



More Questions about heaven:

Will I recognize and know my relatives & friends?

Of all the questions I get, it seems the majority fall into the category of “what will heaven be like?”. God reminds us that our time here on this earth is very temporary and that our true citizenship is in heaven, so it’s only natural to wonder what heaven will be like. There’s a contemporary Christian song that sums it up pretty well: *I Can Only Imagine*. In other words, heaven - our never-ending life on the new earth God will create for all those who trust in His Son (see last month’s Question for Pastor) - is so far greater than anything we can understand that often the best we can do is *imagine* what it will be like.

God hasn’t told us a lot about eternity - certainly not anywhere close to everything we’d like to know. This really makes sense when you think about it. God trying to describe eternity to us - who have never experienced anything like it - would be like me attempting to describe one of God’s amazing sunsets to a person who has been blind since birth.

God does, however, tell us some general facts about heaven that we *can* understand and relate to. For example, in Matthew 13:44-46 Jesus tells two really short parables, one about a pearl and one about hidden treasure, making the simple point that heaven is so great that it’s worth selling *everything you have* just to get it. And in Revelation 21 God describes heaven in terms of what will *not* be there: Evil, death, Satan, crying, pain, mourning, sin. All of those are bad things we are all-too-well acquainted with, so we can understand at least a little of the great joy of heaven by knowing that those bad things will not ever be part of our experience there.

Of the things God does tell us about eternity in the Bible, the one that stands out as being emphasized most is this: We will see God - with our very own eyes! We will live forever in His *visible* presence. (The hardest part of our life here on earth right now just may be having to “see” God with only our mind’s eye - *our faith*.)

So, what about the specific question at hand? Will we be able to see and know our friends and relatives there?

Where should we look for answers to that question? It is really tempting to look to the great number of books people have written recently about heaven. Many of those have been written by people who have died and were brought back to life. (It strikes me that one sure-fire way to get rich quick would be to write a book about heaven. People will flock to the shelves to buy it!)

Some of the things written about heaven in these books may actually be true. Some may not - just something *imagined*. Unfortunately, we really have no way of knowing which things are true and which are wishful thinking until we actually get to heaven. We do know that our human nature is going to tend to lead us to believe the things from those books that we *want* to believe. I *want* to believe that the Twins will win the World Series this year too. The problem is that wanting something to happen doesn’t mean it actually *will* happen that way. (In the case of the Twins winning the World Series I’d guess you’d have at least a 99% chance of it *not* happening.)

So, has God given any indication in *His* book about an answer to this question? (And remember *His* book - the Bible - is the one we can trust 100%)

I would have to say that YES, God has given us something to base an answer on. In the gospel accounts of the "Transfiguration" - Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9 - Jesus "opens up the heavens" to give Peter, James and John a glimpse of eternity. One thing they see is that Jesus is shining - an indication of His divinity. The other thing they witness with their very own eyes (not their imaginations) is a couple of folks chatting with Jesus - folks who had never met on this earth. Guys named Moses and Elijah. In this glimpse of heaven, not only do Moses and Elijah obviously know who Jesus is, the assumption is that they also know each other. Not only that, but Peter, James and John also immediately recognize Moses and Elijah *even though they had never seen even a picture of either of them*. (I've got to think that Moses and Elijah weren't wearing little "My Name Is:" tags so that the disciples would know who they were.)

If we will be able to recognize people we have not met and didn't know on earth, how much more will be able to recognize and know those we did know on earth!

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net