

Death, Immortality, and Heaven: No. 11

Hanging Threads

Maybe I have dragged this topic out too long, but many traditional literal misconceptions are entrenched so deeply that much corrective restudy is in order. The fabric of expectations of a literal end of time, bodily return of the Lord, physical resurrection, day of judgment, and heaven on a renewed earth is so loosely woven that there are many hanging threads. I want to deal with some of those threads in this issue which may be my last on the subject. Most of this is being written in fun but some is serious. I will leave you to decide for yourself. If you see nothing funny in it, that is all right with me.

You are promised an exquisitely beautiful mansion in heaven, aren't you? It will be rather lonely with each person, even children, having his or her own mansion, especially without your spouse or children. Who will do the housekeeping? Angels? You mean you would want angels to work for you through eternity? Will they be some sort of inferior laborers glad to expend themselves unendingly to care for your big house and lawn, and to grow, cook, and serve you ever-delightful food, and clean the kitchen after each meal? If the serving angels pull up a carrot from the garden to feed you, death will have been introduced into heaven as the carrot dies.

If the resurrection is of the literal fleshly body, will the immortalized body need food, a digestive tract, a heart to pump spiritual blood, and reproductive organs for no reproductive purpose? If so, then heaven will need a sewer system and the need for food will indicate continued mortality. Will the body have immortal calcium, iron, sodium, and various other elements that comprised the physical body? There will be a river of the water of life flowing from the throne and the tree of life on each side. Because it is always sunshine in heaven the literal water will have to be created continually. Will each have to pick his own fruit or will itinerate workers be on hand to pick and distribute it? And perhaps Ozarka will have the franchise on distributing the water in the city of about 2,250,000 square miles, nine times bigger than Texas and having a vertical dimension of about 1500 miles. It does not look too prospective for golfing and fishing.

If the risen body is comprised of all it was on earth, then I may weigh 45 tons for that much earthly material has been part of me during my 87 years. Will your spiritualized fleshly body be similar in size, age, and looks to your physical body at the time of death? Will its supposed spiritual tissue look like literal tissue? I think I would rather be about 25 years old and handsome than to have a replica of the one doing this typing. If all are in the prime of youth, I would not recognize my parents and would have some problem with my brother who died at age two. Will the woman who was pregnant at the time of death still be pregnant? Will the person who donated his heart be without one in heaven? What of those plastic joints and metal pins the doctors put in your body? Will these spiritualized fleshly bodies have spiritual clothes or be naked? Why would a spiritual body in a perfect setting need clothing? Will there be eternal spiritual cotton, wool, linen, or Dacron for clothing? Will one outfit serve eternally, or will God provide a new suit for each day? All of the millions of innocent aborted babies and those

millions who died in infancy whose mothers were unsaved – who will be caring for them? Will those who died in infancy be made to comprehend all things in heaven and able to converse in an unlearned language? Will they grow into adulthood there?

We look forward to those family reunions. My wife and I will want to be together with our kids -- while our kids will want to be with their spouses and kids -- and their children will want to be with their spouses and children, and so with all the descendants and ancestors. Some men will have more than one wife because of widows marrying widows and some men will have to share a wife with another man or two whom she married after he/they died. If your spouse was not saved, will you have none in heaven? If you had a Christian husband whom you did not care too much about, would you be stuck with him eternally? Would persons with homosexual tendencies still have those inclinations, or if those tendencies are corrected, would they be celibate eternally, or will virgins and husbands be provided? It is claimed that Allah will provide many virgins for suicide bombers. A lot of cloning, no doubt. I may be cloned many times to meet the demands for me! Since Jesus said there would be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven, will there be living together without the benefit of marriage? Will the bi-sexual person get to choose which sex he/she will be? Well, maybe I went overboard on the demands for my clones. Probably half a dozen will do.

God, being Spirit, is not localized. Will our spiritualized fleshly bodies be localized and bound by gravity? Many contend that Jesus ascended into heaven in the body the disciples saw after his being raised from the dead, and that our bodies will be like that, even with fleshly scars. If that be true, we have a spiritual Father who is omnipresent throughout the universe with his Son sitting at his right side in a localized form. Will that throne be localized over some spot on earth? If so, it is probably over Dallas where they can watch the Cowboys in their uncovered stadium.

