

OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAVEN

We received a bunch (like a WHOLE bunch) of questions about Heaven and eternity. Because of the number of questions, we had to group some of them together in topics.

As you read through these, remember what we talked about at our weekend service. When you ask, "Where is Heaven?", the answer is: "Which one?" The Bible is pretty clear that there is a 'heaven' that believers go to when they end this run here on earth. It's a temporary place in the presence of God (so it's 'paradise' as Jesus promised). But the Bible is also clear that there will be a 'new Heaven and a new Earth' (Revelation 21) which will be our eternal place. So when we answer these questions, we will do our best to make a distinction between the present, temporary place, and the 'New Earth' which is also referred to as Heaven. I hope this doesn't confuse you.

A couple of our pastors answered these—we did have some fun with them. But the place God has reserved for us is incredible, and we look forward to that time, beyond time, when we are with Him.

1. What evidence is there that the earth is the center of the universe?

When I said 'center', I wanted to make it clear that I believe it is the center of the universe in the sense that it is this planet that God is pouring out His attention, and that (as far as I can tell) this is the only place He sent His only son to die on the cross. When God 'recreates' things for an eternity, then the Bible says that there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth, and that the dwelling place of God will be with us (And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. Revelation 21:3 (NIV))

Of course, this is my belief. Many others much wiser than I have different views. C.S. Lewis, whom I admire, believes in the possibility (and, as far as I can tell, the likelihood) of other beings in different galaxies. That could be true and would be cool. But I also love the idea (again, this is only my belief) that this little blue planet is the center of God's focus in the universe.

2. Do you think there will be 8 pound trout to catch or just 6-12 inchers in bounty?

Both.

3. Will Heaven have jobs? Is the economy good in heaven? Will I need computer skills in Heaven?

What we really want to know is the details of our eternity. We'd like to know about the day to day stuff. In that context, someone also asked, "Will I finally get my

motorcycle?” I guess we are, bottom-line asking: WILL ETERNITY BE MORE ‘EARTH LIKE’ OR ‘SPIRITUAL LIKE.’ ?

I believe that since God is going to re-create the earth, it will probably be more earth like. That is, trees, bushes, sky, breeze, rocks, and animals (that answers the ‘are there dogs in heaven?’ question). It also seems that our personalities will carry over into heaven as well, and thus probably our skills. God has always blessed work and so I believe that we will express ourselves in creativity, industriousness, and craftsmanship. To what modern extent we can have that, I don’t know. If there are ‘jobs’, it will be a natural expression of who we are.

3.a. Related Question: When we are in heaven, are we really going to spend every moment serving and honoring God? Sounds like a lot of work!

When all of our sin issues are eliminated, and our agendas are perfectly aligned with our Creator, whatever He has us do will be pure joy.

4. Will our families be reconnected?/Will I know my loved ones?/When I hug my children will they know me and I them?

I’ve heard a bunch of people who’ve heard somewhere that we won’t know anybody in heaven. I’m not sure where that comes from. In Matthew 17, Peter, James and John knew Moses and Elijah. So obviously there is individual personhood and personality in eternity. God made you YOU, and that will carry on into eternity. So, of course you will know loved ones and yes, you will be reconnected to those you love.

4.a. Related Question: Will our family and friends be there

If they have made a personal decision to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior, then yes, they will be there. And the relationships will be perfect.

5. What will we DO in heaven?

Again, I believe that “heaven” (eternity) will be more ‘earth like’ than ‘cloud like’. We will be in a recreated earth. While the details are not clear, among the things we can do would include: spending time with people we love, learning, exploring God’s creation, enjoying our hobbies, using our talents, worshiping, and of course, fly fishing. The Bible says that all things work for good. In this world, we don’t always see that. I believe in eternity we will be able to review moments in life and then appreciate how God was working in our lives and in our world. We will see the intricacies of His plan worked out.

How technologically advanced will eternity be? It could be way more advanced than we could ever imagine. Or it could be much more simple. I do know that if you want to skateboard, you’ll be able to. If you want to play music, music will be there. If you want to ski, then the powder will be awesome. And if Pastor Paul wants to snowboard, he won’t make an idiot of himself.

6. Will we be wired/programmed the same? Will we be individuals?

Psalm 139 says God created us and knit us together. He formed our individual personalities. I believe His creative design lasts forever. You will be 'wired' the same, only better. All the flaws, sins, pettiness, selfishness and insecurities will be gone. So you will be YOU, only the complete YOU.

7. When we get to heaven, do we really “watch over” the family left behind on earth?/ Can my Mom hear me?

Now we are talking about the present 'paradise' place. In Revelation there are martyrs mentioned who seem to be aware of what is happening on earth. I'm not sure if people in the present 'paradise' can hear us and see us. It's a nice thought if they can (but also a little disturbing when you think about it), but I really don't know.

7.a. Related Question: In heaven, can we see and watch others on earth?

