



Who Will You See In Heaven?

Pippin: “I didn’t think it would end this way....”

Gandalf: “End? No, the journey doesn’t end here. Death is just another path...one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back...and then you see it.”

Pippin: “What? Gandalf? See what?”

Gandalf: “White shores...and beyond. The far green country under a swift sunrise.”

Pippin: “Well, that isn’t too bad.”

—Peter Jackson’s *The Return of the King*

Will you ever have any fun in heaven? Will the only people in heaven be those people who rained on everyone’s parade on earth? Will a self-righteous cloud cover of condemnation cast a pall over heaven?

A friend of mine was telling me about a dream he had. He arrived in heaven with a group of new arrivals. They were issued new white robes and they started to flex their new white wings (hey, lighten up—this was his dream—I know the Bible doesn’t say anything about white wings—green yes, but white, definitely not!).

Then, sporting those new wings, the new arrivals were told that introductory harp lessons had been cancelled and they had the rest of the day off. My friend was really excited—he had some time to do some exploring and meet new friends he would be hanging out with for all eternity!

He rented a heavenly transporter and decided to discover heaven. As he drove toward the center of New Jerusalem he saw a huge billboard that advertised *Our Lady of Fatima Living Waters New Creation Grace and Truth Bread of Life Holy Rolling Tabernacle King James Only Bookstore*. He thought he would like to see what was on the bestseller’s list in heaven, and maybe check out the latest *Plain Truth* (OK—this wasn’t in his dream, I added it), so he took the next exit.

When my friend walked into the bookstore it seemed like everyone he met was one of those uptight religious types who had never cracked a smile in their earthly lives! Their white robes had come back from the cleaners with heavy starch. They frowned their disapproval as they checked out my friend, giving him stern, judgmental looks. At first my

friend said he thought he must have taken a wrong turn—this bookstore had to be in hell. If these guys were in heaven, then how could he spend eternity with this grim, smug, hard-nosed, self-righteous crowd? Fearing for his eternal life, he ran out of the bookstore, and broke a few heavenly speed limits driving back to the gates of heaven to arrange for a return trip to earth. Then he woke up.

Working on the Heavenly Chain Gang?

I told my friend that I had never had a dream quite like his, but some of the descriptions of heaven I had heard also left me cold. I remember one preacher saying that heaven would be great because we would never have to sleep and we could work 24 hours a day! Well, I’ve never been allergic to work, as my friends and family know, but I have a dream of sitting on the white shores of a beautiful isolated beach, in a lounge chair, holding a tall cold one (root beer if you prefer).

That preacher who longed to work 24 hours a day forever was also deeply committed to the idea that our works here on earth will have a great deal to do with whether we ever make it or qualify for heaven in the first place. It was natural that he would think that frenzied and frenetic work would characterize eternity as well. Since being under that preacher’s sway, I have since come, by God’s grace, to experience what it means to *rest in Christ* (Matthew 11:28-29) and to be seated “with him in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 2:6).

But enough about beer and root beer and working and resting. There are some serious questions here. Will you recognize anyone in heaven? As Eric Clapton asked, “Would you know my name, if I saw you in heaven?” Will you ever have any fun in heaven? Will the only people in heaven be those people who rained on everyone’s parade on earth? Will a self-righteous cloud cover of condemnation cast a pall over heaven?

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commentary

I've been reading that great chapter in Hebrews that tells about the faithful, those who are in the Hall of Faith because they lived by faith. And you know, I've been surprised at some of those who made it. To be sure, there are the regulars we have heard a lot about. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents and Moses are all listed. Each one of their names is introduced with "By faith..." (Hebrews 11:4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24) followed by a brief account of their life of faith. But there's one more name that immediately follows a formulaic "by faith."

By faith the prostitute Rahab... (Hebrews 11:31). There's an interesting story. But, before we reflect about Rahab, there's one more name we should also consider. The author continues, giving another list (Hebrews 11:32) who "were all commended for their faith" (Hebrews 11:39). Samson is one of those names.

Rahab and Samson in the Hall of Faith

Will Rahab and Samson be (or, are they, depending on how we view the timeless eternity of heaven) in heaven? I don't know, and neither do you. God, in his perfect wisdom, has not disclosed all of the criteria he utilizes in bringing people to be with him for eternity. He won't ask any of us for our help in making final decisions. Thank God he decides on heaven's roster.

But we do know Rahab and Samson are in the Hall of Faith. It is safe to say that honorable mention in the Hall of Faith is an indicator of God's values. I wouldn't bet against Rahab and Samson being there on the basis of this reference, would you?

Hebrews gives a brief description about Rahab. She was a prostitute. In the second chapter of Joshua we learn that two Israelite spies stayed in Rahab's house as they were scouting Jericho. When the lives of the spies were threatened Rahab lied in order to give them a chance

to escape. Rahab also told the spies that she and her family believed that the God of Israel was the one true God. When Jericho was conquered Rahab was spared, and the writer of Hebrews called her a person of faith.

Then there's Samson. He challenges religious perceptions of the resumé some seem to believe one must present to God before entering heaven. While the majority of human leaders in the Bible have weaknesses that are noted, Samson comes close to taking the cake.

Samson is a problem for religious legalism because he is someone God made use of in spite of glaring problems in his personal life. Samson is commended in the Hall of Faith, being mentioned as someone who conquered kingdoms by faith, yet there are so many questions aren't there?

Why did God embarrass us with all of the salacious, sordid details of this biblical bodybuilder's walk on the wild side? Why would God "waste" three chapters of the Bible (Judges 14-16) giving X-rated details of Samson's sins? Why did God still listen to Samson when some religious types would say that Samson was simply getting what was coming to him?

Sometimes God just doesn't make much legalistic, religious sense, does he? Some people call these kinds of divine paradoxes a scandal. The scandal of faith.

I can't answer all of the questions I raised, and neither can you. But God can. God decides, by his grace, who makes it. We are saved by grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone.

Martin Luther once said that if laughter were missing in heaven he didn't want to be there. We will enjoy God's kingdom of heaven, we will have time to kick back and relax, being seated with Christ "in the heavenly realms." And when the angelic hosts take our drink orders, there will be beer for Lutherans, iced tea for Baptists and root beer for everyone. □

—Greg Albrecht