

WHAT WILL YOU BE LIKE IN HEAVEN?

1 CORINTHIANS 15

Sometimes we say things that reveal an unbiblical view of God, life, reality or truth. That can be true of Heaven, too. A radio preacher, referring to a Christian woman whose Christian husband had died, said, “Little did she know that when she hugged her husband that morning, she would never hug him again.” He could have said, “She’d never again hug her husband in this life.” Because of the future resurrection of the dead, you will be able to hug your loved ones again on the New Earth. A man said of his son who died, “That’s the last time I’ll ever see him in his body.” But because they’re both followers of Jesus, they will see each other again in their resurrected bodies. “I’ll never see my daughter again on this earth,” said a grieving mother. But if both are believers, that statement is wrong. Mother and daughter will see each other again on this Earth. Both will be transformed and this Earth will be transformed as well, but it will really be the same mother and daughter and it will really be the same Earth. It’s good to correct our vocabulary about Heaven so that it expresses biblical truth. If we don’t, we will fail ultimately to think biblically about Heaven.

We’re in the midst of a message series entitled *Heaven: A Restored Place for Redeemed People*. We’ve thought about present Heaven – that wonderful but temporary place where followers of Jesus go immediately after they die. Last week we reflected on Hell – that terrible place where those who reject Jesus go immediately after they die. We’ve thought about future Heaven which will be an incredible and eternal merger of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Future Heaven will follow some key events: the 2nd Coming of Jesus, the Millennium (whenever you think that will happen or even if you think that will happen at all), and the last judgment. But future Heaven will also follow another very important event: the resurrection of our earthly, physical bodies.

So what will you and I be like in Heaven? To be more precise, what will you be like in future Heaven? One of the central truths in all of the Bible is the resurrection of our earthly, physical bodies. No chapter in the Bible talks about that more than 1 Corinthians 15. The Bible provides the basis to make three key statements about what you will be like in Heaven. First...

YOU WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD BECAUSE JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

After reading 1 Corinthians 15, you come away with this conclusion: resurrection must be real in God’s plan. That word “resurrection” means nothing less than someone’s body becoming physically alive again after death. There’s been a strong tendency either to minimize or redefine the meaning of resurrection. That’s been tried repeatedly with the resurrection of Jesus. For instance, it’s suggested that Jesus’ spirit was resurrected and went back to Heaven while His body remained in the tomb. The late John Updike, a famous American novelist who I don’t usually associate with Christianity, made this amazing statement

about Jesus' resurrection with which I agree wholeheartedly: "Make no mistake: if He rose at all it was as His body; if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fall.... Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping transcendence; making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages; let us walk through the door." If Jesus didn't get up on Easter Day – His spirit reunited with His resurrected body – we are seriously wasting our time this morning.

By the same token, don't spiritualize the future resurrection of our literal, earthly bodies either. When you suggest that resurrection is just a metaphor for a new kind of life, or a bodiless ascension to Heaven or some kind of spiritual rebirth, you believe something that the Bible doesn't teach. A non-physical resurrection is like a sunless sunrise or being half pregnant. It's a contradiction. If the writers of the New Testament had wanted to say that only Jesus' spirit went back to Heaven or only your spirit will be in Heaven eternally, they had perfectly good ways of saying precisely that. Instead, the Bible clearly teaches that every follower of Jesus will have a new bodily existence in a newly remade world.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that Jesus' resurrection was the key event in God's plan. "And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.... And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins." (1 Cor 15:14,17 NLT) It doesn't say that if there's no Heaven, the Christian faith is a waste of time. If there is no resurrection of Jesus, then your faith is futile. Our culture makes a whole lot more out of Christmas than it does Easter and sometimes that gets reflected in how we do church. Consider this: take away the stories of Jesus' birth and you lose two chapters in Matthew and two in Luke. Take away the resurrection of Jesus, and you lose the entire New Testament. Because of Jesus' resurrection, sin has been dealt with and death has been defeated. But if that's not the case, then you're still living in a world where sin and death are supreme and undefeated. The resurrection is proof that Jesus has already won the ultimate victory even though we don't yet see the full result of that victory.

Most people recognize noted atheist Christopher Hitchens as the author of the bestselling book *God Is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything*. During a recent trip to Portland, Oregon he was interviewed by Unitarian minister Marilyn Sewell. During the interview, Rev. Sewell said, "The religion you cite in your book is generally the fundamentalist faith of various kinds. I'm a liberal Christian, and I don't take the stories from the Scripture literally. I don't believe in the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus died for our sins, for example). Do you make any distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?" Hitchens replied, "I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian." Rev. Sewell apparently wanted no part of that discussion, because she said, "Let me go someplace else." Talk about nailing it. And that was from an atheist.

