

WHAT WILL KNOWING GOD AND OTHERS BE LIKE IN HEAVEN? REVELATION 22:3-5; 1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20, 4:13-18

A Sunday school teacher wanted to explain to the 6-year-olds in his class what someone had to do in order to go to Heaven. In an attempt to discover what kids already believed about the subject, he asked a few questions. "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church," he asked, "would that get me to heaven?" "No!" the children answered. The teacher was encouraged. "If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me to heaven?" Again the answer was, "No!" "Well then," he said, "If I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?" Again they all shouted, "No!" "Well then," the teacher asked, looking out over his class, "how can I get to Heaven?" A boy in the back row stood up and shouted, "You gotta be dead!" What's the old saying? "The obscure we see eventually. The completely obvious, it seems, takes longer."

We're a little more than halfway through our study of Heaven. Today I want you to think with me about what knowing God and knowing other people will be like in Heaven. What information does the Bible give us? What else can we reasonably assume from what we find there? You were made by God and for God. The Bible teaches in numerous places that God is your ultimate Creator. But even more amazing is the realization that God has made you for a relationship with Him. Whether or not you are consciously aware of it today: you long for and desire a relationship with God.

That's what the Garden of Eden was all about. God created Adam and Eve to have open, continual and eternal interaction with Him. When they sinned, they and we lost that relationship with God, but not our longing for Him. The whole story of salvation is about the restoration of that lost relationship between God and human beings. But we can never quite get that relationship with God to where it needs to be here on this Earth, can we? We find in ourselves a longing for this place the Bible calls Heaven. If you long for Heaven in any way, shape or form, my friend, it's really a longing for God. Being with God is the heart and soul of Heaven. God's greatest gift to you is, and will always be, Himself. Your relationship with God in Heaven will be a restored relationship. What does that mean? Well, my study on Heaven in the Bible leads me to see these...

THE MARKS OF A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

First of all, you will see God. Human beings long to see God. Theologians have sometimes referred to this as "the beatific vision" which comes from three Latin words meaning "happy making sight." It's refers to the eternal and visual perception of God. On the one hand, the Bible says that this side of Heaven, human beings cannot see God. The Bible records an incredible conversation between Moses and God. Moses says, "Then show me your glorious presence.'

The LORD replied, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you.... But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.' (Ex 33:18-20 NLT) The Bible also says things like, "No one has ever seen God.... He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen." (1 Jo 4:12, 1 Tim 6:16 NLT)

On the other hand, the Bible says that you will see God in Heaven. Job says, "And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!" (Job 19:26-27 NLT) Jesus gave us this promise, "God blesses those people whose hearts are pure. They will see him!" (Mt 5:8 CEV) And then there's that marvelous vision in the last chapter of the Bible where future Heaven is described for us. Let's read Revelation 22:3-5.

I believe the primary way we will see God in Heaven is in the person of Jesus. After all, He is God. The Bible teaches that you will spend eternity in your resurrected, physical body in a physical place. Jesus was, is and forever will be in a physical body as you will be. When the Son of God took upon Himself human flesh and bone in the person of Jesus, He permanently remains the one and only God-man. To see Jesus is to see God. On one occasion, He said, "...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!..." (John 14:9 NLT) In Heaven, you will be able to see Jesus – the One who died on the cross for you and was raised from the dead for you – presumably as often as you desire.

But will you be able to see God the Father? As I read the Bible, it certainly sounds like it to me. I know that the very essence of God the Father is spirit, so how this will be possible in Heaven, I don't know. Will you have the ability to see things in Heaven with your resurrected, perfected physical eyes that you can't see right now? Will God condescend to reveal Himself in a physical form in Heaven for all eternity? Perhaps. But the promise is true. You will see God.

Secondly, you will enjoy unbroken fellowship with God. That was the original intent of Eden. That was and is God's ultimate plan for human beings. That's why Jesus died and rose again. It was promised back in the Old Testament. God says to the people of Israel, "I will live among you and never again look on you with disgust. I will walk with you--I will be your God, and you will be my people." (Lev 26:11-12 CEV) That was partially fulfilled in the Tabernacle and the Temple. But Jesus promised a far greater fulfillment of that promise. "Don't be worried! Have faith in God and have faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you. After I have done this, I will come back and take you with me. Then we will be together." (John 14:1-3 CEV). This promise and plan of God will be fulfilled in the future Heaven when we literally live with God in the New Heaven and the New Earth. The Bible says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.... I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's

home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.” (Rev 21:1, 3 NLT)

