

## INTRODUCTION

In a cemetery in Indiana there's a tombstone that has an epitaph with the intent to make people prepare for death. It says, "Consider, friend, as you pass by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon shall be. So prepare, my friend, to follow me." Someone scratched another verse on the tombstone that says, "To follow you is not my intent. Until I know which way you went!"

In this message I want you to consider the question, "Have you Confirmed Your Reservation in Heaven?" As I was preparing for this message I googled that phrase and I was surprised to find there is an organization called [www.reserveaspotinHeaven.com](http://www.reserveaspotinHeaven.com). I clicked onto their website, and discovered they aren't religious. There's nothing about God and the Bible. But they offer you a money-back guarantee that you'll have a spot in Heaven. How are you going to file a complaint with them if you don't make it? According to the website for only \$14.95 you get a letter confirming your reservation in Heaven. I'm not sure what zip code it comes from. You also get a certificate, suitable for framing, with your name on it, some bogus information about Heaven and an embossed nametag for Heaven. Of course if you want to upgrade, for only \$10 more you can get a VIP all access pass for Heaven.

This organization also has a website named "reserveaspotinhell" and they offer the same packages, only for a different destination. Of course, this is a spoof, but I read that thousands of people give these as gag gifts every year. As P.T. Barnum said, "There's a sucker born every minute."

I'm not talking about some kind of novelty gift. Heaven is for real. People are more interested in the Bible than ever before. Over the past few weeks, the History Channel has offered a dramatized version of the Bible. Over 13 million Americans tuned in to the first episode—a larger viewership than the main networks. According to the Barna Research Group, one out of four Americans has tuned in to watch the Bible. When it goes into international syndication, it is estimated that over a billion people will view it within the next five years. It just shows that people are hungry for what the Bible says.

Americans are fascinated with Heaven. Just go to any bookstore and you'll find a section of books on Heaven. Here are three *New York Times* Best-selling books written by people who claim to have died and gone to Heaven.

*90 Minutes in Heaven* is a book about a Baptist preacher from Texas, Don Piper. In 1989 Don was driving on a two-lane bridge across Lake Livingston when an 18-wheeler crashed head-on into his Ford Escort. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Ninety minutes later, while another Baptist preacher was praying over him, he resuscitated and started telling about his experience after death.

*Heaven is for Real* is the story of little Todd Burpo, a pastor's son from Nebraska. In 2004, when Todd was four years old he underwent emergency surgery and died. After he was resuscitated, he recovered and started talking about Heaven. He claimed to have seen Jesus. He told his dad Jesus had "markers." When his dad asked him what he meant, Todd pointed to his hands and feet.

*To Heaven and Back* is written by Dr. Mary Neal, an orthopedic surgeon. In 1999 she drowned while kayaking in a South American river. She claimed to have died and was escorted to Heaven by six or eight spirit beings who loved her and knew her. They led her down a beautiful pathway toward a domed structure, but then with sadness they told her she had to go back to earth because it wasn't her time to die.

I'm not casting doubt of the experiences of these three people. In fact, Lazarus had been dead four days when Jesus called him back to life. I'm sure he could have written a first-person account of his experience and it would have been a *Jerusalem Times* bestseller. However, all three of those people, including Lazarus, had what we often call a near-death experience. But a near-death experience could also be called a no-death experience. Lazarus died again, and these three people will die also. None of them were resurrected; they were all resuscitated.

There is only one Man who ever died and was resurrected: Jesus. He died, but He rose from the dead and He is alive forever more. He is the expert on Heaven. It's fine to read some of those books about Heaven. But the very best book to read about Heaven is this book, the Bible.

John 14:1-6. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Over the past month, we've been talking about "Heaven: An Insider's Guide." Let me review some of the things the Bible teaches about Heaven. If you are a believer, one nanosecond after you die, you'll be in the presence of Jesus in paradise. We will know our loved ones in Heaven; in fact, we'll know everyone in Heaven as if they were our closest friend on earth. There will be animals in Heaven. Babies that die, both new-born and pre-born are welcomed into Heaven and we will know them in the fullness of their potential vitality. We won't be angels in Heaven; instead we'll have a powerful eternal body like the resurrected body of Jesus. With this resurrection body, we won't be subject to age, disease, time, or gravity. There will be a new Heaven and a new earth that will be like the restoration of the Garden of Eden—only much better. We won't be lounging around on clouds playing harps; we'll have jobs and serve the Lord. We'll see Jesus and know Him in a perfect environment of praise.

