

Have you ever tried to explain something to someone who simply cannot understand?

Parents, you know what I mean. What happens when your little three year old comes up to you and asks, “Daddy, where do babies come from?”

“Um... go ask your mom,” right?

It’s not because I don’t know where babies come from. It’s just hard to explain something like that to a child who isn’t mentally and emotionally mature enough to understand the real answer to a question like that.

This last Friday was Veterans Day. I read a great definition of a veteran on Facebook: A veteran is someone who at some point in their life wrote the US a blank check for the amount of “up to, and including, their life.” That is an incredible sacrifice that many in our country have made – some of you here today. That is an indescribable sacrifice that has put many in this situation of trying to explain something to someone who simply cannot understand. Many a veteran has returned from war to families who want to know what it was like, what their loved ones went through, but there often just aren’t words to adequately explain what war is like to someone who has never been there.

Sometimes, because of lack of intellectual capacity or life experience, words just aren’t enough to paint a clear picture.

I imagine that is how God often feels when he is talking to us.

I imagine there are times when God thinks to himself, “Ok, now how can I say this in a way that Jacob can understand it?” Because, let’s face it, when it comes to emotional and intellectual maturity, I’m nowhere near God’s level. So, just like that three year old trying to understand where babies come from (a truth that is part of the adult world), I’m trying to understand the things of God (which is a whole other level).

I think today is one of those days, one of those topics where God does the best that he can with the limits that we, weak, fragile, finite humans bring to the table.

We come to God and ask him, “God, what is heaven like?”

And God does the best that he can to explain it, and any miscommunications that happen, any awkwardness in the answer isn’t because God doesn’t know what heaven is like, it’s because we lack the ability to comprehend what God is saying to us. We are sinners living in a world that is fully immersed in and completely affected by sin. So God comes to us and tries to explain what heaven is like, but the perfection of heaven is so far outside of, so beyond our experiences in this world that we can’t really understand what he is saying. The Bible is full of descriptions of heaven, coming at the topic from many different angles to try and get us to understand something that we just don’t have the capacity to fully understand until we get there.

So, God describes heaven is described as a banquet – a Thanksgiving Feast with all the trappings and the family we love and we can understand that, even though heaven isn’t exactly like a banquet.

God describes heaven is described as a wedding – an intimate, loving, emotionally fulfilling day we can understand even though heaven isn’t exactly like a wedding.

In the second lesson for today heaven is described like a walk on a beautiful day at Grant Park – a gently flowing river, a beautiful, majestic tree, peace and tranquility, something we can understand, but again, not exactly what heaven will be like.

In our first lesson, the basis for this sermon, God takes a little bit different angle – and maybe you have used this angle yourself when trying to explain the unexplainable. God tries to explain heaven to us by explaining what it’s *not*. In Isaiah 65 we see that heaven is full of *nots*.

God, through his chosen prophet/pastor Isaiah, starts off this description of heaven like this, “**See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.**”

This right here points out why it is so hard for us to understand what heaven is like. God says it will all be new – something we have never seen or experience before. Dying and going to heaven is not going to be like moving into a remodeled apartment where the leaky sink has been fixed, the mold around the tub scrubbed off, the stain in the carpet removed, and the odd smell taken away. Heaven is not “earth remodeled.” It’s a complete teardown job. Heaven is not simply a cleaned up version of what you experience here on earth, it’s something completely different, something completely new... something God now defines by what it doesn’t have.

Here’s the first *not* of heaven: **The former things will *not* be remembered, nor will they come to mind.**

What kind of emotional baggage did you guys carry into church with you this morning?

Any of you have any big sins that are buried deep in your closet, and no matter how hard you try and move on from them, forget them, they just keep coming back to haunt you?

Did any of you walk in here with a painful memory, a time when sin or death or heartbreak became a very real thing for you, and no matter how much time passes you can’t help but cringe, and feel a little terrified because you know firsthand how much hurt you can feel in this world and that reminds you that it could happen again at any moment?

All of us carry mental and emotional baggage through this life... but not in heaven.