While it is clear that angels interact with people throughout the Bible, there is no indication that people who have died interact with people still on earth. This includes being able to see and watch people. There is a misconception that people become angels when they die. Angels are a created being, just like humans are. But they are different. People don't become angels. Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:13-14

8. What happens to our old falling-apart bodies? Do I really get a young healthy one?

In 1 Corinthians 15 there is a cool discussion about that. It says that we are perishable, but raised incorruptible and eternal. What that looks like, I don't know. I do believe it will be more 'earth like' than 'angelic' like (wings and harp etc.). I believe that the real "us" will finally be revealed. The most important part of "us" is not the physical (in spite of what commercials tell us), but the inside. Whether it will be a physical rendition of our spiritual/personal selves, or something else, the Bible doesn't say. We will recognize each other, however. I hope I come back at 25 years old (only 4 inches taller).

8.a. Related Question: How tall will we be?

The perfect height. See also next question

8.b. Related Question: How old will people be in heaven?

The Bible does not specifically answer this question. Will babies and children who die still be babies / children in Heaven? What about elderly people who die--do they remain elderly in heaven? Some have guessed that babies are given a resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:35-49) that is "fast-forwarded" to the "ideal age," just as those who die at an old age are "re-wound" to the ideal age. This would indicate that there won't be any children or elderly people in heaven. What is the ideal age? Again, this concept is not specifically biblical. Some believe it to be around 30. Some guess 33 since that is approximately the age Jesus was when He died. 1 John 3:2 declares, "Dear friends, now we are

children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

8.c. Related Question: If you die and go up to heaven, will you come back to life in human form?

When we die and are resurrected, we are given new bodies. As the bible says, what is raised is imperishable. The Bible uses an analogy of how a kernel becomes a grain. We couldn't recognize the tree from the seed but that is what it becomes. Whether we will look the same (only perfect) is not clear. 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

9. If Jesus is the only way to heaven, what about my atheist friend? What kind of loving God sends anyone to hell? (A bunch of questions were like this).

This is a tough question as it deals with the eternal alternative to heaven. Does hell exist? Jesus said so. The Bible says so. The Bible indicates that God leaves a witness for all of us. In Romans 1-3, God reveals that through nature, conscience, and His word, we all have a clear signpost to reach out to God. It says none of us are really without excuse (I know this sounds harsh, but this is what the Bible says).

The Bible also says that anyone will find God if they 'seek Him with all (their) hearts' (which is a pretty big order, by the way). Eternity is a continuation of the decisions and choices we have made on earth. If you choose to seek God with all you are, to accept His Son as the payment for your sin, then eternity will be the deepening relationship with God that you desired.

If, on the other hand, chose to keep God at arm's length; to not give Him the rightful place in your life, then at the end of your life God will honor that desire. He will not overrule that choice. You will be separated from God. It is a hard doctrine, but I know in eternity it will make perfect sense as we see and understand God's mercy, provision, justice, holiness, and plan all worked out.

10. What about people who have never heard about Jesus Christ?

Two schools of thought on this. Some believe that God will judge a person based on their response to the truth that has been revealed to them. For example, a person in another land steeped in a polytheistic (multiple god) religion, has examples and witnesses of the one true God (Psalm 19, Romans 1-3). Some believe God will judge that person based on that response. Did they begin to reject that polytheistic faith (to the best of their ability), or did they say, 'to heck with it, I'll just keep believing in all these gods, so what?' If they began to seek God (even though they never found Christ, some say that this is a faith response and pleasing enough to God).

Others believe that this same person, as he or she responds in faith to the little 'light' they have, will be sent more 'light'. As they keep seeking, then they will

find Christ. There are some pretty cool stories of people in the middle of nowhere encountering a missionary and have heard the story of Jesus Christ and proclaimed, "This is what I've been searching for all my life."

11. So WILL my pets be in heaven?

Here are the animals that will definitely NOT be in eternity: gophers, mosquitoes, large hairy horse flies, yapping dogs, most cats (but of course, YOURS will be there), the large grasshopper that freaked me out when I was a kid, fire ants, and the rooster in my neighborhood. If you have a pet not on this list, and you want it there, then it will be there.

11.b. Related Question: Will our pets be in heaven with us?

The Bible does not give any explicit teaching on whether pets/animals have "souls" or whether pets/animals will be in heaven. The primary difference between human beings and animals is that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), while animals are not. Being made in the image and likeness of God means that human beings are like God, capable of spirituality, with mind, emotion, and will, and they have a part of their being that continues after death. If pets/animals do have a "soul" or immaterial aspect, it must therefore be of a different and lesser "quality." This difference possibly means that pet/animal "souls" do not continue in existence after death. Another factor to consider is that animals are a part of God's creative process in Genesis. God created the animals and said they were good (Genesis 1:25). Therefore, there is no reason why there could not be animals on the new earth (Revelation 21:1). It is impossible to say definitively whether some of these animals might be the pets we had while here on earth. We do know that God is just and that when we get to heaven we will find ourselves in complete agreement with His decision on this issue, whatever it may be.

