

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #48: WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

By John Temples

When we get to heaven, will we know each other there? Will we remember--or resume--our earthly relationships? These are some of the most basic questions and longings of the human heart. Surprisingly, the Bible does not give us direct answers to these questions. We are dependent on inference and reasoning the truth from indirect statements.

Actually, we need to expand these two basic questions into a broader series of inquiries:

- Will we know *anything* about our earthly existence after death?
- Will we know ourselves after death?
- Will we know others we have known in this life?
- Will we know people we have NOT known in this life?
- Will we retain our identities and relationships in the next life? (Will Uncle Charlie still be Uncle Charlie?)
- Will babies who die in infancy be babies in heaven? What about old people?
- Will we have to wear name tags in heaven?

Some of these questions we can answer with assurance, some we cannot. There are a few tantalizing answers in the Old Testament:

Job 19:25-27 reads, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

Job affirms or implies three things in this text:

- One day he would rise from the dead and return to his fleshly body (but only for an instant--1 Corinthians 15:42-44);
- He would see God while in his resurrected fleshly body;

- His personality and identity would remain intact.

In 2 Samuel 12:23, we read of David's being stricken with grief upon the death of his child. He said, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." This statement would have meaning only if David would know his child after death.

Several times in the Old Testament, it would be said of notable people who had died that they had been "gathered to their people." This was said of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, among others. This could not mean that they were merely buried in physical proximity to their relatives--Abraham was buried in Canaan, while most of his relatives died in Babylon. Moses was buried by God at an unknown location, nowhere near any of his kin. "Being gathered to one's people" implies a spiritual reunion accompanied by recognition.

In the New Testament, the account of the rich man and Lazarus answers many of these questions:

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five

brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

Notice several things from this account:

- After death, all the persons mentioned were conscious; all were aware of their surroundings; and all were possessed of a memory of the world they had lately left.
- The rich man knew who he was; he also knew Lazarus and could see him in Paradise.
- The rich man could also recognize Abraham, whom he had never seen.
- The rich man could remember his earthly circumstances, including the fact that he had five wayward brothers.

Matthew 7:22 reads, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" In this passage, some are pictured as arguing with the Lord at the judgment about their good works while on earth. If they lose their memory at death, how could they remember their good works?

Another passage, Revelation 6:9-10, sheds more light: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" These individuals are Christians who died for their faith, most likely in the early centuries of the church's existence. Note that in death, they retained their identities; they had a knowledge of their surroundings and why they were there; they remembered the circumstances of their deaths; and they knew that their murderers had not yet been punished.

Paul expected to meet his converts at the return of Christ and to know them. He said, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the

presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). If Paul had no memory of converting these people, his statement would be meaningless.

Jesus implied that at the judgment, we will have full recall of who we were on earth and what we did. Matthew 25:34-40 affirms that when we stand before the Lord, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'”

From these passages, we can draw some legitimate conclusions:

We will still be ourselves after death, retaining our individual identities, regardless of whether we go to Paradise or Tartarus, heaven or hell.

We will retain our memories after death. If anything, our mental faculties will be enhanced. The rich man knew not only Lazarus whom he had seen, but also Abraham whom he had not seen. Jesus said we will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11). That will be quite an honor and thrill for us. But again, this promise would be meaningless if we had no knowledge of these Bible persons once we die.

What about our bodies in that heavenly abode? All we can say for sure is that our new, spiritual bodies will be nothing like our earthly bodies. They will not age or experience pain and suffering. First Corinthians 15:52 says, “For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” But we will still be recognizable.

But there are one or two things that will be different in heaven concerning our identities and relationships: Consider this often-asked question: *will I know my wife in heaven?* The answer is yes--but I will not really relate to her as my wife. Matthew 22:30 affirms, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." In eternity, there will be:

- No sexual distinctions.
- No marriages, for two reasons: (1) there will be no need for marriage, because heaven will not be populated by procreation; and (2) in heaven, each of us will be complete in Christ. We will all be married to Him!
- No births, deaths, or different stages of human existence (babyhood, childhood, adulthood, and old age)--these are all features of this physical sphere of existence.

This concept, that we will not be married in heaven, is a shock to many people. Here are some meaningful thoughts on that: "I think what we are afraid of when we read this teaching of Jesus is the prospect that the person who was closest and most dear to me in this life will be nothing special to me in eternity. But we need not worry about this.... What throws us is this notion of 'not being married.' In this life, no longer being married to your spouse means separation and divorce. It means division and rupture.... But Jesus is not talking about this life. He's talking about the resurrection. And after the resurrection, marriage won't exist — not because it's been undone, as if it never happened — but because it has been *fulfilled*."

(<https://testeverythingblog.com/will-you-be-married-to-your-spouse-in-heaven-ea76e94a6fd2>)

There is one other subject we need to talk about. It is the main objection--really, the only objection--to the affirmation that we will know each other after death. The objection is this: If we will know each other in heaven, and retain our earthly memories, then we will know who is NOT there. We will be grieved by the absence of loved ones who did not come to Jesus. We will be deeply burdened by the thought of their suffering in hell. We cannot give a definitive answer to this objection, but here are some thoughts: (1) In the Luke 16 account, it is said that the rich man could see Lazarus; but it is not stated that Lazarus could see the rich

man in torment. In fact, Luke 16:25 says that Lazarus was “comforted.” (2) I can easily envision part of the suffering of hell as being able to see where you might have been, but those in or heaven not being able to see you. (3) Revelation 21:16 promises us that in heaven, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Upon hearing that in heaven God will wipe away every tear, one little girl exclaimed, “God must surely have a big handkerchief!” But of course, the meaning is that in heaven there will be no causes of sorrow--our joy will be complete.

I have often jokingly said that each of us needs to make a list of people we want to meet in heaven. Really, that is not a joke. I believe I will be able to sit down with Paul, Peter, Noah, Abraham, Dorcas, the Philippian jailor, and a hundred others I have known only in the pages of the Bible. Who knows, we may even be able to go to the heavenly library (there is one, you know) and watch a video of the creation, the Flood, the sermons of Jesus, the day of Pentecost, etc.

Doesn't thinking about these things get you all excited about going to heaven?
--John Temples