

Will We Know Our Friends in Heaven?

The year 2021 was a painful year for me personally because I lost three good friends. Robert died of lymphoma in February; Fernando died last week after a heart attack he suffered while on an international flight; and James died suddenly last weekend of heart failure. All three men left grieving wives and families behind.

To cope with my own grief, I've been looking at photos and writing down memories. But it's hard. James and I talked or texted almost every day so it's surreal to see his number in my phone with no "What's up, bud?" or "You doin' OK?" messages from Alabama.

One thing that has helped me so much in the grieving process is meditating on the reality of eternal life. We know the Bible tells us our loved ones go immediately into God's presence in heaven when they die, if they were believers in Jesus. We love to tell our grieving friends and relatives, "He's in a better place" or "She's enjoying heaven now."

Those words don't always help me, to be honest. 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 safely 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 an ethereal, dreamy place that is more shadow than substance. They imagine that we all show up there as disembodied spirits, floating around in white robes while choirs sing 24 hours a day. Some

Christians even believe we will have totally new identities and that our memories of this earth will be totally erased.

We would do well to read the last chapters of the Bible over and over until we understand that God has so much more in store for us than that. The last 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 totally remake this earth and bring heaven down to this domain. It will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1, MEV), a paradise like it was at the time of creation. The new earth will have trees, animals, roads and indescribable beauty. And the glorious, heavenly city of Jerusalem, a new and perfect city, will be the capital of the new creation.

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, pandemics or death (21:4). The Bible is not clear about 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. 8:11). These great heroes of faith will not lose their identities—they will still be themselves.

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 William Seymour, Corrie Ten Boom, Charles Spurgeon and C.S. Lewis.

We will continue our friendships in the next life. When Jesus shared the Passover meal with His closest friends, “He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16). Jesus was clearly stating that He would reunite with His disciples and they would fellowship together again.

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

I might also talk and text with them on some type of superior phones and I’m sure the signal will be perfect—with no spam, dead batteries or dropped calls. {eo}

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