

WILL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER IN HEAVEN?

March 20, 2011

Christians expect to see one another in Heaven! The songs and hymns we sing in worship reflect this great hope that we have. For instance, one song reads, “There’s a mansion now empty, just waiting for me at the end of life’s troublesome way. Many friends and dear loved ones will welcome me there near the door of that mansion some day.”

Hello, I’m Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Another song that Christians sing goes like this: “Out on the hills of that wonderful country, happy, contented and free...loved ones are waiting and watching my coming: heaven holds all to me.” Sometimes we hear people asking: “Will we know one another in Heaven?” The reason we are interested in the question is because we too must face the “chilling hand of death.” We have experienced the loss of loved ones. Friends of ours have gone on ahead of us. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, perhaps even children or grandchildren –we have experienced losses like these! And so we are interested in the nature of heaven. If you are a young person then you may not have as much interest in the question of Heaven. I don’t know what it may take to cause you to wake up to the reality of death...but for some it may take a tragedy for them to begin to think soberly about life after death. I vividly remember how a couple of brushes with death caused this young man to sober up and think about what happens when a person dies! This is not morbid thinking; it is sober thinking when a person considers what is real and how we should handle it. Peter encouraged people with the real prospect that the end of things is at hand...he said:

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 1 Peter 4:7 (ESV)

Solomon said, ² It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

³ Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” Eccl 7:2-4 (ESV)

Solomon reminds us about reality, and it is a proper to consider the end of all things. Solomon also wrote encouraging young people to think about such things:

¹ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them Eccl 12:1 (KJV)

Christians have a cherished hope of seeing and knowing each other in heaven. Someone has also wisely asked: “if we can know one another in heaven, won’t I be sad when I realize a loved one is not there?” Ah! That’s a good question, don’t you think? Does the Bible give us some answers to these questions?

The Bible truly teaches that there is a Heaven to long for and a Hell to avoid. The word “heaven” is used three different ways in our Bibles, and I might add that in English we use it in the same three ways in everyday life. The apostle Paul once wrote,

“² 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. ³ 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— ^{4 4} How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 Cor 12:4 (KJV)

The “third Heaven” must be the place where our Creator, our heavenly Father, lives. The second heaven is the place where the universe resides. It is inhabited by the suns, the moons, and the stars of the universe. The first heaven is the one closest to us. It is the place where the birds, jets, and clouds fly. It is the atmosphere, the air we breathe. The Bible talks about each of these heavens. Jesus talked to people about the third Heaven. For instance, there is a Kingdom from there that is called the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the rule of God in the hearts and lives of men, women, boys and girls. People can be a part of this Kingdom of

Heaven even while still living on the earth. That's right! I am a citizen of that Kingdom and so can any person no matter where they live in this world. The Kingdom of Heaven is currently here among the population of the earth. When we choose to become a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven we are given an inheritance in the "world to come."

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV)

Peter calls that heavenly inheritance "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." This heavenly inheritance is reserved in a place called heaven, and by God's power Christians in this world are being guarded through faithfulness for that salvation that is coming in the last time.

Will we recognize people we have known if we both receive an inheritance in heaven? Jesus was impressed with a certain Roman soldier called a Centurion. The man asked Jesus to heal his servant from a distance; he said he was not worthy that Jesus would enter his house. Jesus was impressed that the man thought he had the power to heal his servant from a distance. Jesus remarked that he had not seen such faith in Israel among his brethren the Jews. Jesus made this point, "¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt 8:11-12 (ESV) When faithful Christians sit down in the kingdom of heaven Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there. Abraham is still Abraham; Isaac is still Isaac; and Jacob is still Jacob. You will still be you! Since we will have the same identity, since we will be the same persons, then surely we will recognize each other.

The Sadducees of Jesus' day did not believe in the afterlife. They neither believed in Heaven or Hell. To prove their point to Jesus they tested him with an

illustration out of the law of Moses concerning marriage. They described a woman who had had seven husbands because each one of her previous husbands had died; she would then marry the next one until she reached seven. They asked Jesus whose wife would she be in the resurrection, in the afterlife? Of course, they did not believe there would be a resurrection of the dead, so they thought they could render Jesus speechless. But Jesus responded this way:

³⁰ **For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”** Matt 22:30 (ESV)

Relationships like marriage will not exist in heaven. You see, God will be finished with creating eternal spiritual souls through the natural process among humans. Human beings are entrusted with creating eternal spirits by conceiving and giving birth to children. In heaven this human process will end.

Friends, the great climax of history is already past. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the climax of history; it was completed at just the right time for Jesus' father to fulfill His plan for saving the world. The Holy Spirit wrote that

¹ ... the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children [spiritually speaking], were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law [of Moses], ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Gal 4:1-7 (ESV)

And where is this inheritance? It is in heaven, reserved for those who believe and obey Jesus Christ. The Spirit says,

⁴⁷ The first man [Adam] was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man [Jesus Christ] is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 1 Cor 15:47-49 (ESV)

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Phil 3:20-21 (ESV)