

THOUGHTS ON HEAVEN



We should picture heaven, I believe, as a whole lot more like earth than most people realize -- just 10,000 times more wonderful! In terms of joy, ever increasing, forever! But first, the progression from here to there.

Jesus said those who obey his teaching will never see death. When this body quits, I expect to simply step away, look back, see my body, and realize "Oh, I must have died -- but -- I'm not dead. I'm more alive than ever!"

What should we who trust Jesus expect to see when our body dies?

I believe we will first be aware of the luminous being at our side, the angel tasked with guarding us in this life. Next, our loved ones in Christ, already deceased, there to greet us with joy. Perhaps others who knew us and prayed for us on our pilgrimage. Best of all, our Lord Jesus himself. The presence of his glory overtaking our ability to stand -- yet his firm grasp raising us up as he looks into our eyes -- his gaze calming any fears -- then his strong arms around us, pulling us to himself, as we weep, head on his chest -- sorrow and hurt and fear and anger and guilt and regret flying away, never to return.

This is Paradise, but not yet heaven. Paradise is the garden of rest and recovery for those who loved God on earth. It is a time and place to find answers for unanswered questions, to reconcile with others, and to experience profound healing and transformation.

At some point in time (if time has any meaning) comes Resurrection Day. There we merge forever with our immortal bodies and stand before Jesus to give an account of our lives. I anticipate that all others will be standing there too, the righteous as well as the wicked, but Jesus will be interacting with us one-on-one.

While believers have been in Paradise, the wicked – those who steadfastly resisted the grace of God – have been in Hades, the waiting room for hell. Certainly I do not know for sure, but I expect to see shadow and gloom pervading the bodies of the wicked, while the bodies of believers will be radiant.

This standing before Jesus in judgment is based on what we have done. It will confirm the identities of those who belonged to God and those who did not.

There are just two realms into eternity, the “New Heavens and New Earth,” which we commonly call heaven, and hell. Those who cannot stand to be in the presence of the holy God will have only one other place to reside.

For the believer, heaven became certain when Jesus Christ came into our life. This judgment will be a time of rewards. Jesus will reward us for what we did with our opportunities to serve him." Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things -- I will set you over much!"

Then on to the new heavens and new earth!

Our reward from Jesus, in accord with our faithfulness here, will consist of greater responsibility and joy in service. Scripture says that not only will we see the face of God, but we will REIGN with Christ forever and ever.

This reigning, I am certain, will be full of adventure and quests. There will be no boredom in heaven! Instant travel anywhere, to meet with anyone, infused with perfect love and perfect communication, are things I expect to be in heaven. Who knows, maybe even my childhood dream of getting to fly like Peter Pan will be possible!

We certainly should expect to recognize one another instantly. Parents whose children died in the womb or in early childhood will get to see their children, fully mature. Those with mental and bodily defects in this life will be walking, running, jumping, and praising God! I also expect to see loved pets with us in heaven. Why not? God saved not only Noah but the animals as well.

What about those we cared for in this life but were not ultimately saved? Of course I don't really know -- but my expectation is in that day, we will fully understand and respect God's decision why they are not there with us. Nor will we grieve any more. Perhaps best of all, there will be no more sorrow, no more sighing, no more sin, nor anything to provoke sin, but instead, love and joy unspeakable.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).