

## INTRODUCTION

What will life be like in Heaven? There are about 4,000 different religions in the world, and most of them have a theory about the afterlife. Buddhists, Hindus, and other Gnostic religions see the body as evil and that after death, our pure spirits escape, often to be joined to another life form.

Mormons and Muslims believe we will have physical bodies and will even be married and produce children in the afterlife. Islam teaches that men who are faithful will go to Paradise where they will be rewarded with 72 young virgins. That reminds me of the funny story about the Muslim suicide bomber who entered the afterlife expecting his 72 virgins. But when he arrived he was met by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and dozens of other men. The Muslim said, "Where are the 72 virgins?" George Washington said, "Oh, that was a misprint. Your reward is 72 Virginians—and we aren't happy about how you've been threatening our country."

Does Heaven even exist? According to the Pew Research Center, in 2015 72% of Americans say they believe in Heaven, defined as a place where people who lived good lives are eternally rewarded.

There's a growing segment of our American spiritual landscape who are called "nones." These are not Catholic Sisters who wear black and white habits. The "nones" are those Americans who, when asked what their religious preference is, they say, "none." But even among the American "nones," 37% of them say they believe in Heaven. I guess even the nones long for a place called Heaven.

The Bible has a lot to say about Heaven. The word "Heaven" appears over 600 times in the Bible. The words "hell" or "Hades" appear only 22 times. When you write the word Heaven, you should use a capital "H" because Heaven is a proper noun for a place just like Tyler, or Dallas.

In our context, Jesus is in Jerusalem, and will face the cross in a few days. The religious leaders are constantly hounding Him, trying to get Him to say something to discredit Him. They were peppering Him with trick questions. In the last message they asked Him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. They thought they would trap Jesus with a "yes or no" answer, but Jesus escaped the trap with a brilliant answer. He asked for a coin that had an image of Caesar on it. He said, "Give to Caesar's what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." And we have God's image stamped on us.

This next question is a real doozy.

Mark 12:28-34. Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, [the Sadducees were religious liberals who didn't even believe there would be a resurrection, that's why they were sad-you-see]. They came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of

the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in Heaven. Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

Before we talk about Heaven, it's important to understand the context of this passage. Jesus was responding to a trick question about marriage in Heaven. Their question was based on an actual law in the Old Testament called the law of Levirate marriage, or Yibbum in Hebrew. We find it in Deuteronomy 25:5-6: "If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel."

According to this law, when a married brother died, his surviving brother was obligated to marry his sister-in-law and try to have children. If her husband's brother refused to marry her, she could spit in his face and take one of his sandals and he would be publicly shamed. So most brothers obliged by marrying their brother's widow. Then if the wife had a son by her new husband, the son would carry on her dead husband's name and claim his property. Since females had no rights, she needed a son to protect her rights, so the law was given to protect widows.

The Sadducees took this obscure law and extrapolated it to a worst-case scenario: seven brothers marrying the same woman—and each of them dying. It reminds me of the real-life serial murderer named Nannie Doss who was arrested in 1954 in Tulsa, Oklahoma for killing her fourth husband. Investigators discovered she had poisoned three of them, and shot one. When asked by she shot him, Nannie said, "Because he wouldn't eat the soup."

Now, I believe if I had been the fifth or sixth brother in the Sadducees scenario, I would have taken the spit in the face and handed her my sandal! Or at least, I'd let my dog sample her meatloaf before I ate it! But, of course, this scenario never happened. It is simply preposterous question that the Sadducees invented to make Jesus look bad. I can almost hear them giggling when one of them said, "So, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" Remember, the Sadducees didn't even believe there would be an afterlife.

But Jesus gave a serious answer to a silly question. There are some of you who might want to know the answer to a question like that. Let's say your mate died and you remarried or you have been divorced and remarried. Which one of your mates will be your husband or wife in Heaven? There's a tombstone in a graveyard in London dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Inscribed on it are these words. "Seven wives I've buried with a many a fervent prayer. If we all meet in Heaven, won't there be trouble there?" Like that gentleman, some of you may be wondering what your relationship is going to be like with your ex-husband or ex-wife—if they're in Heaven, that is.

Even though Jesus was presented with a preposterous question, He gives a profound answer. In these few verses, He gives us three heavenly lessons.

