

RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE RESURRECTION

Scriptures: Mark 12:18-27; I Corinthians 15:35-44

In his book called *Craddock Stories*, Fred Craddock, a minister from Georgia, tells of a 16 year-old girl who hung around after church obviously wanting to ask him a question. She waited until everyone was gone, then said, “May I ask you a question?” “Yes,” Craddock said. She said, “Will I go to hell for not wanting to go to heaven?” Craddock writes,

Well, a pretty sixteen-year-old girl asking these ultimate questions kind of blew me away for a moment. ... I said, “Why in the world are you asking that?” She said, “Well, my mother’s real suspicious. Every time I come in, she grills me: Where have you been? Who was with you? What’d you do? Every time I leave the house: Where you going? Who you going with? What are you going to do? When are you going to be home? All the time very suspicious. The way she gets at me is: If you do this, you won’t go to heaven! If you don’t do that, you won’t get to heaven! All the time: You won’t get to heaven! You won’t get to heaven! What my mother doesn’t understand is that I’m not interested in going to heaven.” Well, I really was at a loss how to answer her because ... (when our son and daughter were that age) ... I did not use that kind of talk. I had said to John several times, “You’re grounded!” but I didn’t mean it in any ultimate sense (p. 75).

I suspect the girl did not want to go to heaven because she was afraid her mother would be there.

If you think about it, that is the same awkward issue raised by the Sadducees in our second scripture reading. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death. One of my Sunday School teachers told us, “That is why they’re sad, you see.” But I don’t know. I think they may have figured that life would sadder, or at least more complicated, if there was a resurrection. Think of all the people from your past that you might have to deal with. To illustrate, they tell an elaborate story about a widow who outlives seven different husbands. Finally, she dies. “In the resurrection,” they ask, “whose wife will she be?” Imagine facing seven ex-husbands. I picture the Sadducees snickering as they ask the question.

Jesus replies, “You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” I wonder how that would go over with the 16 year-old girl in Fred Craddock’s story—being told that in heaven there is no sex; we are all celibate angels. I wonder if that would improve her attitude toward heaven.

Mark Twain once commented on this. He said that the Bible’s view of a sexless heaven is like telling a lost and perishing person in a roasting desert that he could have anything he wants except water (*Letters from the Earth*, quoted in *Time*, July 14, 2008, p. 50).

You see the dilemma? You can picture heaven as being just like life on earth, in which case it could end up just as hellish as life on earth, or you can picture heaven has being nothing at all like our lives here on earth, in which case you might wonder if you would want to go there.

Fortunately, there is another alternative. It is the picture offered in our first scripture reading from I Corinthians 15. The apostle Paul repeats a question that had apparently been asked by the Corinthians: “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Do you see how that is like the question of the Sadducees? Whose wife will she be? How can you have anything like normal bodily relations without making heaven as awkward, complicated, and messed up as life on earth?” Paul answers,

Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed is own body.

This reply tells us two things. First it tells us that there is continuity between our life here on earth and our life after the resurrection. In the resurrection we are still us. We are still the unique people that God created us to be. Just as each seed produces a unique flower, so in the resurrection we will still be unique people. But we will also be different. We will still be us, but we will be transformed, just as a seed is transformed when it becomes a flower.

Right now we cannot imagine what that will be like. From looking at a seed you cannot imagine what it will look like when it is grown. That is why Jesus says to the Sadducees, “You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.” You do not understand what transformations God can work in your life.

I don’t know if C. S. Lewis ever read Mark Twain. But in one of his books called *Miracles* Lewis takes on Mark Twain’s objection to heaven. He describes a small boy who is told that sex is the highest bodily pleasure we could ever have. The boy responds by asking if it comes with chocolate. The boy cannot imagine a higher pleasure in life than chocolate. C. S. Lewis writes,

In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don’t bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolates: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in heaven, will leave no room for it (p. 261).

When Jesus says to the Sadducees, “When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven,” he does not mean that heaven is less than the joy of sex. He means it is more, infinitely more.

Which brings me back to the 16 year-old girl in Fred Craddock’s church. She has been told by her mother that if you do this or do that you will not go to heaven. She is not sure she wants to go to heaven, if it means giving up everything she has ever wanted. But what if the things she wants are only glimpses of something greater that God wants for us?

It is true that in the resurrection we will have to give up certain things. In the resurrection that 16 year-old girl will have to give up some of her fierce independence and self-sufficiency. But what she will get in return is dignity, which is what independence and self-sufficiency yearns

for in a misdirected way. Likewise, the mother in the story will have to give up something. She will have to give up her desire for control. But what she will get in return is a sense of peace and security, which is what control yearns for in a misdirected way.

The same will be true for us. In the resurrection we will have to give up lust, but in return we will get love, which is what lust yearns for in a misdirected way. We will have to give up pride, but in return we will get acceptance, which is what pride yearns for in a misdirected way. We will have to give up greed, but in return we will get fulfillment, which is what greed yearns for in a misdirected way.

The resurrection is not less than bodily life; it is more. It is bodily life transformed into the glorious thing God meant it to be before we messed it up.

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