

**Heaven**  
**Memorial Day Sunday**  
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**West Valley Presbyterian Church**

MEMORIAL DAY SUNDAY 2015 (END OF STORY SERIES – HEAVEN)

Today, we are at the end of the STORY. You did it! We are at the last book of the Bible Revelation, and Revelation is a book that reveals to us what heaven is like. We are going to talk about heaven today, and deal with misconceptions. The first misconception is captured in this FAR SIDE comic.



**MISCONCEPTION #1: HEAVEN IS BORING**

Hardly. From scripture we have the very strong indication that heaven is a place of constant celebration. I was talking to my now college graduated son about this yesterday and now he knows everything so I have to listen and he said "Mom, God calls us into community on earth

in the church with him and with one another. Heaven is going to be just that except without all the sin...its going to be community – with others whom we love and with God himself.”

Some of you are old enough to remember when you could go right up to the gate to welcome your family or friends when they got off the plane. Some of my most vivid memories as a child are walking down the tunnel from the plane to the terminal once we had landed in Washington State where my grandparents lived. They would be standing right there at the end of the tunnel to greet us in terminal because there were no restrictions back then...and because my grandfather was so outspoken he would hoot and holler and yell “*There they are! I can see them! The most important ones on the plane coming out now*” And he would wave and cheer and embarrass me, and then embrace me; and I loved it. That’s going to be the feeling in heaven. And the celebration of being reunited with one another and with God will be constant.... No more pain, sorrow, crying...none of that anymore – certainly not boredom. Rather joyful fellowship with those we love, and most especially with Jesus himself.

## **MISCONCEPTION #2:HEAVEN IS FULL OF CLOUDS**

The Bible doesn’t say that anywhere. Hollywood shows us that on the screen. So once again the FAR SIDE CARTOON is wrong.

Heaven rather than being full of clouds is talked about in the Bible as being full of actual rooms prepared for us...our true home.: Scripture talks about houses, and rooms and no clouds at all.

**(READ JOHN 14:1-4) Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God<sup>a</sup>; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going.”**

Home is a place where you can be yourself. Home is where you can take off your necktie & kick off those tight pumps that are squeezing your feet. Home is where you can say what you are thinking. Home is where you're always accepted & loved no matter what you do. You're not just a guest. You are a resident. You live there. That is where you belong. Sometimes after a long day at work, or when you are tired from the day for any reason, can't you just wait to get home?

Jesus is saying in John 14... Don't let your heart be troubled. Don't worry about this thing called death. When you die...I'm going to take you to My Father's house, which is my home & its your real home, too. Its where you belong because you belong to me..."

He says, "In My Father's house are many rooms." The KJV version says, "many mansions." Maybe some of you have learned it like that. You might like that word. But "mansion" is not really the best translation of the Greek word Jesus used. Probably the best is "dwelling place" or "rooms."

You see, the word that Jesus used comes from the Eastern custom that when a son grew up & got married in that culture, he then would bring his bride back home again.

*(It seems like that's happening now a days too. Young adults married and poor moving back in with folks – kind of a national trend...anyway...what goes around comes around.)*

But back in that day, when a son would return home with his bride, it was expected that the father would actually at that point add another room onto his house for them.

No need to go apartment hunting. No security deposit with one month rent necessary.

Nope. It was all prepared ahead of time and free of charge...Family for *better or worse*... lived under one roof together, and they all took care of each other. That's just the way it was done.

Then when another son grew up & got married, another room got added. The house just kept getting bigger & bigger, as the family got larger and everyone stayed together.

"In My Father's house," Jesus said, "are many rooms..." – in other words you are my child, you are a part of my family...and I am going to build another room for you – prepare a place

for you where I live ...then I will come back and take you to be with me....so that we can be together.”

He doesn't even just say to us “Here's the address...GPS it...or ask Siri to give you directions” He actually says I am *going to come back and get you* and take you to be with me. For those of us like me who are directionally challenged, that's a huge comfort.