Salvation, getting saved, redemption, being born again, conversion – whatever word you prefer - all point to the same spiritual reality: restoration of unbroken fellowship and relationship with God. On this Earth, that relationship was broken by our sin, but then restored in the person of Jesus. But you know as well as I do, that perfect fellowship with God this side of Heaven is hindered, obstructed, stunted and partial because we still carry around within us that sinful nature – that bent towards resisting God. The Bible says, “We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!” (1 Cor 13:12 MSG)

In Heaven every barrier between God and His children is going to be gone and is going to stay gone for all eternity. All the limitations that sin and spiritual darkness cause you to struggle with now will be gone then. Your greatest joy is going to be unhindered fellowship with God Himself. Wherever you go in Heaven, you will be in the immediate, actual presence of God's full glory. You will enjoy the complete manifestation of God's presence forever and ever and ever. I don't understand that with my finite, fallen, limited brain, but I accept it by faith because the Bible tells me so.

We'll think more about this next Sunday, but it's important to say today that you will offer perfect worship to God in Heaven. Let's be honest; that might sound less than thrilling to you today. See if this helps: there will be no church services in Heaven. That's good news for some people! In describing future Heaven, John in the book of Revelation says, “I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” (Rev 21:22 NLT) Worshipping God in Heaven is going to be something so incredible and enjoyable that it's hard to imagine this side of Heaven. Back in 2003 when statues of Saddam Hussein were being torn down in Baghdad, a TV commentator made this interesting observation, “These people are used to coming out in the streets and praising Saddam. If they didn't, they were punished. He had a policy of compulsory adulation.” Compulsory adulation. God doesn't have a policy of compulsory adulation. Your offer of perfect worship to God in Heaven is going to be completely voluntary and eternally pleasurable.

A fourth mark of a restored relationship with God is that you will experience eternal access to God. That's the greatest miracle Heaven will offer you and me: our access to God. Your experience of God will never come to an end in Heaven. Because God is infinite, you will never exhaust your knowledge of Him. Instead, both your experience and knowledge of God will only deepen, develop, intensify, increase and broaden as the years of eternity roll on. You'll never know everything there is to know about God, but all your knowledge of Him will be accurate and true. It will be impossible to get bored with God because He is the

author of everything you find fascinating and wonderful. Then – and only then – will the promises of the Bible become completely and perfectly true: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” (Ps 16:11 NIV) Those are just a few marks of a restored relationship with God. Just now, let’s shift our focus and consider...

THE MARKS OF RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS.

John Newton, the pastor who wrote the words to “Amazing Grace,” once made an interesting observation. He said, “When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders there. The first wonder will be to see many there whom I did not expect to see; the second wonder will be to miss many people who I did expect to see; the third and greatest of all will be to find myself there.”

What will your relationships with all those other children of God be like in Heaven? First, you will enjoy human relationships as God intended. God created and designed you both to enjoy and to need other human beings. In the Garden of Eden, He created Eve for Adam before they sinned meaning He put within human beings a need for human companionship. That’s not going to change in Heaven. You know that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and the second commandment – which is really inseparable from the first one – is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. One of the very best ways to love God is to love people. If you don’t love people who are made in God’s image, how are you going to love God?

To enjoy another person doesn’t require you making that person into an idol or a competitor with God. That can happen in this life. People can take the place only God should have in your life. That will never happen in Heaven. The Bible says, “Everything God created is good, and to be received with thanks. Nothing is to be sneered at and thrown out. God’s Word and our prayers make every item in creation holy.” (1 Tim 3:5 MSG) Certainly “everything” includes fellow human beings, doesn’t it? Other human beings are a gift from God. To enjoy other people is a way to enjoy God. In Heaven relationships with other people will be just as they should be and all that they can be. God’s intent for human relationships will achieve all of its potential. No disappointing one another. No giving or receiving heartache. No using or abusing of one another. No wearing masks. No anger. No cliques. No hidden agendas, betrayals or causing pain. No tears. Only respect. Only kindness. Only gentleness. Only understanding. Only sincerity. Only harmony. Only authenticity. Only joy. Only love.

