

## More Questions About Heaven

Sign Title: More Questions About Heaven

August 22, 2010

I want to welcome you to Faith Evangelical Free Church. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. This summer, we are in a series called, “The Mysteries of Heaven.” As our summer series winds down, we are taking time to answer some of the questions about heaven you submitted earlier in the series. Last week, we looked at some of those questions and this week we will consider a few more. Next week, we will wrap everything up.

A few of you told me you are anxious to jump right in, so that is what we will do. This first question is a popular one.

### Should I trust near-death experiences?

Some people claim they died and returned to life to tell us about it. The book which brought near-death experiences to the forefront of our culture was *Life after Life* by Raymond Moody. It is a book of interviews from people who died but were resuscitated. The stories have a similar pattern to them. The person hears the doctors pronounce them dead; they float out of their body and they watch the doctor working on their corpse. While in this disembodied state, they meet dead relatives and a “being of light.” Reluctantly, they are forced to return to their body when it is resuscitated.

An even more sensational book on near-death experiences that hit the number one spot on almost every best-seller list is *Embraced by the Light* by Betty Eadie. In her book, she gives a fascinating account of her visit beyond the

grave. She claims that in this near-death experience she met Christ and she even dedicates her book to him.

“To the Light, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom I owe all that I have. He is the ‘staff’ that I lean on; without Him I would fail.”

It sounds impressive. How much should we trust of her beyond the grave experience? Since her book ranked #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list, you know many people found her story compelling and credible. Should we?

If we dig a little deeper into her book and learn about the Jesus she dedicates it to, we find it is not the same Jesus we recognize. Eadie describes the Jesus she met as a benevolent being of light that surrounded her so that she could not tell *where her light stopped and his began*. She says the Jesus she met was separate from the Father and would do nothing to offend her. This Jesus says this Jesus told her there was no reason to regret past deeds, for we are not sinful creatures. Her Jesus told her we are actually “spirit beings” who assisted the father in the creation of the world. She says this Jesus told her she had a past life and a premortal existence. That means she existed before she was created. Betty rounds it off by saying something especially revealing, “I knew that I was worthy to embrace Him.”<sup>1</sup>

Betty’s Jesus doesn’t sound like the same Jesus we meet in the Bible. A closer reading of her book reveals that her Jesus is not unique but was drawn from the book of Mormon and the teachings of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.

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<sup>1</sup> Betty J. Eadie and Curtis Taylor, *Embraced by the Light* (Placerville, Calif.: Gold Leaf, 1992).

Now I know some people who read her book will say, “Here is a woman who has been through death and come back to tell about it, shouldn’t we listen to her?” My answer is, that we evaluate the truth of what she says based upon what the Bible says it true. We don’t evaluate the truth of the Bible based on what she says happened to her. If her teachings about Christ are in harmony with what God says in Bible, we can accept them, if not, we need to toss them out with the morning trash. The Bible warns us many people will try and deceive us.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8–9 (ESV)

Betty Eadie goes right after the heart of the gospel. She says there is no sin and therefore Jesus never came to die for our sin!

I am very skeptical about near death experiences. I am not saying they can’t happen, I am just skeptical. Many of the near-death experiences we read about in pop-culture material portray death as a warm, wonderful experience filled with light and no fear of judgment. For example, according to Betty Eadie, *there is no hell or punishment for sin to concern ourselves with*<sup>2</sup>. To me, that sounds like Satan’s deliberate attempt to deceive people about what lies beyond death’s door. The fear of death and the reality of personal accountability before God has moved *many* people to place their faith in Christ for forgiveness. If people believe there is no fear of death, why repent and trust in Christ in the face of death? I believe Satan gives some people positive near-death experiences so

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty\\_Eadie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_Eadie)

her can use their story to remove other people's fear of death and their opportunity for repentance.

While the most popular books on near-death experiences almost uniformly portray death and a positive, warm experience, there are other books that reveal the exact opposite, and for understandable reasons, they didn't make the New York Times Best Seller List. On my shelves, I have a book by medical doctor Maurice Rawlings entitled, *To Hell and Back*. He describes terrifying near-death stories where revived patients trembled in fear because of torment, darkness and agony they faced at death's door. Rawlings claims his stories are more reliable than many others because they were gained almost immediately following a patient's resuscitation. We need to remember, not all near-death experiences are positive.

Does this mean every near-death experience is a scheme of Satan and his angels to extinguish the fear of death and the desire for repentance and trust in Christ? No, not necessarily.

The Bible records a few people who came back to life after a near death or even an actual death experience. Interestingly, none of them talked about it or wrote best-selling books.

