

Pastor, I Have a Question...

Coming Back from Heaven?

Question: *I have heard from friends and books about people who had died, gone to heaven and come back. I don't believe any of this. Could you please help with a response to my friend? The inquirer referred to the following books: "Heaven is for Real", by Colton Burpo and "90 Minutes in Heaven" by Don Piper. Both books refer to people who were declared dead; one for a few minutes and the other for 90 minutes. Having encountered such stories, friends were excited.*

Answer:

Throughout the years, this pastor has met people who reported the visits of loved ones who had died. They found some comfort in these experiences. The March 2010 column addressed the issue of near death experiences and the tunnel with the light. This column was directed to help in responding to a friend who was excited about meeting someone who died, saw heaven and returned.

The Bible has several accounts of resurrections: Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:41 ff), the widow's son (Luke 7:11 ff), Lazarus (John 11) and, of course, the Easter story. When Jesus died, Matthew reports, "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:52-53).

People have come back from the dead. We might have expected one or more to report on what they saw in heaven. The Bible is silent.

St. Paul reports on this experience, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which *it is not lawful for a man to utter*" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). The resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus showed St. John a vision of glory in the Revelation; read especially Revelation 21.

We believe in heaven because God promises it in His Word. Jesus taught us to rely on the Bible. It is tempting for us to want additional proof. If God answers prayer the way we

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want, if our faith gives us a special feeling, if we might have a vision from heaven, we might hope it would strengthen our faith. However, such experiences are not the solid foundation on which true faith is built.

Jesus told a story about two men who died, a rich man and a poor man. The rich man went to hell; Lazarus went to heaven. The rich man asked for relief. When it was refused, he asked that Lazarus be sent back. “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:27-30).

There is grave danger in relying on anything other than the testimony of the Scripture. It is one thing to find a little solace in somebody claiming to come back from death. It is an unwholesome thing if this becomes the foundation of our faith.

These things we should know:

1. If God allowed it, the reports of those who died and returned to life would agree with Scripture.
2. “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).
3. Those in the Bible who saw heaven were commanded not to reveal certain things (2 Corinthians 12:4, Daniel 12:4, Revelation 10:3-4).

Jesus earned heaven for us by His death and resurrection. Easter is all the proof we need that, “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:16).

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