### **1. Our relationship with Jesus will overshadow all human relationships**

In Heaven, our relationship with the Living God will be so powerful our earthly relationships will seem to be insignificant in comparison. I like the way Eugene Petersen paraphrases Jesus' words: "Marriage is a preoccupation here, but not there. Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage. They'll have better things to think about, if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God." (*The Message*)

If you are a Christian couple you feel a certain bond with your husband or wife. When you pray together, that bond becomes even stronger. Now imagine a spiritual bond a million times more powerful, that's the bond you'll have with Jesus. Your friends and family members and mates and ex-mates will be there if they know Jesus, but you won't be thinking of them in those terms. We'll all be so overwhelmed by the presence of Jesus that earthly relationships will all become insignificant in comparison to Him.

You may be single, widowed, or divorced. But in Heaven, all previous relationships will be overshadowed by a powerful love relationship with Jesus. When you see Jesus face to face, your deepest yearning for acceptance and intimacy will be fulfilled.

I've done hundreds of weddings through the years. I love standing there with the groom as the bride starts down the aisle. I look at the bride's beautiful beaming face, and then I look at the groom's sweating face. There's always a moment where they lock eyes as if to say, "Finally, we're here. We've waited a long time for this. In that moment they only have eyes for each other.

When you get to Heaven, you won't be looking for your loved ones who've gone on. You'll only have eyes for Jesus. In 1923 Nettie Dudley Washington wrote a song largely ignored for about sixty years. But the Gaither vocal band rediscovered it and recorded it in 1993. Now the words are familiar. "As I entered the gates of that city, My loved ones all knew me well; They took me down the streets of Heaven; Such scenes were too many to tell; I saw Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Talked with Mark and Timothy. But I said, "I want to see Jesus, 'Cause He's the One who died for me." Then I bowed on my knees and cried, "Holy, Holy, Holy." I clapped my hands and sang, "Glory, Glory, Glory." I sang, "Glory to the Son of God."

You'll know and enjoy many relationships in Heaven with family members and friends, but all those relationships will be overshadowed by your relationship with Jesus.

Notice again what Jesus said about this truth in Luke's version. Jesus said, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:34-36)

That leads us to our next two truths about Heaven. Let's talk about angels and children

## 2. We will be like God's angels, but we don't become angels

Contrary to popular folklore, when we die, we DO NOT become angels—we become LIKE the angels. That's a very important distinction. How will we LIKE the angels? Angels don't die. There is never a reference in the Bible to an angel birth or an angel funeral. Contrary to the Cupid myth, there are no baby angels or senior citizen angels. There are no married angels.

In comparing the superiority of Jesus to angels, the writer of Hebrews asks two important questions. "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:13-14) A simple definition of angels is that they are ministering spirits sent to serve those who are saved.

Over the next few weeks you will have the chance to watch the classic movie, "It's a Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart. In the movie, Clarence is a man who died in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and went to Heaven. However, Clarence didn't have enough goody-points to get his angel wings, so he is sent to Bedford Falls to help out George Baily. If he helps George through his money troubles he will earn his wings. At the end of the movie his family is restored and they are singing Auld Lang Syne, which isn't really a Christmas song. The bell on the tree tinkles and Zuzu says, "Teacher says, 'every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings.'" George looks up to Heaven and says, "Atta' boy, Clarence." Now if you don't shed a tear or two dozen at that movie, you may be a robot. It's a great movie, but it has terrible theology. People never become angels. Enjoy the movie this season, but keep reminding yourself it's a fairy tale.

A few years ago a reader of *Decision Magazine* wrote this question to Billy Graham. Dear Dr. Graham: My sister lost her small son a little over a year ago, and on the anniversary of his death, she put a poem in the paper to remember him. It said something about him being an angel now. Is that what happens to us when we die and go to Heaven, that we become angels? —Mrs. L.C.

Billy Graham wrote back: Dear Mrs. L.C.: I know your sister was sincere, and I respect her sorrow and her desire to remember and honor her son—but no, we don't become angels when we die and go to Heaven. The truth is, when we die and go to Heaven, we become even greater than the angels! The angels are spiritual beings who were created by God to be His servants, and God has given them great authority and power to do His will. And at the present time, the angels are greater than we are, because God made us "a little lower than the Heavenly beings" (Psalm 8:5). But the Bible also says that in Heaven we will be higher than the angels—and the reason is because we will be like Christ. The Bible says, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). All of that, I know, may seem like theological hairsplitting to you. But don't lose sight of the central truth: When we know Christ, we know that this life is not all, but ahead of us is the joy of Heaven. May your sister take comfort in this truth and in the fact that her little son now is beyond all the pain and suffering of this world.