Lazarus was genuinely dead, yet we don't hear anything about his after-death experience. Apparently he missed an opportunity to make a lot of money.

Some think Paul died when he talks about being caught up into paradise in 2 Corinthians 12. There he says he heard "inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak." Since he said it happened fourteen years before

writing to the church at Corinth, there is at least some evidence that the event coincided with his experience at Lystra. There he was stoned, dragged out of the city and presumed dead (Acts 14:19-20). If he did die and then revived, this account could be classified as a near-death experience, or even a revived-from-death experience; yet he wasn't permitted to talk about it.

Near-death experiences may be a true representation of what happens the first few moments after death but they must be scrutinized to see if they conform to the Biblical picture of the after-life. Remember - *and this is important* - *Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light, will try to replicate any positive near-death experiences Christians may have.* Satan wants everyone to think our relationship to Christ has no bearing on our eternity.

Some positive near-death experiences are clearly demonic because they sharply contradict the core teachings of the Bible. One example is Betty Eadie. She says the Jesus she met told her everyone will be equally welcomed into eternity, no matter how they lived. She said this Jesus told her there is no judgment for how we lived. That cuts against everything the New Testament teaches.

The near-death experiences that are most reliable are probably the ones we *don't* hear about.

### **Will Christians who commit suicide go to heaven?**

Kirk's son was David's wrestling partner. As fathers across the mat, we became good friends rooting for our boys. Our families enjoyed eating together at restaurants after wrestling tournaments. Kirk would occasionally ask me

questions about our faith and one afternoon he called me with a question about suicide. His daughter was in a suicide prevention workshop at school and the parents of a child who took his life were there. They were confident their son was in heaven. Kirk's daughter didn't understand how he could be. She said to her father, "How can he go to heaven? He is a murderer, he killed himself."

What do you think the answer is? Will Christians who commit suicide go to heaven? Yes! There is nothing unique about the final act of life that nullifies our salvation. The final season of life, with all its battles and failures, is not the only season of life that will bear witness of our relationship with Christ.

For example, suppose tonight, after an exhausting week, my sinful nature got the best of my desire to please Christ. In a display of anger and selfishness, I yell at my wife and children, slam the door, press the pedal to the metal on my truck and fly down route 71 on my way out of town. Barreling out of control down the highway, I lose control and cross over the double yellow line. I run first into a semi-truck and am killed in an instant. Would I go to heaven?

Unless I was a hypocrite for the last forty-two years of my Christian life, the answer is yes. For these reasons:

- Jesus Christ, died for my sins and bore the wrath of God in my place. All my sins are forgiven, even the last one.
- Jesus Christ lived a perfect life of obedience so that by his obedience many sinners would be counted righteous through their faith in him, that includes me.
- His sacrifice for my sin and his righteousness are mine by faith alone, that is true on the good days, and the bad days.
- If the last season of my life is so dark that I die by my own sin, that season is not the only season that God takes into account for the evidence that my faith was real.

Now, I know this unsettles some of us because you think I am understating the seriousness of suicide. I am not understanding the seriousness of suicide, I am clearly stating the greatness of our salvation through Christ. Salvation is bigger than suicide. Is suicide a tragedy? Yes!! It is a huge tragedy. Rather than leaving a legacy of trust in Christ for others to follow, those who commit suicide leave a legacy of cowardly shame. Christians who commit suicide squander an eternal reward that is much greater than any earthly pain or suffering they were called upon by God to endure. Yes, suicide is a tragedy that some Christians give in to during seasons of overwhelming darkness, and sorrow. It doesn't forfeit their salvation. It certainly forfeits eternal rewards and scars those they love.

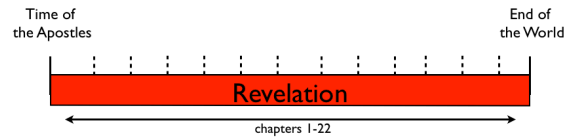
### **Who are the 144,000 in Revelation?**

This question is a little germane to the topic of heaven since it focuses on understanding an issue in the book of Revelation. It is still a good question that a number of you were interested in so we will deal with it today.

To answer this question, I need to give you some background on understanding the book of Revelation. Revelation is apocalyptic literature so it is a completely different type of book to read. Through church history, there are four distinct ways it is interpreted. Let me explain them to you. Even if we don't end up with a great answer on the 144,000, you will at least know how to read Revelation.

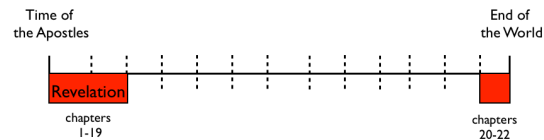
**Historicist View** - Those who subscribe to this view see the Book of Revelation as a prewritten chronological record of the course of history from the time of the apostles to the end of the world. They see the book of Revelation as a time-line of world events.

