

Will We Know Our Friends in Heaven?

Last year was painful for me because I lost three good friends. Robert died of lymphoma in February, Fernando died in November after a heart attack and James died a week later of heart failure. All three men left grieving wives and families behind.

To cope with my grief, I looked at photos and wrote down memories. But it was hard. James and I talked or texted almost every day, so it was surreal to see his number in my phone with no “What’s up, bud?” or “You doin’ OK?” messages from Alabama.

One thing that helped me in the grieving process was meditating on the reality of eternal life. The Bible tells us if our loved ones were believers in Jesus, they go immediately into God’s presence in heaven when they die.

We love to tell our grieving friends and relatives, “He’s in a better place” or “She’s enjoying heaven now.” But those words don’t always help me. That’s great for them, but what about those of us here on earth who are missing them? I know my friend James is in heaven, but I can’t text him there. My phone plan with AT&T doesn’t include coverage in glory. (I would pay extra for that!)

What encourages me most is not that my friends are in the arms of Jesus, but that when this world as we know it ends, I will be with my Christian friends again. Some Christians have a weird idea that heaven is a dreamy place, more shadow than substance. They imagine we will be disembodied spirits, floating around in white robes while choirs sing 24 hours a day.

Some Christians even believe we will have new identities and

our memories of this earth will be erased. We would do well to read the last chapters of the Bible and recognize God has so much more in store for us than that. The final words of Revelation remind us of these truths:

This world will be reborn. After God judges the wickedness of humanity at the end of time, He will remake this earth and bring heaven down to this domain. It will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1b), a paradise as at the time of creation. The new earth will have trees, animals, roads and indescribable beauty. And the new, heavenly city of Jerusalem will be its capital.

We will live and work with each other in a new world. Revelation 21:24 says “the nations” will walk by the perpetual light of the Son of God, who will rule from His eternal throne. There will be nations in the new earth. We will live as citizens of God’s glorious kingdom in a world where there is no war, violence, tears, pain, viruses or death (21:4). The Bible doesn’t specify what kind of work will we do, but those who have been faithful to God in this life will be involved in management of the new world.

We will maintain our identities. We will have new bodies (1 Cor. 15:49), but that doesn’t mean we won’t be ourselves. Jesus said when we are in the new earth we will “recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Matt. 8:11b, NASB). These great heroes of faith will still be themselves—and so will we.

I will be myself, you will be yourself and we will have the opportunity to meet saints who lived in different time periods. I am personally eager to schedule appointments with Paul, Timothy, John, Ruth, Mark, Luke, Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, as well as Christians whose writings encouraged me.

We will continue our friendships in the next life. When Jesus shared the Passover meal with His closest friends, He said, “I

will never eat [this meal] again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16b). Jesus was clearly stating that He would reunite with His disciples and they would fellowship together again.

When this world ends, true believers in Christ are invited to the greatest party ever celebrated. I’m sure the food and the music will be amazing, but the joy will be uncontainable because our friends and relatives who loved the Lord will be in the crowd. We will dance, hug, laugh and visit each other’s new homes. And I plan to enjoy coffee—or some new, heavenly beverage—with Robert, Fernando and James.

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