthiness & God's grace there will be no questions here. **Second**, we will see more fully the actions & attitudes our loved ones really had towards God – like the revelations that have come out of the “***MeToo***” movement, we will no longer look at the actions of those loved ones as “***being no big deal***”. **Third**, we will be overwhelmed with just how many chances and opportunities God provided, well after people insisted on going their own way. This we can be sure: Hell will have no power over heaven; none of Hell's misery will ever veto any of Heaven's joy.

D. Will we ever disagree?

Will we ever disagree in heaven? Of course we will, why wouldn't we? Our knowledge in heaven is still finite – I'll know some things you don't and you'll have discovered some things I haven't. God does not make us clones in heaven. The difference is that there will be no sin, no personal attacks, no ill feelings, no prideful refusal to admit we did something incorrectly. We will still be learners in heaven. There was uniqueness & differences before sin and we'll have uniquenesses & differences in heaven. If we all, always, saw everything the same in heaven, why would we need rulers, judges and authorities in the New Earth? Imagine lively debate and questioning without any hint of malice, bruised egos or defensiveness. And then discovering together the deeper truth! ***Heaven really is going to be a great place where we will share so many discoveries together.***

E. Will we share discoveries together?

May God unleash your imagination about what our relationships will be like in heaven forever and may that continue to empower you to be an overcomer for Jesus.