

Oh!...Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4-7

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 24, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

What will everlasting life be like?

This is a question that many of you have posed at one time or another.

Sometimes you ask it this way: what will heaven be like? That question is actually an incorrect question. Heaven is something that God created. It says in Genesis 1 that in the beginning God created heaven and earth. Some of your translations probably say that God created the heavens and the earth. That translation should either stick with heavens everywhere it finds that Hebrew word or translate it correctly to start with. God made heaven and earth. Therefore heaven is a creation of God. Therefore when the Lord Jesus comes in the heat of His judgment, He will melt in the fire of His judgment both heaven and earth. The heaven and earth that are here now will not be there. He will make a new heaven and a new earth. It will be the home of righteousness.

This is why so many of you don't like any of the answers that you get when you ask what heaven will be like. The answer is speculative. People are taking parts of the new heaven and the new earth and calling it heaven, but when you think about that it doesn't make any sense because when we die our souls go to heaven and what we say about the new heaven and the new earth apply to bodies and not to souls.

One big example of this problem is the little bulletin blurb that funeral homes sell you that is entitled, "If you could see me now." It reads as if the dead person is speaking to the living and telling them that if they could see him now they would see that he is running and jumping and happy and glad. The entire poem or piece is all about the new creation at the resurrection, when with glorified bodies, we will run and jump and play and laugh and sing. The reason that that little blurb does not satisfy some of you as to what heaven will be like is because you are not sure how a soul does all of those things that the little bulletin thing from the funeral home says that they are doing when it does not have a body. How can a person run and jump and smell the flowers when they are in heaven? Isn't heaven above the sky? You see the problems this presents. It is all because we have not read our Bibles and when we don't read our Bibles we get our theology from little bulletin thingies from the funeral home that the funeral home is selling to you to make you feel good at a time of grief.

So what does the Bible say? The Bible says this, "The Lord is at hand." He came the first time in great humility. We will celebrate that first coming this evening and tomorrow morning. He comes the second time in great glory.

When the Lord returns from heaven where He has ascended, He will return in the glory of His Father. He will return with all the angels of His Father. He will raise all of the dead. With the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, He will raise all of the dead. He had the power to raise the dead when He was among us in great humility. How much more will He raise the dead when He returns again in glory!

When He raises the dead He will stand in judgment over them and over those who will be alive when He returns. The heaven and the earth will melt in the heat of the fire of His judgment. All of the creation will melt in the heat of the fire of His judgment. Neither heaven nor earth will survive. In their place He will create a new heaven and a new earth. Those whom He finds righteous in the judgment will live forever in the new heaven and the new earth. Those whom He finds wicked will not live in the new

heaven and the new earth. Instead He will dismiss them into the everlasting lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Now the question of the hour and the question you should ask in regards to life everlasting is this: what will the new heaven and the new earth be like? Not what will heaven be like? That is only a temporary phase for the soul while it waits for the resurrection. The real life everlasting gets underway when Jesus raises you from the dead on the Last Day. What will the new heaven and the new earth be like?

Well, they are called new heaven and new earth. That means that they will resemble this heaven and this earth sufficiently so that we will recognize them while we live in them. Jesus is not taking us to some foreign place to which we must adjust. He is bringing us to the new creation where He designed us to live as created beings.

But there will be one major difference. In the new heaven and the new earth after Jesus raises you from the dead, there will be no more sin and no more death, none whatsoever.

For today I would like to focus on the fact that there will be no death.

Think of that for a moment. There will be no death. You will rise from the dead by the power of the Lord of glory and you won't die. Your body will be recreated and reconstituted in such a way that you will not die. It will not wear out. It will not get old. It will always work the way it is supposed to work. You will never see a doctor or a physician's assistant in the new heaven and the new earth. You will never need medicine and surgery in the new heaven and the new earth. You will have a body because Jesus created you to have a body. He is not going to undo His creation, but it will work the way it is supposed to work! No health insurance in the new heaven and the new earth. No bureaucracy to fool with. No long phone calls while you are on hold waiting for customer assistance from the insurance company. No decisions to make as to which plan to be on. No congressional arguments over the best way to administer health care. Imagine it!

There will be no cemeteries there. Once we rise from the dead those resting places will not be necessary as resting places any more. There will be no funeral directors. There will be no pastors there. There will no government there. No one will want to kill you and even if there were people there who would kill you, which there won't be, but even if there were, you won't die. They couldn't kill you even if they wanted to. So there will be no public servants to protect us from those who would do us harm. There will be no military there. There will be no government there, no president, no congress, no governor, no legislature, no judges, no juries or jury duty.

I know that there will be farmers and gardeners there, but that is because before Adam fell into sin and death God had put him in the garden to work it and to preserve it. Our economy today is so focused around death that it is hard even for farmers to imagine what they would do in a creation without death in it. We buy fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide, all in an effort to keep the desirable plant alive because if we don't try to keep the desirable plant alive, it will die. Something in this old heaven and old earth will kill it. We grow plants and keep animals in the end for our food. Without death to whom would we sell our produce? And so there will be no money in the new creation. There will be no banks and financial institutions. None will be needed no one will die.

That is the world that is coming to you in the new heaven and the new earth. That is the life everlasting that Jesus has guaranteed to you by His own death and resurrection.

