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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

Will We Recognize Each Other In Heaven?

Somewhere along the line, someone got the idea that we Christians won't recognize each other when we get to heaven.

Probably this comes from a bungled interpretation of Revelation 21:4, that there will be no tears in heaven. If I get to heaven, the logic goes, and I look around and realize that my parents or children or favorite brethren aren't there with me, I will be very upset, thereby contradicting the notion that there will be no tears. Thus, I must not be able to tell who the others are. I've even heard some say that we won't remember life on earth, or know who we are ourselves—that we'll be struck with some form of heavenly amnesia.

This is a good example of pressing a passage way beyond what God intended it to communicate. While there are no passages that directly deal with this question, there are several passages we could read to infer confidently that we will recognize each other in heaven. Let me give them to you, in no particular order.

In the patriarchal age, one common way to describe death was, “he was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8, 25:17, 35:29, 49:29–33, Num. 20:24–26, 27:13, 31:2, Deut. 32:50, Judges 2:10). One can debate just how much the patriarchs understood about resurrection and heaven, but it seems clear that they looked forward to joining their faithful ancestors after death. The phrase certainly does not refer to burial in a common tomb, for the phrase is used of the spirit passing into the afterlife, not the physical body passing into the tomb (Isaac, for example, “breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people” and then “his sons Esau and Jacob buried him”). Interestingly, the phrase is only used of believers.

This is one of the awesome truths of heaven. It will be one great, never-ending reunion! Loved ones who suffered the sharp pain of parting in death will be reunited in the everlasting city.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

This blessed hope allowed King David to get on with his life after the death of his infant child. While the child was sick, he prayed and fasted and wallowed on the ground for seven days. But when the child finally died, he got up, bathed and changed his clothes, worshipped God, and ate food. His servants were a little puzzled by his apparently backwards behavior, and David explained:

While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, “Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.” But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:22–24).

Would David, a man known for many inspired prophecies and psalms, have clung to such a hope if, in reality, he would never recognize his child when he got to heaven? That wouldn't be much to look forward to. That really isn't much different from a kidnapping.

There are a number of passages in which people recognize departed saints. In Luke 13:28–29, Jesus says,

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out; and they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.

In fact, a heavenly banquet is one of the most frequent metaphors for heaven found in the Bible. It would be a rather awkward feast if we didn't know each other, and weren't allowed to introduce ourselves.

In Luke 16:19–26, the rich man recognizes Abraham as well as Lazarus, the man who used to sit outside his home begging. And Abraham recognizes the rich man.

In Luke 9:28–35, on the mount of transfiguration, Peter and James and John recognized Moses and Elijah, men who had died centuries before. They retained identity, activity, and personality.

Besides, Revelation 21:4 doesn't say there will be no tears in heaven. It says, "God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes." If there is anything to be dismayed about in heaven, it will quickly be replaced by the amazing reality of eternal fellowship with God. I suspect that family blood-ties won't have the same meaning in heaven as on earth (see Matthew 22:30). If my loved ones don't make it, I will be crushed by this loss. But, I will also better understand the principle that all souls belong to God, and that all souls are accountable to God. If I don't want to suffer this loss, let me do the best I can, while I have these relationships on earth, to teach the gospel.

Reunion is one of the most powerful incentives to go to heaven. Let's not drain heaven of this marvelous feature.

—John Guzzetta

Prayer Warrior or Prayer Worrier?

There's an article making the rounds of the internet, though I cannot tell who first wrote it. The article mentions a woman who said regarding the power of prayer:

I so believe in the magnificent power of prayer! This power saved my daughter from having major life-altering surgery. Praise God and all my prayer worrier friends who joined me in asking for God's intervention in the matter. Glory be to God!

Yes, that was one of those meaningful typos that makes you think. She meant to say "prayer warrior" but accidentally said "prayer *worrier*."

Which are we?

Prayer warriors are important. Colossians 4:12 mentions one of them, Epaphras, who is "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers."

Nevertheless, we have a tendency to continue worrying about things after we have taken them to God. The Bible says "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). God truly invites us to give Him the worries so that He can carry them for us. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

We gain nothing by worrying (Matthew 6:27). Let's do our best to trust the promises of God, casting our anxieties upon Him, and then leaving them there!

—*John Guzzetta*

Quotes of the Week:

"If two men agree all the time, then one is useless. If they disagree all the time, then both are useless."

—*Darryl Zanuck*

"The person who knows how will always have a job. The person who knows why will be his boss."

—*Carl Wood*