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The great commission

Absent from the Body – At Home with the Lord

Every person who has ever lived has wondered about the place beyond mortality—Shakespeare called it “the undiscovered country.” *God’s Word* tells us about our bodies, souls, and heaven. What happens at the moment of death for Christians? Will we recognize and know our loved ones in heaven? What is heaven like? Recently I interviewed Dr. Ron Rhodes, president of Reasoning from the Scriptures and author of many books, on the Family Shield radio program. We discussed one of his books *Heaven—The Undiscovered Country*.

Christians go to heaven because of their faith in Christ. I look forward to meeting my Savior and Lord someday. I hope you do too. When people ask me about my family I say, “I have my family here on Earth and my family in heaven.” My family in heaven continues to grow. My grown sons, Kevin (40) and Jeff (32), have passed from death to life. Kevin in the fall of 2009 and Jeff in June of 2010. They were wonderful sons and my husband, myself, our daughter and our entire extended family will forever miss them.

We are thankful that our sons had faith in Christ and are now with the Lord in heaven. Yet, we still mourn their loss. The Lord walks with us as we grieve. He gives us daily comfort and strength. We remember that the Lord called them both by name

in their baptism and walked with them all of their lives. “*He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel; Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*” (Isa. 43: 1b-3a).

So you can see why I want to learn more about heaven from *God’s Word*. I want to share a few of the topics that Dr. Rhodes and I discussed on the program. I hope these words will comfort you as they strengthened and comforted me.

What happens at the moment of death?

Although our bodies die, our souls do not. At the moment of death our soul/spirit departs the body which *God’s Word* calls “the tent.” Our souls go immediately to be with the Lord in heaven. “*For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we*

would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:1-9)

The Bible tells us God is the God of the living, not of the dead (Mark 12:27 & Luke 20:38). Our bodies die, but our souls never die.

Jesus said to her (Mary), “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” (John 11:25-26) I believe this and put this verse on many sympathy cards. I pray you believe this too.

Another verse I like is when Stephen was being stoned to death for preaching Christ. As he was stoned, he looked up to heaven and prayed, “*Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.*” Minutes later his body was lying dead on the ground, but his soul was with the Lord. It’s interesting to note that Saul (later to become the Apostle Paul) heard this prayer and witnessed Stephen’s death.

Will we recognize our loved ones in heaven?

Dr. Rhodes believes we will know our loved ones in heaven and will even retain memories of our family. He mentioned Luke 16:19-31. It is a story (or

parable) that Jesus shared. In it the man who died remembers his family. He talks about his five brothers and is concerned about them.

Another example related to recognizing loved ones is King David of the *Old Testament*. When his young son died, King David said that someday he would be reunited with his son who had died. We also discussed Moses and Elijah. They appeared and spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. “*After six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John His brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him.*” How could Moses and Elijah be talking to Jesus if they were dead and in the grave?

We also discussed a book I had recently read entitled *Ninety Minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper. In his book Piper relates that he was pronounced dead after being in a serious car accident. During the 90 minutes that he was thought to be dead, he remembers finding himself at the gates of heaven. There he saw and talked to those who had died before him. Everyone was happy and excited to see him. He recognized his grandmother and others he had known and cared about on Earth. They began moving towards the gates of heaven. He heard the beautiful music, but never got inside of the gates.

A Christian man stopped

during the traffic accident where Piper had been pronounced dead by paramedics. This man felt led to pray for Piper so he prayed and began to sing Christian songs. Piper remembers waking up and hearing the man singing and began singing with him. I don’t know if Piper had a dream while he was unconscious and thought he was dead or if he had really died during those 90 minutes. Piper believes he really was dead.

I told Dr. Rhodes that I look forward to seeing Jesus face-to-face and want to see my two sons, my mother, and father and others I love that have passed from death to life.

As I pondered our reunion I thought about other benefits of being in heaven as well; no death or sickness, no mourning or tears, the intimate fellowship with God, our eventual resurrected bodies and the fact that we will reign with Christ.

What are we to make about near death experiences?

I asked Dr. Rhodes about near death experiences. Some people have these experiences and say they saw a bright light or went through a tunnel. Dr. Rhodes warned us that we need to examine everything carefully. Who is the “being of light?” Some people who are not Christians have said the bright light they saw was Buddha or another false god. He warned us that we must test all experiences against the *Word of God*. Remember that Satan disguises himself as an

See *At Home with the Lord* page 11


Continued from page 6

angel of light.

Yet, there are many stories of those who are near death that have seen loved ones who have died. He believes some of these stories are true. One he mentioned is Billy Graham’s grandmother. Seconds before she died, she sat up in bed and said, “Ben!” Ben was her husband who was dead. Minutes later she died.

Revelation 21 and 22 describe heaven. Why not read these two chapters? “*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of the God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb*” (Rev. 21:23). Revelation ends with these words, “*Surely, I am coming soon. Amen. Come,*

Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with us all. Amen” (Rev. 22:20b-21).



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