

DO YOU BELIEVE IN HEAVEN?

Do you believe in Heaven? Strangely enough, not everyone who believes in God believes that there is a Heaven where humans too can live. For instance, in America back in 2005, a survey of 2500 Americans suggested that 82% of the population believed in God. But the same survey suggested that 75% believed in Heaven. How would you answer? Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Heaven?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

Another survey of Americans released in 2013, shows that 74% of Americans believe in God and 68% believe in Heaven. Both these numbers are down since 2005. So we see that many people disconnect God from Heaven. They believe in God, but do not believe in Heaven.

Jesus connected God and Heaven when He said to Peter and his other apostles, "You believe in God; believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:1-3) The place where Jesus wants to take his apostles is Heaven. Jesus calls that place His Father's house. Of course, this is metaphorical language for Heaven is not a "house" like you and I understand a house. But this is a reference to Heaven. Jesus wants us to believe in God and believe in Him. You see, if we believe in Jesus and in God we will believe that Jesus' absence from the earth is because he is gone to prepare a place for human beings. In that same conversation Jesus says that He will return to gather His people to Himself, that where He is His people can be also.

Thomas, one of Jesus' apostles, said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replied, "I am the way, the truth and the life." And then Jesus said a remarkable saying, "No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:5, 6) If God the Father is in Heaven and no one can go to the Father except through Jesus, then no one can go to Heaven except through Jesus.

Many people think that this statement is an arrogant statement. Jesus is too exclusive! He excludes any other way of going to Heaven! Many people believe that there are many ways to heaven and every person can choose his or her own way. These folks believe that one way is as good as another. But Jesus does not believe that, nor teach that.

Friends, Jesus is the One who has come to the earth to save all mankind. There is no other savior. On two occasions God spoke from Heaven about Jesus. "When Jesus was baptized,

immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17) The second occasion happened a couple of years later when Jesus took three of his apostles with him up to the top of a high mountain in Galilee. There on that mountain Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with [Jesus]." After a while "Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.'" It was while Peter was still speaking that "a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified." (Matthew 17:2-6)

It must have been a frightening experience to see Jesus transformed into the brightness of the sun, and to see two ancient heroes standing and talking with Jesus. But that voice from the cloud terrified the apostles and they fell on their faces before that voice. They only looked up again when Jesus touched them and said, "Arise, and have no fear." When they looked up they saw only Jesus. "And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded [those three men], **"Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."** (Matthew 17:9) Can you imagine NOT telling this? But eventually they did tell what they saw and heard. Jesus is God's Son, "listen to him."

If we will listen to Jesus we will learn something about heaven, and if we believe Jesus then we will also believe in heaven.

Both in the Old and the New Testament God's residence has always been identified as "heaven." However, the word "heaven" is also used to identify the atmosphere around the earth. Furthermore, the word "heaven" is also used to describe what we call outer space. Consider the following passages from the Bible. The first verse of the Bible says that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) Notice that God created more than one heaven. On the first day of creation darkness was already present, so God said "Let there be light." And it was so, and God separated the darkness from the light. The darkness He called night and the light He called day. On the second day of creation, "God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day." (Genesis 1:6-8) Clearly, this "heaven" is the atmosphere that surrounds the earth.

But consider this warning from Moses, "Beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."

(Deuteronomy 4:19) It is easy to recognize in this passage that the word "heaven" refers to outer space; the sun the moon and the billions of stars, they are called the "host of heaven."

But then also the Bible speaks of the place where God is. Solomon spoke of that heaven when he dedicated the magnificent temple that he built in Jerusalem. Solomon asked a pertinent question: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27) That "highest heaven" is no doubt the place that Paul ascended to. Paul speaks of that place as the "third heaven." Paul wrote, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) Paul may be referring to the time in his life when he was stoned and left for dead. Some have suggested that this might have been the time when he was caught up to the third heaven. When the Christians finally gathered around him, Paul revived and got up and walked back into the city of Lystra. The next day he left. [You can read about this in Acts 14:19, 20.] Whenever it was, Paul was caught up to the paradise of God. He was not permitted to tell what he saw.

Friends, if you listen to the Bible, surely you must believe in God's residence of Heaven. And if you will listen to Jesus you will come to believe that you too can one day enter into God's residence. Jesus once said, "Call no man your father on earth, [that is as a religious title] for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, [that is, as a religious title] for you have one instructor, the Christ." (Matthew 23:9-10) Friends, just think of all the religious titles that are in the world! We should not be calling people by these titles! The only religious leaders we should honor are the ones in Heaven, God the Father and His son, the Christ Jesus. Of course, God and Jesus have left their guidance in the pages of a book inspired by the Holy Spirit, the book we call the Bible.

Friends, you and I can interact with Heaven. Not only can our prayers go there in the name of Jesus Christ, but Jesus also talked about humans laying up treasure in Heaven, not on the earth. On one occasion a young man came to Jesus asking him about eternal life. "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus told him to keep the commandments, the young man replied, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 19:18-19) Then the young

man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21) Friends, in this world's economy we can lay up treasure in heaven, the place where God dwells. We do this by being zealous in good works.

The Psalmist sang this song: "Once I was bitter and brokenhearted. I was stupid and ignorant, and I treated you as a wild animal would. But I never really left you, and you hold my right hand. Your advice has been my guide, and later you will welcome me in glory. In heaven I have only you, and on this earth you are all I want. My body and mind may fail, but you are my strength and my choice forever. Powerful LORD God, all who stay far from you will be lost, and you will destroy those who are unfaithful." (Psalm 73:21-27) Friends, do you believe in Heaven?