

*“This is my chosen Son; listen to him”*

### Heaven

What did you see Peter up on that mountain? I saw Jesus, whom I confessed to be the Christ of God, in his glory. I saw Moses and Elijah in their glory speaking with Jesus and I wanted to capture that glory forevermore. Then I heard the Father himself say: “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” With that there was nothing more for me to say. I needed to ponder this experience in my heart. Like Peter (and John and James) when heaven comes into our conversation about life here on earth and life after death, we ponder the question: what difference does heaven make? Yes, what difference does heaven make to earth, to now, to our present lives? Shouldn’t we wait to find out?”

Peter Kreeft in his book; “Everything you ever wanted to know about heaven but never dreamed of asking” says that it’s the difference between hope and despair in the end, between two totally different visions of life; between chance or the dance. We are going to explore here some questions about heaven.

First of all is heaven real or is it escapism? Is reality limited to what we see on earth and in the universe? Or does reality extend to heaven? This is a personal question because if reality does not extend to heaven then I cannot either. In our modern age we are assaulted if not by denial of heaven then by insipid images of puffy clouds, angels with harps and metallic halos, etc. In this view God presides over all as some stuffy divine Chairman of the Bored. All of that is a joke not a glory. A more modern interpretation of heaven is that it is a nice comfortable feeling of peace and kindness and sweetness and light where God is a vague grandfatherly benevolence. These are pictures of heaven that are dull, platitudeness and syrupy; therefore so is our faith and our hope and our love of heaven. We get to the point of asking “is this all there is? (Peggy Lee - if

this is all there is then let's keep dancing and bring out the booze my friend)

The real and heaven's answer to this question is that, no, there is more. Our deepest need is for reality, for more and ever more reality. Yes, this is our deepest thirst. Our scientific endeavors attest to that. To this prophetic announcement our reaction should be to an esthetic 'Bravo'. In every desire, even that of truth and goodness and beauty, we desire being; we insist that the object be real. Actually we need reality as our spiritual food; that's what we need to keep growing and spiritually thriving. Eventually, if only at death we must meet reality face to face. So we had better begin rehearsing now! That's what Peter realized on his way down the mountain.

If heaven is not real every honest person will come to disbelieve in heaven simply for that reason. We mustn't play games with that. But if heaven is real, every honest man, woman, child, scientist, theologian, saint and sinner will want to believe in it. Our deepest desire is not for the desirable but for the real.

So given that heaven is real, what will we do there? Won't we be bored there since everything there is perfect? Well, when we get there it won't be perfect! Could it be that our job in heaven will be to restore heaven's perfection? But I get ahead of myself. Because we see heaven as boring we may even fear going to heaven. So consciously or unconsciously because we fear boredom we may fear heaven. If this is the case then our death would really be terrible. Our death then offers only two hellish alternatives - boredom or the agony and the aloneness of Hell.

Boredom comes from not having anything novel or exciting to do. But doing is not our only activity in life. C. S. Lewis says: "We are apt to think God only wants action of a certain kind, whereas He is most interested in people of a certain sort." Our gift in heaven is to become the person that God created us to be. This becoming happens in three stages:

- (1) Understanding our earthly life by God-light (purgatory)
- (2) Sharing in all other human lives (Communion of Saints)
- (3) Exploration into God Himself (Beatific Vision)

At stage one we review our past life with loving understanding and appreciation of every single experience, good and not good. We milk all our meaning dry. It's analogous to rereading the book of our lives with new insight - the more we read the more we understand.

At stage two we do the same thing to the lives of others. We experience their lives from within their being. We get to know them more intimately than we could ever know them here on earth because we share God's knowledge of each one.

It is when this knowledge is complete; when we know, love and understand and appreciate completely by inner experience everything we and everyone else have experienced - only then are we spiritually mature enough to begin the endless and endlessly fascinating task of exploring, learning, loving the inexhaustible nature of God. It is then that we enter into eternity and possess the Beatific Vision; "for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (1Jn 4:20).

It is apparent that as human beings, as embodied spirits, we will have bodies in heaven that correspond to the three stages of heaven. After we die our earthly bodies are consigned to the dust of the earth. Our soul survives but not alone. We acquire a spiritual body. In Purgatory this body is etherial kind of like a ghost. In this body and soul I will experience all the good and the harm I have done with a sensitized and mature conscience. This is a suffering both more intense and more useful than fire or physical pain. Useful because this experience will strengthen and grow my future resurrected body that will carry me through to the second or Communion of Saints phase. In this stage each of us acquire bil-

lions of new stories, new facets of our identity by knowing and being known by others.

This touches me deeply. When I read and heard Jesus saying to the Pharisees that in heaven there will be no marriage or giving in marriage I felt a deep sense of loss. I envisioned a state of being in a relation less collective. I will have lost my connectivity with those close to me on earth beginning with my wife Joan. To me marriage carries a committed love for each other in a special way. Have I lost my Joan forever? I now read that the Communion of Saints stage as a way deeper way for us as individuals to keep growing in love. Joan and I will be together always - we'll just have a bigger family to grow that love!

This brief exposition of Heaven tells me that there is more connectivity and less difference between Heaven and earth than we think. In closing we remember that Purgatory like Heaven is joy and truth. Heaven is the perfection of joy and truth. Hell is a refusal to accept truth and therefore a refusal of joy and love.