

I would like to start today's sermon with a riddle – what is this place that I am describing – right now, it is a quiet, peaceful place, where you might see one or two people walking around, talking in whispers. But someday, this place will be loud, hustling and bustling with all kinds of people. What place would that be? Right now, the people that go there often feel a sense of confusion, a sense of sadness and despair. But someday, this place will be filled with people who are not confused, not at all. And rather than a place of sadness, it will be a place of unspeakable joy. Right now, this place is considered to be the end of the road. But someday, it will be the beginning. What is this place?

I pass by one of these places when I take a shortcut back from I75. My dad used to call it a rock garden. I think you know what place this is. There are people there, and they're all lying down. If you think about it, they're not really even people, but corpses, left behind in caskets or urns. Of course, this place is a cemetery, and the atmosphere there will be completely changed when Jesus returns on Judgment Day. Right now, quiet and empty, but someday, loud and full of people. Right now, you'll hear crying, but someday, you'll hear loud laughter. Rather than the end of the road, it will be looked upon as the beginning.

This morning, Jesus tells us that when he returns, things will be very very different. "Do not be amazed at this," Jesus says. And as far as you are concerned, either you'll be alive when Jesus returns, and you'll see all these things happen with your own eyes, or, you'll be one of those many people that Jesus raises from the dead. So until then: Hang On With Patient Expectation or HOPE....

Every year we celebrate Easter, the day that Jesus rose from the dead after dying on Good Friday. Today, we are focusing on your Easter, your resurrection, a day that you can look forward to. It is true, that, unless Jesus returns very soon, you will eventually die. But it's also true that someday, you will rise from the dead, and you will be alive on this earth once again, just as alive as you are right now. Actually, more-so – the life you will enjoy after you rise from the dead will be much more fulfilling, much more satisfying, much more full of joy and happiness than the life you are living right now. Today, we are going to focus on your resurrection, your Easter, that day that Jesus returns to raise you. As Christians, we sometimes get caught up in the "here-and-now" – we forget that there are better things, more wonderful things, waiting for us in the future. Even the best things you experience now on this earth pale in comparison to what you will experience beginning on Judgment Day.

There will be no "rapture," as many people describe it today. There will be no moment when all the believers quietly disappear and all the unbelievers are left behind to continue to live on this earth and suffer for awhile. According to the Bible, at a moment when you least expect it, Christ "himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). At that moment, there won't be any mystery as to what is going on, as the various movies and books portray it. At that moment, everyone will know exactly what is going on. No matter where you are standing, no matter what you are doing, you will be able to look up, and you will see that it's over. The world as we know it is finished. Christ has returned.

Do not be amazed at this," Jesus says in our text for today. Verse 28: "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out." It just boggles

the mind to picture what that will exactly look like. Whether or not it will be this way, I don't know, but I picture a cemetery, at first being a very quiet place. But then, instantly, it is filled with people, both believers and unbelievers, alive and looking up in awe at Christ, the great Savior and King of this world.

The Bible pictures something else quite interesting too. In the book of 1 Thessalonians (4:16-17), we are told that those believers in Christ who are raised from the dead will immediately be caught up into the sky to meet the Lord in the air. And what if you are alive when all this takes place? 1 Thessalonians tells us "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

So if judgment day happens at 12:00 noon today. My mom's body in Forrest Lawn, cemetery rises from the dead. Her body is fixed up, glorified. It then rises and joins her soul with Jesus in heaven. After that, I will rise both body and soul to join my mom with Jesus. You might say, my body gets fixed up enroute.

