

Do You Agree With What T.D. Jakes Says About 'Heaven Is for Real'?

Bishop T.D. Jakes, a producer of the new movie *Heaven is for Real*, said fascination with the story of Colton Burpo, a 4-year-old boy who claims to have glimpsed heaven after a near-death experience, reflects a "growing wonder" in the afterlife that spans religious backgrounds. The Dallas megachurch leader answered emailed questions about the film, which opened in theaters on Wednesday.

Some answers have been edited for length and clarity.

The book on which the film is based was a best-seller and is again. Why do you think it has prompted so much interest?

People are attracted to the simplicity of Colton's story. The vivid detail and the certainty of his experience are the most compelling elements. I also believe that there is a growing wonder about life after death in our culture. The notion of heaven captures people's imagination regardless of their religious predisposition. The need to find purpose in life is often driving that curiosity. Believing in the hereafter provides an anchor for the soul, and a resting place for one's faith.

I also think that people relate to a father wrestling with unbelief, and struggling to find meaning in his son's experience.

Your previous movies have had predominantly black casts. Is there a reason you're branching out?

I have always said that I want to make the type of movies that I want to see. I recognized early on that there is a vast

movie-going audience that wants to see films on Saturday night or on a Sunday afternoon with their families and not be embarrassed. That task is larger than any one race or people group. To think of that objective in terms of race is to be far too narrow in one's definition. Building an exceptional body of work was always the objective.

My casts to date have reflected the story that was being told and from a perspective that is not often represented in American cinema. There are still far too few scripted roles for actors of color. In the faith space, actors of color are rarer still. I am delighted that *Heaven Is for Real* will reach a larger audience and provide additional opportunities to speak to people that don't look like me or think like me. Jesus said to go into all of the world, to preach the gospel. He didn't send me just to the black world.

Do you think *Heaven Is for Real* will answer people's questions, or prompt them to ask more?

I think that the role of the moviemaker is to prompt people to ask questions, to leave the theaters with perhaps just as many questions as answers so that they may continue to explore and to seek answers to life's mysteries. You can't solve the world's problems in 90 minutes. What you can do is set the context, provide the ammunition and hope that people carry the task forward, especially now as this movie comes out Easter weekend. We want people to explore the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.