Now, in this very pulpit I have joked about there being cars and trucks in the new creation. But I actually do not think that there will be cars and trucks in the new creation. In fact I do not think that there

will be any organized transportation of any kind in the new creation. The reason is that such transportation will be unnecessary.

Why do you speed on the interstate? Why do you take a several thousand pound vehicle which even at the speed limit flies down the highway at seventy miles an hour and drive seventy-five or eighty? Why do you do it? You risk my life by doing this. You obviously don't care anything about me or you would drive more cautiously. Are you just a calloused human being?

You drive at fast velocities because you want to get there. Why do you want to get there? Because one day I am going to die and I do not want to waste any more time than is necessary driving down the road when I could be at my destination enjoying my children, my wife, my husband, my parents. I could be at home watching a movie or enjoying some popcorn. I could be with my family at Christmas time and instead I am in this vehicle and so we drive fast. And why do you want to be sure you get home quickly in order to enjoy time with family because one day you and they are going to die and you know that and you want to enjoy time with them now while you have the time to enjoy them and so you drive fast.

That is why we have airplanes. They allow us to travel to places that we would never go because it would take too much of our limited lives to get to and from the destination to enjoy it otherwise so we build airplanes so that not so much our life is eaten up getting to and from our destination and that makes it plausible for us to go there and return. All these things assume that our time is limited and the only thing that is limiting our time is death.

If we were going to live forever, we would walk to Urbana. Why not? We would have plenty of time to get there. If it took years to get there that would not matter, we are going to live forever. It is just like the fifth stanza of Amazing Grace says, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." So in my scenario if it took ten years to walk to Urbana once we got there we would have the exact same number of years left in our lives as we did when we started the journey, namely all of life everlasting!

We would stop keeping track of time. It would become meaningless. No clocks or clock makers in the new heaven and the new earth.

And our death is the reason why Christmas time is so stressful. I don't have time to drive on north Market in Champaign to go Christmas shopping. Ever driven on north Market in Champaign during Christmas shopping season? And you don't even have to be there then to get frustrated with the whole thing. Just go up there later in the afternoon after school lets out and try to get around. And why does that kind of traffic frustrate you? Because you are going to die and you are wasting precious moments of your life stuck in traffic.

Why is it that when people cut you off in traffic it irks you? Because you are going to die and they just risked their lives and your life cutting you off. Why does it irk me when people drive through Wal-Mart parking lots like they are driving in a cow pasture? There are yellow lines after all! Can't you see the yellow lines? Are you blind? The reason I am upset is because I perceive that my life which is temporary is under threat. You might kill me because you are not following the rules of the road. I got even madder once I had a baby strapped into the backseat because not only were such people threatening my life they were threatening his and I waited a long time for him and I am now closer to death than other parents are when they started parenting and I don't want you to take me away from him today!

I remember last Christmas standing line at Barnes and Noble. I stood there forever. And when I got to the front of line all I wanted to do was pick up a stocking stuffer for Christy that I had ordered. The computer said it was on the shelf behind the check out people. The shelf said that it was not there. They called the manger. They checked the back rooms. They checked the shelves. All the while I am standing there holding up everyone who is in line behind me. I want to get this done, get it wrapped, and leave. I

remember turning around and apologizing to these frustrated people in line behind me for putting them into this position. And I think some of them appreciated that someone acknowledged the fact that we were all getting a little closer to death standing there when we could have been home enjoying our families and spending time together.

All of that frustration, all of that anxiety is because we constantly know in our hearts that we will die and we only have so much time together in this creation.

In the new creation there will be none of that.

There will be no traffic, but even if there were people could drive in parking lots like cow pastures and I wouldn't care, because I am not going to die. Their driving is not a threat to me. There won't be lines in the new creation, but even if there were, standing in them isn't going to make any difference, I am going to live forever. I have plenty of time to do other things with those whom I love. And without doctors and health care there won't be any anxiety there. Without surgeries and medication, there will be no anxieties there. And without sin there will be no anxieties when you stand before your Maker.

This is the life that your Lord has guaranteed to you on the day when He returns. And He is near! He is at hand! The time of His return is imminent! He is coming soon!

And even though you are not currently experiencing this new life in this new creation that is coming since it is guaranteed to you by the One who rose from the dead it is yours now! It is coming to you now! Every day that goes by brings you closer to this wonderful new creation that your Lord has guaranteed to you! Everlasting life is coming and it is coming to you! Since it is guaranteed to you by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead it is as good as yours right now!

Think of that since the new creation is guaranteed to you by His death and resurrection, that everlasting life is already yours right now.

Now, it is in this light that the admonition of Saint Paul in Philippians 4 finally and actually makes sense:

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, Rejoice!

Let your reasonableness be evident to all. When it says reasonableness it means your yieldingness. In other words if you are going to live forever in the new creation these things that threaten your life in this creation are rendered inert. Even if someone or something kills you, you are going to rise from the dead and live forever. Therefore you let your yieldingness be evident when someone cuts you off in traffic or threatens your life with crazy driving or the line is moving too slowly in the store. Your yieldingness is there because you are going to rise from the dead and live forever.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God!

And the God of peace who has guaranteed to you this new life will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.