

Heaven: When the Role is Called Up Yonder

2 Cor. 5.6-8, 46; Hebrews 11.13-16; Revelation 21.1-4; 22.1-5

While a majority of Americans believe in heaven, what they imagine is a far cry from biblical teaching. Some Christians even confess that they are not looking forward to heaven – *it's so boring!* What will Christians experience 'one minute after they die'? It's beyond our imagination!

- One Minute After We Die: We are with the Lord
Luke 23.43; 2 Cor. 5.8; Phil. 1.21-23; Rev. 6.9-11
- Heaven-in-Waiting: The 'Universe Next-Door'?
 - *A departure ('See you soon!')*
 - *Going 'home'*
 - *Trading a 'tent' for a 'house'*
- Heaven for Eternity: New Heavens and New Earth
 - *Not like the present earth: No sin!*
 - *Like the present earth, but New!*

All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness. The day is coming when you will wake to find, beyond all hope, that you have attained it, or else, that it was within your reach and you have lost it forever.

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*



1. Heaven has often been depicted in television shows, movies, and books. It seems that everyone has some idea – often made up from something they imagine. What images of heaven can you remember from your childhood? Were they comforting, or troubling? How do popular depictions of heaven as 'sitting on a cloud strumming a harp' make you feel? When you think of heaven, what comes to your mind?
2. The scene of Jesus on the cross provides a graphic glimpse at what the promise of heaven can entail. In particular, the dialogue between Jesus and the two criminals being crucified on either side of Him is gripping. Read Luke 23.39-43. We see contrasting views of Jesus in the two criminals, leading to Jesus' amazing statement to the second man in v43. What do we learn from this encounter?
3. "Soul Sleep" is the idea that between death and heaven, we do not experience anything – we "sleep." To get a biblical corrective to this teaching, read: Eccl. 12.7; Luke 16.22-31; 23.43; 2 Cor. 5.6-8; Phil. 1.23; Rev. 6.9-11. Scripture does refer to Christians who have died as "sleeping" (see 1 Cor. 15.51; 1 Thess. 4.13; 5.10): What does this figure of speech suggest about their experience after death?
4. A Christian's experience after death, before the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21-22), is temporary. We are with Christ and much better off than on earth (Phil. 1.23), but there is much about this time we don't know. While we aren't judged for eternal life (John 5.24), we will be judged for rewards (Rom. 14.10; 1 Cor. 4.5; 2 Cor. 5.10). When do you think this will take place? Why? Physical bodies of Christians who die are not resurrected until the Rapture (1 Thess. 4.13-18); will God give us bodies until the resurrection? Where will this 'temporary' heaven be? (No wrong answers here!)
5. Heaven on earth! We may think we've known it, but it will finally be *real* when the new Jerusalem descends from heaven, and God Himself comes to dwell with us (Rev. 21.1-5; 22.1-5). What strikes your imagination the most as you contemplate what this 'new earth' (heaven) will be like?