Here’s another mark of restored relationships with other people in Heaven. You will be reunited with family and friends. Let’s look at to how Paul assumes this fact when he writes to the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, 4:13-18. Will we know each other in Heaven? Those passages in 1 Thessalonians would provide little comfort to us if we didn’t know our loved ones in Heaven. On one occasion, Jesus said, “Many people will come from

everywhere to enjoy the feast in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Mt 8:11 CEV) If you’ll know them and they’ll know you, why can we not assume that, of course, we’ll know each other? The disciples certainly recognized and knew Jesus after His resurrection. One of the joys we anticipate most about Heaven is the prospect of reunion. Heaven would be far less enticing if you’re unable to recognize your friends and loved ones. What will make Heaven special for you is what makes any place special for you now – the people who are or who will be there. Precious relationships with family members, loved ones and friends will be reclaimed and continue in Heaven. We’ll just pick up where we left off. We’ll see death then for what it is: a defeated enemy that caused –in the light of eternity - only very brief, temporary interruptions with those we cherish in this life. Then, those perfected relationships will deepen, grow and become richer as eternity rolls on forever. I love this quote from Anglican bishop, J.C. Ryle, “Those whom you laid in the grave with many tears are in good keeping: you will yet see them again with joy. Believe it, think it, rest on it. It is all true.”

Here’s a final mark of restored relationships with other people to consider: you will experience new and new kinds of relationships. Let’s consider the last part of that statement first. What do I mean you’ll experience new kinds of relationships? Not everything is going to be exactly the same as it is in this life relationally speaking. For instance, Jesus told us that there won’t be marriage in Heaven. He said, “For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven.” (Mt 22:30 NLT) Now that news gets mixed reactions! Let’s be honest: some folk are openly or secretly pleased at the prospect of no marriage in Heaven. Other people get distraught at the idea that they will somehow lose the greatest relationship they know this side of Heaven. But Jesus never said that deep, satisfying relationships between married people will end in Heaven. It’s just that earthly marriage will have achieved its purpose and won’t be necessary in Heaven.

What are the purposes of marriage again? Marriage was always intended to be a signpost pointing to our relationship with Jesus in Heaven. The Bible calls the whole group of believers past, present and future the Bride of Christ. Once we’re in Heaven, there will no longer be a need for a signpost. We’ll experience the real thing. That one collective “marriage” will be so completely satisfying that even the most wonderful marriage here on Earth will pale in comparison. Another purpose for marriage is certainly friendship and companionship. If you’ve enjoyed a wonderful, enriching relationship with your spouse on this earth you can be assured that it will continue in Heaven. By the same token, can you imagine what perfect relationships with everyone in Heaven forever will be like?

A third purpose of marriage is sex and having children. Presumably, the population of Heaven will be fixed so there won’t be a need for bringing babies into it. As for sex, you get a mixed response from people as well! Some are glad to give it up. Others can’t imagine eternity without it. Christian thinker and

author C.S. Lewis has the best “take” on this subject that I’ve ever heard. He writes, “I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer, ‘No,’ he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don’t bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life. We do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it.” In other words, let’s remember that God designed sex. Perhaps in Heaven the pleasure and intimacy of sex will be fulfilled in a higher form. Marriage and sex aren’t bad things to be replaced by good ones in Heaven. No, they are good things now that will be somehow transformed or resurrected into better ones.

You will not only experience new kinds of relationships in Heaven but new relationships as well. Meaning what? You will re-establish relationships with your family and friends, to be sure. But isn’t it just as likely that you will develop rich and rewarding friendships with people you will meet for the first time in Heaven? Perhaps your best friend is someone you have yet to meet because you will meet that person for the first time in Heaven. Or consider this. What characters in the Bible would you like to get to know? Abraham... Moses... David... Isaiah... Mary, the mother of Jesus... Peter... Paul. What great Christian leaders that have impacted your life would you like to befriend? Augustine... Martin Luther... John Calvin... William Carey... William Wilberforce... John Wesley... Hudson Taylor... Francis Schaeffer.

Sheldon Vanauken was a student of the English professor and Christian writer C. S. Lewis in the early 1950s. He tells the story of his last meeting with his mentor when Vanauken was leaving Oxford for the United States. Over one final lunch together at a pub, they had spent time wondering aloud about the nature of life after death. When they had finished eating, they stood outside of the pub, talked for a few more minutes, and just before parting ways, Lewis said to Vanauken, "I shan't say goodbye. We'll meet again." Lewis then plunged into the traffic to cross the street while Vanuaken watched his friend walk away. When Lewis got to the other side of the street, he turned around, anticipating that his friend would still be standing there. With a grin on his face, Lewis shouted over the great roar of cars, "Besides—Christians never say goodbye."

In Heaven, every relationship you have now with those who know and love Jesus will be restored then. Best of all, in Heaven your relationship with God will be fully restored. “Believe it, think it, rest on it. It is all true.”