### **MISCONCEPTION #3: WE WILL NOT RECOGNIZE OUR LOVED ONES.**

This is a worry and concern that people always ask me about because they fear that since their loved ones will have a new body they will be in a different state altogether. People fear that they won't recognize their loved ones or be able to speak with them. But there is no need to fear this. First off, there are countless near death experiences of people who see their loved ones waiting for them, or welcoming them home...

The book “90 Minutes in Heaven” (a best seller with 3.5 million copies sold) was written by a pastor who, I actually got to meet at a conference – Don Piper - was a pastor who was in a fatal car accident – a head on collision with a bus on a bridge. He was instantly killed and was dead for 90 minutes. He had no pulse and the EMT's pulled a tarp up over his face. He was just a corpse waiting in the ambulance to be taken to the morgue – for an hour and a half he lay there. And because he had just been coming home from a pastor's conference, his friend who was also a pastor was behind him in the line of traffic that had built up because of the accident on the bridge. And his friend – saw what was happening and recognized his friend's car.

He walked up to where the ambulance was and hearing what had happened he asked if he could climb into the ambulance and just sit with Don for a while. Being a pastor they gave him permission, “He's dead you know” they said. Don's friend nodded, and climbed into the ambulance where he began to pray and to sing . And the EMT's were like “whatever”... we've got other things to do. Well, Don was up in heaven at that moment and he writes that

all his loved ones were gathered there. They were so happy to see him, and here's how he described it...and he shared this at the conference...

**"I was standing in heaven. Joy pulsed through me as I looked around and at that moment I became aware of a large crowd of people. They stood in front of a brilliant ornate gate....I didn't see Jesus but I did see people I had known. As they surged toward me, I knew instantly that all of them had died, during my lifetime. Their presence seemed absolutely natural. They rushed toward me, and every person was smiling, shouting and praising God...Never even in my most joyous moments on earth had I felt so fully alive..."**

Then he heard someone singing. It was his friend in the ambulance singing *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. And that song seemed to call him back to earth...Don came back to his body...and after 90 minutes of being dead, his body began to grow warm again. But every bone in his body was broken... and his recovery took over a year. But today he lives to tell this story.

Scripture attests to this too. Jesus saw Moses and Elijah on the Mountain of Transfiguration, and they recognized each other and they spoke with one another, after they'd been long gone from this earth. The disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke) recognize Jesus after they had been with him for awhile – even though he was in his resurrected form. And this tells me that the same will happen to us in heaven.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #4: EARTH IS MORE REAL THAN HEAVEN**

Ever notice how movies about Heaven always makes it look foggy & misty & colorless & dreamy. Everything is white not especially appealing to me... Sort of gives you a surreal feeling. Actually ***heaven is going to be more real, not less real than what we have here.***

In the final scene of the Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan comforts Peter, Edmund, and Lucy with these words:

**"The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream has ended; this (heaven) is morning."** (the dream was the earth)

Lewis then brings the story to a final conclusion:

**"And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion (allusion to Jesus) ; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them...for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world**

**and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."**

Friends, Jesus says to us **there's a new day coming. The real story is about to be written.**

Jesus says to us, Let not your heart be troubled. **IF IT WERE NOT SO I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU!** You have so much to look forward to. The best is yet to come.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #5: BELIEF IN HEAVEN IS A CRUTCH AND NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES ARE BRAIN HALLUCINATIONS.**

For those of you who are skeptics, who see this hope of heaven as simply a crutch for the weak, or a child's fantasy to make us all feel better ...let me tell you...I am a pretty skeptical person too.

Stories of peoples near death experiences don't always convince me of much. I always think, well that's nice, but what if it is just a hallucination – a trick of the brain that makes this stuff happen right before someone expires. I think those thoughts too...but if you are like me, I'd strongly recommend the book called **Proof of Heaven**. It was written by a guy named Eben Alexander who was a Harvard trained neurosurgeon. He had meningitis so badly that his brain was soaked in puss and his neo-cortex – the part of the brain that makes us human and creates hallucinations (that would happen let's say on an acid trip) was completely shut down at the time he had his experience of heaven. In addition to this, his recovery to full mental capacity after this, is nothing short of a medical miracle. I believe it was so that he could tell his story to the scientific community.