Obviously, who is left behind? The unbelievers. That's where a series of books called the "Left Behind" series gets some of its ideas. But remember, those books are fiction. They portray a quiet, quick disappearance of believers, while the rest of the world continues to go on. But here, we learn from the Bible what will really happen. On Judgment Day, in a very open and public and loud way, Christ will return. The world will stop. He will raise the dead. All those who believe in Christ will be lifted up into the air to meet the Lord. As 1 Thessalonians says, "And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Are you alarmed at what Jesus says in the next verse of our text for this morning? Look at what Jesus says, verse 29: "Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." Have you ever done any sort of evil in your life? Have you ever lied or lusted, or felt a sense of greed, or have had a moment of selfishness? Have you ever put yourself and your wants ahead of others? Ahead of God? Have you ever done evil in your life? When Jesus raises you from the dead on Judgment Day, will he condemn you because of your evil? Are you going to be left behind on Judgment Day, watching others meet Christ in the air while you are condemned eternally to hell?

For those of you who believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, that will not happen. When you read the rest of the Bible, you begin to understand what Jesus is saying here. It is true that on Judgment Day, Jesus will talk about your life, your works, but before he talks about your life, he looks into your heart. In some, he will see no faith in him as Savior. He will see that some have spent their lives trusting in themselves. Some have spent their lives ignoring Christ and serving themselves. "You have done evil," Jesus will say to them. (See Mt. 25:31-46)

"What do you mean?" they will say. And Jesus will say, "You never trusted in me as your Savior. You never had faith in me. None of the good things you have ever done in your life count, because nothing was done out of love for me. 'All your righteous acts are like filthy rags.' You have done evil." And then, because Jesus is a just judge, he will have to condemn them to hell.

And then Jesus will look at you. And before he talks about your life, he will look into your heart. And he will be glad, because he will see that you trust in him. He will see all the times you have confessed your sins. He will see that you believe that his blood has cleansed you of all of your sins. He will see that you have faith in him, that you trust him

as your Savior. And he will say to you, "You have done good."

And you will say, "But I don't remember being that good." And Jesus will say, "But you believe in me. And at times, you did good things in your life. Those good things count in my eyes, because you did those things out of love for me. Your sins are forgiven. And the good things you have done – those are fruits of your faith in me. You have done good." And then, because of his grace, because of his mercy, he will welcome you into eternal glory.

And you will look at yourself and say, "I think this is the same body I had when I lived on the earth, but it feels so much different, so much better." "That's right," one of the angels will say to you. "God has taken all the sin out of your body. You are now a glorified creature – now you are the human being that God intended you to be before the fall into sin." No wrinkles, no arthritis, no cancer, no artificial parts.

Then that angel will disappear, and you will look, and you will find yourself participating in the greatest worship service, the music so beautiful, the experience so wonderful, it will be beyond explanation. And you will find yourself sitting at a feast beyond anything you have ever seen or experienced before. And at every moment, Christ will be there, at your side, smiling, and saying to you, "I've been looking forward to showing all these things to you. Come and see the mansion prepared for you since the creation of the world."

My friends, someday you will rise from the dead. And you will never miss the sun, which will be put out, for you will be basking in the presence of the Son of God, the Sun of glory, and, as it says in the Old Testament, you will shine, much brighter than the sun shines here in the middle of summer. And when you rise from the grave, you will never miss any city on this earth, because you will be ushered into the city of God, the new Jerusalem. You will never wonder, "What time is it?" An angel will remind you that there is no such thing as time, no such thing as night, no such thing as hurrying, or rushing, or being tired. "This is eternal life," the angel will say to you.

So how can you hang on with patient expectation when it looks like the world is out of control, when people are in charge that don't agree with Christianity? When atheism and immorality and materialism are taking over the world, and false religions like Islam and anything except the Bible is growing in popularity - how do you have hope? How can you hang on with patient expectation when your life is not going well? When your body isn't what you want it to be? When your mind doesn't work the way you want? When you're not healthy, when you're not smart, when everything is going wrong for you socially. God tells you how to have hope - believe his Word when he says that someday he will raise you from the dead and change you into perfect - physically perfect, mentally and emotionally perfect, and everything will be perfect for you socially and with your health and with your whole existence, when he raises you and changes you on Judgment Day. Don't be ignorant. Don't grieve like those who have no hope. I will rise. You will rise! The ultimate Triumph belongs to us. The future is bright. Hang on With Patient Expectation!