**Historicist View**  
(Revelation is chronological history)



**Preterist View** - Those who subscribe to this view believe Revelation's prophecies were fulfilled in the ancient past. They believe The first nineteen chapter focus on the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in

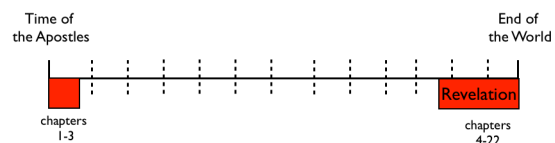
**Preterist View**  
(written primarily for the ancient audience)



70 A.D. They believe Revelation should be treated like we treat every other New Testament letter. It was originally intended for the audience of its day. Chapters 20-22 focus on the ancient audiences hope, the return of Christ.

**Futurist View** - This is the opposite of the Preterist approach. The futurist believes that everything after chapter 3 will be fulfilled in the distant future during the Great Tribulation, right before the return of Christ to establish his millennial kingdom. They believe everything after chapter

**Futurist View**  
(after chapter 3, it focuses on the tribulation and end of time)

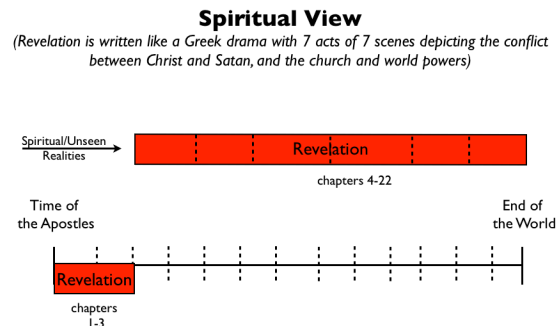




3 refers to the future because you don't hear the church talked about after chapter 3.

### **Spiritual View** - This

approach does not try to assign individual fulfillments to Revelation in history but takes Revelation to be a pictorial drama that depicts spiritual realities in the conflict



between Christ and Satan played out on the battlefield of the church and the world. Many people who adopt this view see similarities in Revelation to Greek drama because it is a book with seven acts that have seven scenes in them. The key thing to remember is that rather than attaching dates and times to everything, they see Revelation as a picture of the bigger spiritual conflict.

Why did I go into that? It wasn't to bore you! I want you to see why Revelation is a difficult book and why Christians have different understanding of what things mean in Revelation. While the first three chapters and the last three chapters of Revelation are relatively clear, it is the middle chapters that produce the most discussion. When it comes, to understanding who the 144,000 are in Revelation, know they are mentioned in Revelation 7 and 14, two tough chapters to understand in the center of the book. Let's look at how these four view understand the 144,000 in Revelation.

**The Historicists** - They see the 144,000 as a symbolic number representing the entire church.

**The Preterists** - They see the 144,000 as a symbolic number but it represents the full number of Jewish Christians who escaped the city of Jerusalem before its destruction in A.D. 70.

**The Futurists** - They see the 144,000 as a literal number of Jewish people who come to Christ during the great tribulation before the end of the world. They are sealed by God for protection from the later plagues in Revelation. While the Bible doesn't say this, most futurists believe these 144,000 Jewish Christians will be actively involved in sharing Christ during the tribulation period. Hal Lindsey, who calls them, "The 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams."

**The Spiritualists** - They believe the number 144,000 is a symbolic number. It represents 10 cubed, which represents completeness. The 144 is twelve multiplied by twelve. The twelve represents the twelve Old Testament tribes of God and the twelve New Testament apostles of Christ. They understand the 144,000 to represent symbolically the true church of all time of both the Old and New Testaments.

**The Jehovah's Witnesses** - This one is a freeby we will throw in for the fun of it because if the Jehovah's Witnesses come to your door, they will talk about the 144,000. They believe the 144,000 are the total number of people who will be in heaven beginning from the apostles down to modern times. They believe the 144,000 were filled up in 1935 and after that everybody else is a second class citizen and won't be in heaven. That's a real bummer!

You probably want to know what I believe. I believe 144,000 is a symbolic number representing the full number of the people of God from every tribe and nation. The reason I believe this is because right afterwards it says this.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9–10 (ESV)

Revelation is not an easy book. That doesn't mean we shouldn't read it or study it. God promises a blessing to those who study it. I am studying it in my own personal study now and being challenged by it. If nothing else, I want you to understand why Revelation is understood by people different ways.

### After death, is there another chance to be saved?

This question was asked earlier in the series by a man on his way out the door. He heard the Bible said we had a second chance. What do you think the answer is? "No."

