

Shall We Know One Another in Heaven? By Hoyt Houchen

Man is confronted with many mysteries, thus causing him to Ponder on many questions. He is made to wonder about death, immortality, what is beyond and shall we know each other in heaven. The subject of future recognition in heaven that is discussed in this article pertains to saints. As we give attention to this question, we are aware that our soul's salvation does not depend upon the answer; nevertheless, it is thought provoking and motivates us to delve into the Scriptures to determine if they provide the answer. Some questions which concern us are not answered in the Scriptures, thus they remain mysteries and must be classified in the file of curiosity. We do not believe, however, that the question under consideration is in that category. Every devoted Christian has probably given thought to this question. When one of our loved ones (a saint) departs from this life, we are sustained by the hope that we shall be united with him in heaven. Shall we recognize each other? We address ourselves to this question. While the Bible does give some teaching about future recognition, nevertheless, there are questions which remain unanswered, especially those involving details or specifics. The Bible teaches that heaven is real, but shall we as saints know each other in heaven?

A significant phrase is found in Genesis 25:8 where we are told, "And Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people." "He was gathered to his people." This phrase, or a slight variation of it, is used with reference to Ishmael's death (Gen. 25:17), the death of Isaac (Gen. 35:29), the death of Jacob (Gen. 49:29,33) and to Moses and Aaron (Deut. 32:50). Moses was not buried in the sepulchers of his fathers, but in an unknown place "in the valley of Moab" (Deut. 34:6). So, the phrase "gathered unto his people" would not refer to the burial of the body, but to the reunion of the spirit with those who had died before.

On the occasion of David's child who had died, he said: "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2Sam. 12:23). David realized that someday he would go to be with the child.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "...we are your glorying, even as ye also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus" (2Cor. 1:14). Paul also wrote to these brethren: "knowing that he that raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2Cor. 4:14). And, he wrote to the Thessalonians: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?" These are times of future rejoicing and glorying, thus it seems reasonable that Paul in these verses is referring to the "day" when the Lord Jesus will come to judge the world. Paul and his readers will be in one another's presence at that time.

The passage in 1Thessalonians 4:13,14 is one of hope and comfort for Christians whose loved ones had died. Paul admonished his readers that they "sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope" (v. 13). Their hope was not only that of the loved being at home with God, but it is also reasonable that there was the hope of someday seeing that beloved saint and being with him forever. This Scripture affords us the same hope today.

The foregoing Scriptures are some which convey the idea that the faithful who die will be united with the other faithful who have already departed from this life. There will be a meeting together.

Will there be future recognition? There are two passages in particular which lend evidence to this. 1) The transfiguration (Matt. 17:18; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). Christ was transfigured on the mountain and there appeared with him Moses and Elijah. Moses had been dead for nearly fifteen hundred years, and his body lay in an unknown grave. Elijah did not die, for he was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind (2Kings 2:11). The body of Moses turned to dust and Elijah had been changed. These men were clothed with different bodies from what they had here upon earth, but they appeared to the disciples and were talking with Jesus. They were both recognized. 2) The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Although some classify this account as a parable, a parable represents something that actually occurs. The rich man recognized Lazarus and Abraham in the unseen world. He still possessed memory, for he was told to remember that in this world he had good things and Lazarus evil things. He also remembered that he had five brothers still living. He requested that they be warned, lest they too, should come to torment. A great gulf in Hades separated the righteous from the wicked, and although it was too late for the rich man to be changed, there was recognition.

The Scriptures teach that at the resurrection of the dead, it is our physical bodies that will be changed, not our spirits. This is made clear in 1Corinthians 15 (see vv. 35-38). This body will be changed from a mortal body to an immortal one. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (v. 53). There can be no doubt that the mortal and the corruptible refer to the physical body. Certainly, the spirit is neither corruptible nor mortal. When we are raised from the dead, we shall have a body which pleases God to give us. It will be a changed body (vv. 51,52). "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (v. 44). This being true, we shall not be known in heaven by our natural (physical) bodies as we are known here upon the earth, but this is not to suppose that our spiritual bodies will be without form and features. Jesus, Moses and Elijah were transfigured. Webster defines "transfiguration" as "a change in form or appearance" (Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1252). They were transfigured, but they were recognized. The Lord will clothe us with bodies which he has prepared; they will be fashioned anew to be "conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:21). Our bodies will be transformed into the likeness of his body in the glorified state. John wrote, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is" (1John 3:2). If we shall recognize God in his manifested form, then, does it not stand to reason that we shall recognize one another in whatever likeness he shall prepare for us?

There will be recognition in heaven. How the resurrection and transformation will take place, our finite minds cannot comprehend it, much less can we explain it. By the same faith that we accept all the miracles in the Bible, let us anticipate this great miracle which is yet to occur, and believe it with all our hearts.

The very thought of knowing one another in "the land that is fairer than day" is a great hope for Christians and should motivate us to endeavor even more to please God, and be assured that someday we can live forever in that most wonderful and

indescribable place known as heaven. (Via Guardian of Truth XXXV: 20, pp. 623-624 October 17, 1991)

A Moments Wisdom

The average man's idea of a good sermon is one that goes over his head, and hits his neighbor's.

A good sermon helps people in a couple of ways. Some rise from it greatly strengthened. Others wake from it refreshed.

Scandal is what one-half the world takes pleasure in inventing, and the other half in believing.

They never taste who always drink; they always talk who never think.

A great talker: he has the knack of telling you nothing in a big way.