

RT Kendall: Expect These 3 Surprises When You Get to Heaven

"I expect three surprises when I get to heaven."

So Martin Luther, the German Reformer who turned the world upside down in the sixteenth century by his rediscovery of justification by faith alone, is often quoted as saying. First, there will be people in heaven he did not expect to be there. Second, there will be people not present in heaven he was certain would be there. Third is the greatest surprise of all—that he is there himself!

I suspect Luther was right in his speculation. I think many of us may be surprised to see people in heaven we assumed were not fit for heaven. Could this be because we set a standard of fitness that is different from what the Lord Himself requires?

One of the least-known but most important teachings of John Calvin (1509–1564) is what he calls "implicit faith." It is faith that lacks a full knowledge of truth but that is nonetheless true faith. He cited the woman of Samaria as an example.

"Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, 'He told me all that I ever did.' ... And many more believed because of His word. They said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this Man is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world'" (John 4:39, 41-42).

The woman of Samaria believed what she saw and heard in Jesus. Her testimony led to many coming to confess that Jesus was the Savior. But Jesus had not yet died on the cross, neither is it

likely they saw Him as the God-man. But they believed what they saw. This is implicit faith, a measure of knowledge that needs to be topped up at some stage. Yet Calvin also added that there is a sense in which all faith is implicit faith. We are still learning. We have so much more to learn.

One of our members at Westminster Chapel was a young lady who was saved in a church in York. She was a student there who went to an Anglican church where she was converted. But she had no idea there is a hell, and her knowledge of the gospel was quite shallow when she first came to us. She grew by leaps and bounds. But this did not mean she became a Christian after she came to us. She was truly converted in York. She no doubt had implicit faith—a genuine faith, a saving faith, but a faith that was greatly lacking in knowledge.

How right (I suspect) Luther was. The surprises we will have in heaven! But what about those whom we *were so sure* would be there but are not? Could this be some of those who seemed to be so godly? Could it be those who were faithful tithers and were faithful in church every Sunday? I think of millions of Southern Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans and Lutherans who were baptized. Some stopped coming to church a week or two after they made a profession. Some persevered. I think of thousands who went into the ministry. Seminary professors. Missionaries. Will all of them be in heaven? Who knows?

What makes a person fit for heaven?

To quote Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Christian is a person who is surprised that he is a Christian—that is, amazed; he or she never gets over it. But at the same time the person knows in his or her heart what is gloriously true: the person is fit for heaven because he or she has embraced the true gospel.

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