12. Does everyone get along in heaven?

God in his very nature is in a perfect relationship, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit of the Trinity. He created Adam and Eve to have a perfect relationship. They (we) broke that in rebellion. God solves this two ways, once for our time on earth and once in eternity. Jesus is our only solution for reconciled relationships while on earth. When we get to Heaven, all brokenness will be removed and all relationships will be restored so we will all get along perfectly. Genesis 1:26-31, 1 Corinthians 13.

13. What type of clothing will we wear?

No one knows for sure but probably it will be personal preference. In some cases people are given white robes (Revelations 6:11) but that is while the saints are waiting for God's judgment.

14. How will any of us face Jesus or God? How could all the people that died before me and after me all be able to spend time with God?

Since God is not bounded by time, He will be able to meet with each of us. He is omnipresent, which means He is everywhere. He will be able to spend as much “time” with us as we desire.

15. Do you go to church in heaven?

Church was established on earth by Christ to be the light of the world. Once the old heaven and earth is gone and the new is created, we will be in a state of perfect worship and won't have a need for the “church”. Also note that there is no reference to the church after chapter 3 in Revelation. Some suggest this means the church ceases to exist.

16. Do you go to heaven as soon as you die?

Jesus tells one of the thieves on the cross that “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). This implies an immediate transition from our life on earth to heaven. For the believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that after death believers’ souls/spirits are taken to heaven, because their sins are forgiven by having received Christ as Savior (John 3:16, 18, 36). For believers, death is to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8, Philippians 1:23). However, passages such as (1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17) describe believers being resurrected and given glorified bodies. If believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, what is the purpose of this resurrection? It seems that while the souls/spirits of believers go to be with Christ immediately after death, the physical body remains in the grave “sleeping.” At the resurrection of believers, the physical body is resurrected, glorified, and then reunited with the soul/spirit. This reunited and glorified body-soul-spirit will be the possession of believers for eternity in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22).

17. Will we be able to remember our good and bad experiences here on earth?

Isaiah 65:17 tells us, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” Some interpret this as saying that we will have no memory of our earthly lives in heaven. However, one verse earlier in Isaiah 65:16 the Bible says, “For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.” It is likely only our “past troubles” that will be forgotten – not all of our memories. Our memories will be cleansed, redeemed, healed, and restored – not erased. There is no reason why we could not possess many memories from our earthly lives. The memories that will be cleansed are the ones that involve sin, pain, and sadness. Revelation 21:4 declares, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

18. Will I finally get my motorcycle in heaven?

When you enter eternity with God, your Will will be aligned with God's perfect Will. If He "Wills" you to have a motorcycle, then you will!

19. When we are in heaven, are we really going to spend every moment serving and honoring God? Sounds like a lot of work!

When all of our sin issues are eliminated, and our agendas are perfectly aligned with our Creator, whatever He has us do will be pure joy.

20. How can we prove there is a heaven?

Ultimately this is a faith question. We can say with confidence that the Bible is accurate and that where science can prove truths in the Bible, it does (for example, archaeological finds, historical evidence, etc.). If we believe that the Bible is true, then we believe heaven exists.

21. Do people on their death-bed get a chance from Jesus? Do evil people on earth who commit terrible crimes then repent get to go to heaven?

Everyone gets a chance to accept Jesus as their savior. When they accept Him doesn't matter. That they accept Him does. Jesus Grace is sufficient for all sins. The thief on the cross accepted Jesus and was assured that he would be in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

22. What happens to our loved ones who, through life's circumstances, have "lost their way"? Will we be with them one day in heaven? If not, how will we deal with this?

If we have accepted Christ as our savior, nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Each person must personally make that decision. Then and only then can we expect to see them in heaven. For the last question, see number 17.

23. Is heaven eternal? When does God wake up the dead and bring them to heaven? Do both heavens exist at the same time? Are we judged before we get to heaven? Where are we placed after judgement?

The fact that there is going to be a final judgment for all men, both believers and unbelievers, is clearly confirmed in many passages of Scripture. Every person will one day stand before Christ and be judged for his or her deeds. While it is very clear that the great white throne judgment is the final judgment, Christians disagree on how it relates to the other judgments mentioned in the Bible. It is important to never lose sight of the facts concerning the coming judgment(s). First, Jesus Christ will be the judge, all unbelievers will be judged by Christ, and they will be punished according to the works they have done. The Bible is very clear that unbelievers are storing up wrath against themselves (Romans 2:5) and that God will "give to each person according to what he has done" (Romans 2:6). Believers will also be judged by Christ, but since Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us and our names are written in the book of life, we will be rewarded,

but not punished, according to our deeds. Romans 14:10-12 says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and that each one of us will give an account to God.

24. For everyone in heaven, what will happen when Jesus goes to earth and picks up all the Christians? Will the earth end? How long will everyone be in heaven?

In eternity, time has no meaning so it is unclear how those in heaven will experience the last days when Christ is wrapping things up on earth, collecting those that accept Him. As Revelation 20 states, God will create a new heaven and earth. This will be our eternal destination.