He tries to explain it when he returns – as to what heaven is like - and he does a great job of it in the book– but he says trying to explain that other reality is like trying to explain anything on earth using half the alphabet. Read his book...I don't have the time to tell you it all here...but let me close with a few quotes from him...

“As a neurosurgeon, I did not believe in the phenomenon of near-death experiences. I grew up in a scientific world, the son of a neurosurgeon. I followed my father’s path and became an academic neurosurgeon, teaching at Harvard Medical School and other universities. I understand what happens to the brain when people are near death, and I had always believed there were good scientific explanations for the heavenly out-of-body journeys described by those who narrowly escaped death.

Although I considered myself a faithful Christian, I was so more in name than in actual belief. I didn’t begrudge those who wanted to believe that Jesus was more than simply a good man who had suffered at the hands of the world. I sympathized deeply with those who wanted to believe that there was a God somewhere out there who loved us unconditionally. In fact, I envied such people the security that those beliefs no doubt provided.

But as a scientist, I simply knew better than to believe them myself. Very early one morning four years ago, I awoke with an extremely intense headache. Within hours, my entire cortex — the part of the brain that controls thought and emotion and that in essence makes us human — had shut down. Doctors at Lynchburg General Hospital in Virginia, a hospital where I myself worked as a neurosurgeon, determined that I had somehow contracted a very rare bacterial meningitis that mostly attacks newborns. E. coli bacteria had penetrated my cerebrospinal fluid and were eating my brain.

**When I entered the emergency room that morning, my chances of survival in anything beyond a vegetative state were already low. They soon sank to near nonexistent. For seven days I lay in a deep coma, my body unresponsive, my higher-order brain functions totally offline.**

**Then, on the morning of my seventh day in the hospital, as my doctors weighed whether to discontinue treatment, my eyes popped open.**

**There is no scientific explanation for the fact that while my body lay in coma, my mind — my conscious, inner self — was alive and well. While the neurons of my cortex were stunned to complete inactivity by the bacteria that had attacked them, my brain-free consciousness journeyed to another, larger dimension of the universe: a dimension I’d never dreamed existed and which the old, pre-coma me would have been more than happy to explain was a simple impossibility.**

But that dimension, ...is there. It exists, and what I saw and learned there, has placed me quite literally in a new world: a world where we are much more than our brains and bodies, and where death is not the end of consciousness but rather a chapter in a vast, and incalculably positive, journey.

One of the few places I didn’t have trouble getting my story across was a place I’d seen fairly little of before my experience: church. **The first time I entered a church after my coma, I saw everything with fresh eyes. The colors of the stained-glass windows recalled the luminous beauty of the landscapes I’d seen in the world above. The deep bass notes of the organ reminded me of how thoughts and emotions in that world are like waves**

**that move through you. And, most important, a painting of Jesus breaking bread with his disciples evoked the message that lay at the very heart of my journey: that we are loved unconditionally by a God even more grand and unfathomably glorious than the one I'd learned of as a child in Sunday school.**

Friends... those are the words of a Harvard trained neuroscientist.

Jesus words are Let not your heart be troubled

Trust in Jesus' promises to you on this memorial day 2015. Trust in him for your loved

ones that have gone before. There's a new day coming for us

all...lets read from Revelation together – the last book in THE

STORY ...AND THE PROMISE OF HEAVEN FOR US ALL(PUT ON SCREENS AND USE NRSV)

**21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”<sup>[a]</sup> for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death<sup>[b]</sup> or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

**<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**

TRUSTWORTHY AND TRUE...that's the end of the STORY. No, its just the beginning....Let Us Pray...