The Bible also teaches that your resurrection – and along with it the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth - is the fulfillment of God's plan. That's the whole point of 1 Corinthians 15. Your body will be either resurrected or transformed into a new body at the 2nd Coming of Jesus: "But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed." (1 Cor 15:51-52 NLT) The Bible indicates that the entire present universe is anticipating eagerly the fulfillment of God's fantastic plan of salvation. "For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us." (Rom 8:22-23 NLT) God's plan of salvation is a whole lot bigger than just getting your disembodied soul up to Heaven. It is restoring everything affected by human sin to its original condition – including your body and including this Earth – so that God might dwell with us forever in the New Heaven and the new Earth. What will you be like in Heaven? Here's a second key statement:

YOU WILL HAVE A NEW BODY LIKE JESUS' NEW BODY.

Two Bible passages support that statement: "But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control." (Ph 3:20-21 NLT) It also says, "Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is." (1 Jo 3:2 NLT) The risen Lord Jesus Christ is both the means by which you receive a future body as well as the model for your future body.

I wish we had time today to read all the Bible accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances, but we don't. But if Jesus' resurrected body is a model for our future resurrected bodies, what can we say? First of all, your resurrected body will be an old and new body. By old I mean it will be familiar to you. There will be some kind of fundamental continuity to your present body. Jesus still bore the marks of the crucifixion in His new body. He said, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself..." (Lk 24:39 NIV) But, it was clearly also a new body in many ways as well. In the same way, you can expect that your resurrected body will be significantly unlike your present body. There are many analogies in nature. I think the caterpillar turning into a butterfly is a picture of fundamental continuity and yet significant dissimilarity. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul uses the seed and plant analogy. There is fundamental continuity between an acorn and an oak tree, but there's a lot of significant dissimilarity as well. Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian

author and speaker, who has been paralyzed from the neck down since suffering a spinal cord injury as a teenager, writes, “Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become.” That’s true of all of us.

Second, your resurrected body will be a physical and human body. When Jesus appeared to His incredulous disciples, He said: “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39 NIV) The resurrected Jesus looked like a normal human being. His new body was suited for life on Earth. He could be touched and handled. He cooked and ate fish. He talked with the two people on the road to Emmaus and they apparently didn’t notice anything abnormal about Jesus’ appearance either. He didn’t have a halo around His head nor did His feet hover a few inches above the ground. You are not going to be a ghost in Heaven. You’re not going to morph into an angel. If Jesus’ resurrected body is a model, you’re resurrected body will be fully physical and human. I anticipate that you’ll stay the same gender and race in Heaven that you are now. Jesus didn’t stop being male or Jewish after His resurrection, did He? There’s no evidence that He suddenly become genderless or lost His ethnicity. After all, John’s vision of Heaven says “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb....” (Rev 7:9 NIV) Being male, female, Caucasian, African, Hispanic or Asian is a God-created aspect of being human.

But someone might say, “Rick, what about 1 Corinthians 15:50: ‘I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.’? Doesn’t that say that physical humans can’t be in Heaven?” No, it doesn’t. “Flesh and blood” refers there to our present bodies which have been marred and flawed by sin’s effects. They’re subject to disease, decay and death right now. Paul goes on to say, “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor 15:53 NIV) meaning that we are going to be given new bodies that are not subject to disease, decay and death. Paul wasn’t contrasting the physical with the non-physical, but rather physicality tainted by sin and physicality untouched by sin. When God created Adam, He joined body and spirit together. Adam didn’t become a living human being until both the physical and the spiritual parts of him were brought together. Your body is as much a part of you as your spirit. God intended your body to last as long as your spirit. When He restores all things, God is going to restore your body to His original intent for it.

Third, your resurrected body will be a transformed and perfect body. When Adam and Eve sinned, God proclaimed a Curse upon everything in Genesis 3. Think about that spreading oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico today and how it’s threatening to foul the environment in countless ways. The Curse is like that: a spiritual oil slick that’s spread everywhere. Sin has resulted in both the physical and spiritual pollution of nature, animals, human beings and the entire universe in ways that are hard to imagine or describe. But God is reversing all of that. The

Bible says, "... (Jesus,) by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Ph 3:21 NIV) The key word there is "transform". In a great act of power, Jesus will change your present body into one that corresponds in kind to His own as part of His work of bringing all things under His control. What will that mean?

