Some Thoughts on Heaven

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One of the things that accompanies the absence of someone you love is an increased interest in what it must be like for them (and for all the saints) in heaven. I've certainly found my mind gravitating to thoughts of heaven this past year. Perhaps you have too. I've recorded here some random thoughts on heaven.

I've often wondered what it must be like to enter heaven. What the first minutes and hours must be like. Jesus spoke of angels escorting the souls of believers to heaven (Luke 16:22). I've spoken to some patients in the hospital who claim to have seen their deceased loved ones during "near death encounters." I don't know what to make of this…whether they really do come to help escort us to heaven. (It certainly would ease the transition if this is the case.) But I'm sure they are among the first to greet us once we arrive. Can't you see the tears and hear the exclamations of joy and love? There must be an uninterrupted influx of new arrivals in glory. imagine the literally millions of personal histories .of God's grace in the lives of his children to be told and retold among the inhabitants of heaven! A biographer's paradise to be sure!

Then there's the matter of our settling into our heavenly "home," our "place." Jesus said that He would be "preparing a place" for us when He returned to heaven (John 14:2-3). What this entails we can only speculate. I wonder if the saints assist in these *preparations* in some way? I don't know. But I love what C. S. Lewis said: "Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it--made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand."[1] *"At home* with the Lord" indeed (11 Cor. 5:8).

I personally think there's enough evidence in scripture for us to speculate that the saints in heaven may indeed pray for those of us still on earth. The saints described in Rev. 6:9-10 are certainly praying for God's justice to be done on earth. The "prayers of *all* the saints" are said to be symbolically offered through the incense in the heavenly temple (Rev. 8:3-4; 5:8). And if they pray for us, could it be that they also are informed about us to some degree? I don't think it's beyond possibility that they are. Moses and Elijah were certainly aware of what was about to transpire in Jesus' life when they joined Him on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31).

What we do know for sure is that the saints in heaven are overcome with the greatness and grace of God, and are moved from the heart to *praise* and worship Him (Rev. *4-5)!* I can't help but quote Lewis again: "Surely…each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the divine beauty better than any other creature can. Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love each differently?…If all experienced God in the same way and returned Him an identical worship, the song of the Church triumphant would have no symphony, it would be like an orchestra in which all the instruments played the same note"[2].

One thing for which He certainly will deserve our praise is the marvelous *transformation* that will take place in each one of us. John says that "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as he is" (I Jn. 3:2). All of us know people who have impacted and influenced us, changed us, just by being in their presence and enjoying their fellowship. If the presence of other mortals has this kind of effect on us, how much more must the presence of the immortal Son of God! Even now, we are told, as we behold the glory of the Lord we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18)! If our veiled vision of Christ changes us now, how much more when we see Him face to face! "Having no spot or wrinkle…but holy and blameless" before Him (Eph. *5:27).*

My internal struggle with sin described so intensely in Romans chapter 7 will be forever a thing of the past!

Of course, as a result of this internal change, our *relationships* with others will be perfected as well. We often think of being reunited with loved ones in heaven. But who of us has loved perfectly even our closest and dearest family and friends? Not to mention brothers and sisters whom we may have injured, or by whom we were even deeply hurt during this life. We tend to romanticize our relationships. But this healing of relationships is a very real part of the spiritual transformation that will take place. I've wondered if in fact some of those who helped put Jesus to death might not be in heaven. Didn't He pray that the Father might forgive those who knew not what they were doing? In heaven, we'll be able to do the same, Isaiah recorded the words of the Lord that in the new heavens and new earth "the former things (defined in v. 16 as the *troubles* of this life) will not be remembered or come to mind" *(65:17).* Purposely set aside in our consciousness, so as to form no barrier in our relationships. Jesus' prayer that we be "perfected in unity" will be finally and fully answered (in. 17:23).

Jonathan Edwards wrote of our relationships in heaven: "No inhabitants of that blessed world will ever be grieved with the thought that they are slighted by those that they love, or that their love is not fully and fondly returned… There shall be no such thing as flattery or insincerity in heaven, but there perfect sincerity shall reign through all in all. Everyone will be just what he seems to be, and will really have all the love that he seems to have. It will not be as in this world, where comparatively few things are what they seem to be, and where professions are often made lightly and without meaning. But there, every expression of love shall come from the bottom of the heart, and all that is professed shall be really and truly felt."[3]

Our *knowledge,* understanding and insight will also be greatly expanded. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known" (I Cot 13:12). Not that our minds will encompass all that is in the infinite mind of God. Faith is one of the things that will abide forever (v. 13). And faith implies incomplete understanding. But no doubt many of the mysteries of this life will be resolved for us. Personally I have an innate desire to know more and more about so many things, especially about God and his ways. This is a good thing. It keeps me learning and growing, and hungering for heaven. But I have to remind myself frequently that this side of that place there will always be huge gaps in my knowledge, even of the Lord. That far more important than reducing what I don't know is *doing* what I do know.

When we see the Lord in heaven, and only then, will the deepest and truest longings of ow heart be fulfilled. "As for me, 1 shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be *satisfied* with Your likeness when I awake" (Ps. *17:15).* "In Your presence is *fullness ofjoy;* In Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps. 16:1 ib). There is much joy in this life. But fullness of joy will never be known here. Only there. The greatest blessings of this life are merely small "foretastes" of and pointers to the things to come which are "better by far" (Phil. 1:23). Lewis again: "There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven, but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else."[4] And again: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[5]

I can't resist closing with this much beloved quote from the last page of the last volume of Lewis' *Narnia Tales* series:

"(T)he things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stones, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their

adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read; which goes on for ever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."[6] I can hardly wait. Can you?

Notes:
[1] C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain.* Macmillan, 1968. pp. 147-48.
[2] ibid., p. 150.
[3] Jonathan Edwards. *Heaven: A World of Love.* Calvary Press, 1999. pp. 27-29.
[4] Lewis. *The Problem of Pain.* p. 145.
[5] C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity.* Macmillan, 1967. p. 120.
[6] C. S. Lewis. *The Las Battle.* Collier Books, 1970. pp. 183-84.

I'm standing on the seashore. A ship at my side
spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean.
She's an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her
until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud
just where the sea and the sky come down to mingle with each other.
And then I hear someone at my side saying, "There, she's gone."
Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all.
She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was
when she left my side.
And just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination.
Her diminished size is in *me,* not in her.
And just at the moment when someone at my side says,
"There, she is gone" there are other eyes watching her coming,
and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout,
"Here she comes!"

Attributed to Henry Van Dyke