Luke 16 tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus after they die. We talked about this story in the message entitled, "One Minute After You Die." Lazarus went to a place called Abraham's bosom in Hades, a place of comfort. The rich man went to a place of torment in Hades. The text says that a great chasm separated the two. What does it say about second chances?

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' Luke 16:26 (ESV)

No second chances. Last week, we learned the Bible says nothing about purgatory. You are either saved completely and fully by Christ when you die, or you are eternally separated from him. No second chances.

The only exception I can think of would be infants, that is, if you could call it an exception. We learned earlier in this series that the Bible does not explicitly say infants are saved as a special act of God through Christ, it hints that is true. As we learned when we studied this, there are good reasons God would choose not to say that explicitly. If he did, those with evil intents would use it as justification to destroy children's lives. As I said, this really isn't a second chance issue but it is the only other way, outside of making a conscious decision for Christ, that I am aware people can be saved.

### **Will we sleep in our resurrection bodies?**

Last week, on the way out the door, a boy about age seven asked me this question. It is a good question. Since we will have perfect bodies in heaven, will we need to sleep? It seems reasonable to conclude that some of the qualities of our earthly body will continue to be true about our heavenly, resurrected bodies.

Adam and Eve were created perfect and sinless. Do you think they slept? They probably did. Sleep is not an imperfection but appears to be part of the God designed rhythm for life.

Sleep is also one of life's great pleasures. A good night's sleep is a gift from God. I believe we may need it. If we do need it, we will enjoy it and be refreshed by it. Why not?

## Will we work in heaven?

The idea of working in heaven doesn't sound inviting. Many people don't like their jobs. They are ready to follow Steve Slater's example, pull the rip cord on the emergency escape shoot, and quite their job with two beers in hand.

The Bible gives us a different picture. We were designed to work. Adam was to work.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

Work was part of God's original plan for Adam and Eve, even before the fall. Work wasn't created to be a curse. The curse of sin is what ruined work and made it menial, tedious, and frustrating.

"...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground,..." Genesis 3:17–19 (ESV)

On the New Earth, work will be transformed into even better than what God intended it to be.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. Revelation 22:3 (NIV)

*Serve* is a verb. Servants are actively involved in carrying out the tasks of their master. In heaven, we will have work to do. It will be satisfying and enriching work that we can't wait to get back to. In heaven, we will create, accomplish, set goals and fulfill them - all to God's glory and our joy. Think about this. Unemployed people are unhappy people. What could be better than joyful, fulfilling work?

## Will there be oceans on the New Earth?

One of the confusing, and apparently disappointing, verses we studied in this series was about the new heavens and earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. Revelation 21:1 (ESV)

When we read this, we think there will be no more warm, inviting waters, no more surfing, no more fun at the beach and no more fishing. That sounds more like bad news, rather than good.

When the Bible was written, people heard these words differently. In the ancient world, “there will be no more sea,” meant there will be no more cold, treacherous waters that destroy ships and drown loved ones. People in the ancient world were afraid of the sea. Remember, they had no compass, they had no sonar, they had no radar, their ships were little wooden vessels that were tossed about corks on the waves and stormy seas.

Even if this passage means there will literally be no more oceans, that doesn’t mean there will be no more large bodies of water. For those of us in the Iowa Great Lakes area, this is good news. Revelation tells us of a great river that flows from under God’s throne and runs throughout the capital city of the New Jerusalem. Where do flowing rivers go? Do you think the river ends up in a lake somewhere? Do you think it will be big lake since it is a mighty river?

I believe there will be lakes on the New Earth. This is great news for those of us who love to Jet Ski, water ski, swim, boat and just plain old relax around the water.

If we engage our imagination a bit, I think we can have a little fun here.

Last week, we learned there will probably be animals in the new creation. God saved animals during his last judgement nothing will keep him from doing it again if he wants. Do you think God will only save only land animals? Do you think he might bring sea animals into the new creation? If everything in the new creation is vastly improved, what do you think it would be like to go scuba diving and see the colors of the fish? What do you think it would be like to ride on the back of a dolphin or play with a whale? If there is no more death in the new creation, there would be nothing to fear from the sharks or predator animals. In fact, they would be our friends! As we learned in Hebrews, we will be the kings and queens of God's new creation ruling with Christ and under Christ. The amazing and even more glorious animals of this new creation will be there for God's glory and our joy. For a moment, imagine what a day at the lake would be like!

## Conclusion

Next week is the last week in this series. The title of the message is, "The Hope of Heaven." We are going to take what we learned about heaven and show how these heavenly realities make an every day earthly difference. I look forward to seeing you next week as we wrap things up.



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