Certainly, it will mean that your body will be transformed and perfectly restored. It could mean that you will have new physical abilities that you don't have now. We read in the Gospel accounts that Jesus' resurrected body was capable of suddenly appearing, disappearing and ascending to Heaven. Will we have the same abilities? Perhaps. It is safe to say that you will no longer be susceptible to illness, injury, age or death. Those are all the results of sin and the Curse. You will never get sick or hurt. You will not age or decline physically. If you're in a wheelchair today, God will raise you up and make you completely whole. Your mind will be transformed and perfectly restored. It will no longer be subject to conditions such as dementia, depression or any kind of mental illness. In addition, your resurrected brain will no doubt be capable of doing things that the greatest genius on the Earth right now would consider unimaginable.

Your emotions will be transformed and perfectly restored. Emotions are an integral part of being human, but they've been corrupted by sin and the Curse as well. In Heaven, they will be a reflection of God's emotions, rather than so often being a distortion of them in this life. Heaven will be an emotional place. There will be laughter in Heaven. There will be no tears of suffering, to be sure, but there may well be tears of joy. My wife, Cheryl, got excited when I shared with her that we might well have new, restored taste buds in Heaven. Well, why not? Hasn't the Curse affected everything? If so, we will need transformed and perfected taste buds to experience transformed and perfected food! Those of you who love computers are familiar with those periodic software upgrades. When you start thinking about what you will be like in Heaven, just try to imagine the best possible upgrade of you that could ever be. Then, simply recognize the fact that God will exceed your wildest imagination! Here's a final key statement.

YOU WILL BE YOU, BUT YOU WILL BE DIFFERENT.

I've said that in other ways today, but here's a slightly different perspective. In Heaven, you will have a restored personal identity. The resurrected Jesus didn't become someone else. When John recognized the risen Jesus on the shores of Galilee, he said to the other disciples, "... 'It is the Lord!...' " (Jo 21:7 NIV) Your own personal identity will endure from this Earth to the New Heaven and New Earth. In fact, you will probably retain the name you have now. Jesus said, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 8:11 NIV) Apparently those Old Testament saints retained their names in Heaven. Our names reflect our individuality. Your individual identity is part of your personhood. You should expect to be just as unique in Heaven as you are

now. In future Heaven, you will be for the first time the person God created you to be. In addition, in Heaven you will have a restored relationship with God and other people. I'm going to devote a future message to that idea, but I simply wanted to mention it today in passing.

In Heaven, you will have a restored relationship to space and time. You live in a spatial world now and the resurrection of your body demands that you will forever occupy space. You will be a physical being living forever in a physical universe. Space and physicality aren't evil. After all, God created Eden and it was a physical space. The New Heavens and the New Earth will be a physical space. For a variety of reasons, we often think of Heaven as being timeless. But the Bible never says that. Buddhism teaches the end of time but not Christianity. There is much scriptural evidence that implies the presence of time in Heaven. God inhabits infinity, but human beings are finite. We inhabit time. Time is your environment much like water is a fish's environment. Time is not evil in and of itself. The Curse is our real problem not time. Time, like everything else, has been tainted by sin and needs to be redeemed. But without the Curse, time will never work against you. Eternity will be living in time forever. Time will pass, but you won't run out of time in Heaven. The passing of time will no longer be a threat to you because death will be abolished. You will no longer have to be encouraged to number your days and use time wisely. Time will mean only gain in Heaven, never loss. You'll no longer equate time with unwelcome change, deterioration or death. John Newton had it right in his hymn "Amazing Grace" when he wrote, "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'd first begun."

Finally, in Heaven you will have a restored heart. That's true physically, but here I'm thinking of heart in terms of how you relate to God spiritually. In the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Bible says God "...will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Rev 21:4 NLT). All of those are either caused by sin or sin causes them. You will not be able to sin in Heaven because you will no longer have a sinful nature. Instead, you will have a completely purified heart. No longer will you be crippled by sinful distractions, disabled by insincerity or handicapped by half-heartedness. Yes, you'll have desires in Heaven, but not sinful desires. You will likely still desire food, but you won't struggle with gluttony or eating disorders. You will likely be able to express admiration and affection for other people, but it won't turn into lust or betrayal. You will likely want to use and experience everything God will provide, but you won't become covetous. Heaven will not be absence of desire or longing, but rather its complete fulfillment.

Author and professor Lewis Smedes used to ask his students if they wanted to go to heaven when they died. Everyone would raise a hand. Then he'd ask, "Be honest now—who would like to go *today*?" A few would raise their hands slowly, giving what they thought was the correct answer, looking around to see if they were the only ones. They were. Most people wanted a rain check. They were

ready to die—just not today. Then Professor Smedes would ask who would like to see the world set straight once and for all tomorrow: "No more common colds, no more uncommon cancers. Hungry people would have plenty; no one would lift a finger to harm another; we would be at peace with everyone, even with ourselves. Anybody interested in that?" There would be a frenzy of hand-lifting. Then Smedes would point out that if that new world is what you really want, then heaven's where you'd like to be.