The Scriptures speak of a day of judgment. It seems that most of us have some mental picture of the great throng of risen humanity gathered before an awesome throne occupied by God in his glory. One by one, we are called to stand in his majestic presence to give account for our earthly conduct and to hear our sentence. Even though we were presumably forgiven in this life, we will still have to give account of our sins after death in the judgment. And even though we are saved by grace, we will be judged by our works. Let's think about that day for a moment. That "morning of the resurrection and day of judgment" may be stretched out a bit. If, in such a judgment scene, God gives each of us one short minute, how long would it take? Now, arithmetic is not my long suit but, if I figure correctly, it would require 9,512 years to judge the 5 billion people on earth today. If there are as many as 20 billion to be judged, that day would stretch out to 38,051 years and, if you are looking forward to a private visit with Jesus, your wait may be infinite. Even if that judgment process began when Jesus ascended, the waiting line is growing faster than you can count. And you grow impatient standing in line at Wal-Mart!

Since Jesus is coming in the clouds and every eye shall see him, his coming will be on a totally cloudy day around the earth, yet all will see him through the clouds. He will have some sort of universal body rather than the human-like form in which he ascended. We will be caught up to meet him in the clouds in the air and ever be with him. That will be close to the earth! Earthly man has traveled higher than the clouds and air! It is a good thing that we will have spiritualized

bodies for ordinarily we run out of oxygen after a few thousand feet and would die of the chill at that altitude and would be terribly out of place in a tumultuous cloud.

Furthermore, Jesus will come unexpectedly like a thief -- with a shout and trumpet heard even by the deaf -- seen by all like lightning from east to west even by the blind -- riding on a white horse -- in flaming fire -- with ten thousand of his saints, according to various references.

If this universe is to be dissolved with fervent heat in preparation for creating the new heavens and earth, where in the world -- or out of the world! -- will we be during that process? The physical elements of our bodies would be annihilated with the elemental universe. Without the physical universe, there is no "place." Will the Spirit God and our spirits and the spiritualized body of Jesus exist in no place?

Out of the dissolution of the universe, some things will be recovered or recreated in the heavenly Jerusalem like the gold and precious jewels, and the pearls created in oysters. And that city will certainly have a unique architectural design being a cube measuring about 1500 miles wide, 1500 miles long, and 1500 miles high. It will be interesting to learn how all those mansions are arranged and whether we may be given a choice of the ground floor or a thousand miles up.

How rapturous the rapture will be into that new world. Just think of the joy experienced by a faithful wife and mother being taken up from the car in which she is riding with her dearly loved, but ungodly, husband and daughter. We will just have to wonder what happens to the unborn child of the rebellious pregnant daughter left in the car.

OK! OK! OK! I will stop! If you are a new reader, you may be disgusted and outraged by this. You who have read my series on this subject may understand what I have presented and agree that we have built literal theories from figurative language.

Am I discrediting the Bible? No. Am I recklessly destroying faith? By no means.

Has my intention been to create doubt? Yes! Not to doubt God or the Bible, but to doubt the literal interpretations you might have been entertaining all your life.

We have been inclined to grasp hanging threads of interpretation and try to weave them into fanciful and glorious fabric of truth. Many of the embellished concepts of heaven I have heard found their basis in Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21-22, but neither of those sources is written about heaven. Isaiah was predicting in highly symbolic language the wonderful restoration of the Jews after the Babylon captivity. The two chapters in Revelation refer to the completion of redemptive history with us in a reconciled relationship with God, a spiritual state which we enjoy now and which will not be terminated by the death of our physical bodies. Being earthly, we can form no concepts except through physical senses, so the writers used physical terminology and literal descriptions to describe the spiritual relationship of the redeemed now and hereafter. Eternal relationship with God is spiritual and cannot be a place located in space.

If you still have questions, maybe a review of the eleven previous articles relating to this subject may clarify some of them.

If I have succeeded in averting you from giving literal interpretations to figurative and symbolic language, maybe I can progress to convincing you that our emotions and religion are not in the physical blood-pumping heart but in the mind which resides in our head! []

(Cecil Hook: February 2006)

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).