

Arriving In Heaven

Short Version

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Introduction

My friend,

To help us understand just a bit of _____'s present joy, I'd like to describe what happens when a person like him/her arrives in heaven. *Now I know* about the widely varying glimpses of heaven shared by people who have had near-death experiences, and I'm also well aware that Hollywood has given us various comedic takes on human interaction with heaven. But what I share with you now is based on insights that God Himself has given us in the Holy Bible.

The Heavenly Welcome

So what happened when _____ arrived in Heaven? Jesus taught in one of in the 16th ch. of Luke, that **friends who have gone before us will welcome us** into our eternal home. In other words, when _____ arrived at the entrance to heaven, he/she saw some familiar faces. He/She was met by beloved relatives, and by dear Christian friends who had gone on before him/her. They welcomed him/her, rejoicing to see him/her, and he/she was immediately filled with awe to see people — some of whom he/she had last seen weak and ailing — now filled with vibrant, joyous life.

The Intermediate State

At that point, _____ probably looked at his/her own hands, arms, legs, feet and realized that he/she also has a body full of life and youthful vigor, but not

yet a physical body — an immortal physical body will be given to him/her later, in the resurrection described extensively in 1Corinthians, ch. 15. But for now, _____'s present body is a spiritual body, like that of an angel, clothed in divine light, **as Jesus promised in Mat 13.43**. The light that now clothes _____, is like the light that shone from the face of Moses after he spent time in God's presence on Mt. Sinai.

Paradise

_____’s greeters, dear relatives and friends, would have led him/her through an enormous gate of pearl, guarded by an awe-inspiring angel (these gates are described in the book of Revelation, ch. 21). As _____ passed through the gate, he/she realized that he/she had entered Heaven proper, the Holy City of God. Now this city has a “central park,” so as _____ kept walking along with his/her joyful greeters, he/she soon found himself/herself in a lush, perfectly ordered garden, bursting with vivid color. This garden is described in Revelation, ch. 22. There is a street running through the middle of it, the famous street of gold, and through the middle of the two sides of the street runs a river clear as crystal. On both sides of the river, along the two lanes of the street are fruit trees that bear a fresh crop every month, and that have leaves with healing power (that will be useful to our traumatized world in the future). **This is the garden that the Bible calls Paradise.** It's the heavenly garden from which the earthly Eden was copied when God first fashioned the earth, and it's the garden to which Jesus referred while on the cross, when he told the thief crucified with Him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise” (Luk 23.43).

The Throne Room

Before long, as _____ and his/her companions walked ***and danced*** up the golden street, he/she arrived at the source of the river, a larger body of water, a sea, perfectly calm on its surface, reflecting like glass, shimmering with fiery colors. He/She would have looked up from the shimmering sea, and seen on the other side of it a great throne, a throne surrounded by strange and wonderful living creatures, full of wings and eyes, and singing without pause,

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!” These are the cherubim described in the book of Revelation, ch. 4, and in Ezekiel ch. 1, and after which the golden cherubim were modeled that once spread their wings over the ancient ark of the covenant.

And as _____ continued to lift his/her gaze upon this wonderful sight, he/she saw sitting on the throne the manifest presence of our Heavenly Father, the Holy Creator whom heaven and earth cannot contain, but who condescends to manifest Himself in finite space. _____’s eyes drank in this vision that glitters like fiery diamonds in hues of purple and red and green, and realized that he/she was looking into the very face of God.

Now, if _____ had been in his/her mortal body, he/she would have fallen on his/her face, overwhelmed, shaking in fear. But now, _____ — released from the limitations of a mortal body, and its limited interface for the mind, *and* freed forever from the fleshly impulses of sin — _____ felt **one** all-encompassing feeling, the feeling of being loved. As the apostle John wrote in 1John 4.8, “God is love.” God *is* Love personified, and _____ came face to face with that Love.

Memories

Now, it’s important to understand that nothing in his/her heavenly experience will cause _____ to forget his/her life on earth. On the contrary, as the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13.12, ***it’s in our current mortal lives*** that “we see in a mirror dimly” and “know in part,” but when we see our Creator face to face, we “will know fully” even as we “have been fully known.” _____ not only remembers his/her life on earth, but *understands* it; he/she remembers and understands the significance of *the details* of his/her life, both the good and the bad, he/she understands it *all* like never before. And to the depth of his/her being he/she grasps what it means that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Perhaps, ***as he/she gazed*** upon the beauty of God’s majesty on the throne, he/she began to wonder if he/she had made the right choices in the important moments of his/her life, and tears came to his/her eyes. *** But

then a man, not an angel, and not one of _____'s angel-like friends, but a man, a God-Man, **flesh-and-blood**, but now immortal, would have approached him/her, and as it says in Revelation 21, verse 4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes." I imagine Him saying something to _____, like, "Fear not, son/daughter, **when you put your trust in Me, I not only reconciled you to my Father** who is on that throne, but I began to guide your life so that no matter what happened, it would work for your good, according to my purpose for you. Welcome into the joy of your Lord."

And for a good while, _____ *** had only one word on his/her lips, "Jesus." We know that he/she is with Jesus, the ultimate *sine qua non* of heaven, because 2 Corinthians 5.8 tells us that, "to be absent from the body," is "to be present with the Lord."

Getting Back To Work

There is just one more thing. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 12.1 that the people of heaven surround us like a cloud of witnesses as we run our earthly race, and (by implication) they cheer us on, joining with us as we pray to God for help in our daily battles. So, don't picture _____ standing on one spot still, enthralled passively forever after; he/she has not taken his attention off of Jesus, but he has remembered Jesus' command — still not rescinded — to "love one another." By now he/she has begun to turn his/her attention also to what Jesus is bringing to completion on earth. He/She is praising our Lord, and is simultaneously cheering and praying for his/her friends and loved ones still on earth. **I dare to think he/she is praying for me and for us right now.**