Do you want to know what heaven is going to be like for you, what it is like right now for that loved one of yours who is already there? Well, it’s *not* baggage filled. All those painful memories, all those guilt ridden recollections will be gone for you, and they already are gone for those who have gone before us – never to be remembered again.

Welcome to the *nots* of heaven. Pretty good first *not*, isn’t it? **The former things will *not* be remembered, nor will they come to mind.**

Instead God says: **be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem** (the Bible often uses Jerusalem or New Jerusalem or Zion, which was one of the hills inside Jerusalem, as synonyms for heaven)... **I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people...**

And now here is the second *not*: **the sound of weeping and of crying will be no more.**

Do you want to know what heaven is like? Those frustrated tears that streamed down your face when you fought with your husband because even though you love him, and he loves you, you are still two sinful people, capable of hurting each other deeply; that uncontrollable sobbing at the bedside of your sick, sick child; that sorrowful weeping as you stood next to that hole in the ground and watched the body of your wife, your mother being lowered into the ground... all those heartbreaking experiences that define so much of our time on this earth, “*Not* in my heaven,” says your God. “*Not* in my new Jerusalem, *not* among my chosen people. You will never cry again.”

Again, sounds pretty good, doesn’t it?

And why will we never cry again? Well, the third *not* answers that: **Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.**

God says to us today, “You want to know what heaven will be like? It will be like that old guy, that 100 year old man, heaven is considering his life as just beginning. That’s what forever feels like.” “Forever” is hard to wrap your mind around, isn’t it? God says this *not* to teach us that people will still grow old and die in heaven, God makes clear that heaven is forever, this is just God trying to put *forever* in terms we can begin to understand.

Death will be gone – and you remember what it is that brought death into this world in the first place, don’t you? Death is the wages of sin. Why will crying be gone? Why will the former things not be remembered? Because the wages of sin has been paid in full. The death that we deserve, the death that makes this world so cruddy, will be gone.

Welcome to the *nots* of heaven: death cannot hurt you anymore.

Heaven means no more baggage, no more crying, no more death, and God has one more *not* for us today:

No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat... my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hand. For they will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune.

In heaven there will be no more foreclosures. No recessions. No layoffs. No cut backs. No salary freezes. No workplace anxieties. No wrestling with purposelessness or lack of passion for your job. It will all be gone.

God throws out a bunch of the *nots* of heaven – it’s not an exhaustive list, but his hope is that one of them would resonate with you this morning, that one of these

would give you some peace of mind as you wrestle with the consequences of sin this side of eternity.

We may not be able to understand it all, but it sounds pretty good, doesn’t it?

Which leaves us with one final question to consider today: why us?

Why do we get this?

Why do we get to experience one day what it is like to be **a people blessed by the LORD?**

Why do we get to rest secure knowing that this heaven of *nots* is where our loved ones are now, and where we will be too one day? Because the Bible makes clear that not everyone will get to enjoy the heaven of *nots*... This description of heaven ends with the ominous note “**dust will be the serpent’s food**” – the devil and those aligned with him do not get to enjoy the heaven of *nots*. Why is that not us?

Well, it certainly isn’t because we have earned or deserved it. It isn’t because we are smarter or better than the rest of the world. It has nothing to do with us at all, actually.

It has everything to do with Jesus – Jesus who came to pay the wages of sin for us; Jesus who sent his Spirit into our hearts to create faith that clings to the forgiveness he bought for us when he died on his cross; Jesus who promises us that one day we will be in the heaven of *nots* because we are **children of the resurrection** – children who were adopted into God’s family when he put his name on us at our baptism.

What is heaven like? Heaven is finding yourself among that people blessed by the LORD, being a part of a family where God is the Father, and Jesus is your brother. And all because of Jesus.

Today is Saints Triumphant Sunday – one Sunday a year where we remember our loved ones who have gone before us, one Sunday a year when we spend time thinking about the triumph that is waiting for us. And while we may not be able to fully understand every aspect of heaven until we get there, God has not left us in the dark. Rejoice with me today friends, over the heaven of *nots* – no more baggage, no more crying, no more death, no more hardships. That heaven is yours. Jesus promises it.

Amen.