If you are a parent who experienced the death of an infant, you need to know God has something in store for that child that is much more wonderful than becoming an angel. We know little

children go directly to Heaven because in 2 Samuel 12:23, an infant son of King David dies. David makes a profound statement about his child being in Heaven. He said, "He cannot return to me; but I can go to him." If you've had a newborn, or even a pre-born child die, you can hang onto the hope that if you know Jesus as your Savior, you can go to be where they are when you die, or when Jesus returns. You may be wondering, "How old will my child be in Heaven? And while we're on that topic, how old will I be in Heaven?" I've got the correct answer for that so listen carefully. Get ready to write it down. Ready? You'll be the PERFECT age – and only God knows what that is for you. But remember, He does all things well! Here's the third Heavenly truth:

### **3. After the resurrection, we'll enjoy eternity as God's children**

Jesus said we'll be LIKE the angels, but He said we ARE the children of God. Does that mean we'll all look and act like little children in Heaven? Is God going to be operating a day care in Heaven? No, it means we'll have the same simple, carefree attitude of kids. When you were a kid, life was so simple it consisted of just getting up, getting dressed, and eating the food placed in front of you. Somebody else was handling all the details of your life. In the same way, I believe Heaven will allow us to be kids again, God's children. There will be no deadlines, no funerals, no hospitals, no wars, no arthritis, no Alzheimer's. You won't have to spend time worrying about your kids and grandkids; you'll be a kid!

Last Friday, we celebrated Thanksgiving at Jenni and Jason's house. Jenni was feeding 16 people including family members and some close friends. Cindy made some of the food and we loaded it in the back of our car to drive over. As soon as we arrived, there was a hectic scene of activity. All the adults were running around trying to finish up all the final details of the meal. Right in the middle of all the meal preparation stress, I noticed the grandkids weren't stressed out at all. They were filling out a thanksgiving puzzle on the floor and writing little "I'm thankful for" statements on a large paper tablecloth. We all love holiday meals, but for those who are preparing and serving the food, it can be stressful. I believe Heaven will be a totally stress-free zone. We'll be like the kids, not the cooks!

So what will our bodies be like after the resurrection? Paul answers that question. "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable...just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from Heaven...Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:42, 49, 51-52) The generation of Believers who are alive when Jesus returns won't go through a cemetery: We'll be instantly changed. I've said before I'm not looking for the undertaker; I'm looking for the Uppertaker.

The Apostle John fills in more details. He writes, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

We won't have what you might consider physical bodies; the Bible says flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. But we will have transformed bodies. Our eternal bodies will like the resurrection body of Jesus. His body could be touched and He ate with the disciples. He could come and go as He pleased, but He wasn't restricted by walls or distance. He disappeared from the table of the two disciples in Emmaus and He appeared behind a locked door among the disciples.

## CONCLUSION

So Jesus responded to a silly question by providing some serious truth about Heaven. Are you looking forward to Heaven? One of my spiritual heroes is Joni Eareckson Tada. In 1967 she was an active 17-year-old teenager. She dove into water she thought was deep, but it was shallow and she broke her neck. Since that time, Joni has lived as a quadriplegic. There were a few years of anger and depression during her rehab. But when she found she could paint pictures by placing the brush between her teeth, she found a new purpose in serving God. She became an overcomer. She has gone on to become one of the most active Christian authors, speakers, and singers in the United States and around the world. You should see the you tube of her singing the title track to the movie "Alone, Yet Not Alone." It was nominated for an Academy Award, but was later withdrawn because some think of an anti-Christian bias from the Academy.

Joni has refused to let her disability slow her down. Can you imagine how she must look forward to having a new resurrection body, like the body of Jesus? You don't have to imagine, because she writes about it in her book, *Heaven: Your Real Home*. She writes: "I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness—powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone who has a spinal cord injury like me? No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts, and minds. Only in the gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope." (*Heaven: Your Real Home*, p. 53)

I love the old chorus that says, "Heaven is a wonderful place; Filled with glory and grace; I want to see my Savior's face; 'cause heaven is a wonderful place."

## OUTLINE

CONTEXT: A trick question about marriage in heaven

"If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." *Deuteronomy 25:5-6*

## HEAVENLY LESSONS FROM JESUS

1. Our relationship with Jesus will overshadow all human relationships

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2. We will be like God's angels, but we don't become angels

"To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" *Hebrews 1:13-14*

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"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable...just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from Heaven...Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." *1 Corinthians 15:42, 49, 51-52*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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