Let's notice four more things Jesus taught about Heaven.

### **1. Jesus is in His Father's house preparing a place for us**

Jesus ascended back to Heaven forty days after His resurrection. He sent His Holy Spirit to live in us and give us His life. Meanwhile, He's preparing a place for us Heaven. Notice Jesus said Heaven is a place. It's not just some kind of otherworldly dream-like state. It's a place. That's why you should always capitalize the word Heaven, just like you capitalize the word Tyler.

The King James Version says, "In my Father's House are many mansions." That's an unfortunate translation that caused some people to think that we're going to be living in our own mansion, separated from everyone else like in a subdivision with huge lots. But Jesus used the word *mone*, which means rooms. I get excited about that and I want to say, "Show me the *mone*!"

When you read "rooms," don't imagine a private room with walls and a door you can lock, like a hotel. There will be no need for locks in Heaven. Think about sharing a big house with all the other Heavenly Family members—more like a bed and breakfast.

When Paul wrote about Heaven, He used the metaphor of a building. He wrote, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

In 1994, the Christian band, Audio Adrenaline, recorded a song about Heaven called, "Big House." Through the years it was one of my favorite songs to sing at Kids Kamp. The chorus says: "Come and go with me; To my Father's House; Come and go with me; To my Father's House; It's a big, big house; With lots and lots of room; A big, big table; With lots and lots of food; A big, big yard; Where we can play football; A big, big house; It's my Father's House." I don't know that we'll be playing football, but it's a big house!

Sometimes Christians are criticized by skeptics. They say all we care about is "Pie in the sky by and by." But the Christian life is so much more than just going to Heaven when you die. It's not just "Pie in the sky, by and by." It's also "steak on your plate while you wait."

I'd be a Christian even if there we didn't go to Heaven when we die. Following Christ means that we treat others with kindness and compassion. We forgive other people. If every person on the planet lived according to the Bible, this world would be a much better place.

But even though some people say Christians are so Heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good, just the opposite is true.

C. S. Lewis WROTE, "Throughout history, the Christians who did most for this present world were those who thought most of the next...Early Christians left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were pre-occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians ceased thinking of the other world that we have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at Heaven and you'll get the earth thrown in. Aim at the earth and you'll miss both." (*The Joyful Christian*, p. 138)

Jesus is preparing a place for you in Heaven. Have you confirmed your reservation?

## **2. You CAN be certain about spending eternity in Heaven**

I've heard people say, "Well, nobody can know for certain that you're going to Heaven when you die." Wrong. Or "You'll just have to wait until you die to see if you were good enough to go to Heaven." Wrong. The Bible says we CAN know for certain. In his first epistle John wrote, "I

write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may KNOW that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13)

One of the most familiar chapters in the Bible is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. David starts by saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." We often put so much focus on the beginning of that chapter that we miss how he concludes. He says, "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6)

David didn't say, "I HOPE I dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He didn't say, "I MIGHT dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He said, "I WILL dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He was certain He would spend eternity in Heaven.

Many critics of Christianity dismiss our faith as another fairy tale. In Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, the prince and the princess marry and live happily ever after. American atheists have started displaying billboards that equate Christianity with myths and fairy tales.

And it's true many fairy tales and legends often have plots that have happy endings. But that's because God has placed eternity in the hearts of people. We have an innate longing to live happily ever after. Just because we have this instinctive desire doesn't mean it's false. In fact, because that intrinsic longing is in our hearts, it is another proof Heaven exists.

The theologian J.I. Packer wrote, "As I get older, I find that I appreciate God and people and good and lovely things more and more intensely; so it is pure delight to think that this enjoyment will continue and increase in some form, literally forever. In fact Christians inherit the destiny which fairy tales envisaged in fancy: we live and live happily, and by God's endless mercy will live happily ever after." (*Your Father Loves You*, p. 68)

It's one thing to be saved, and that's wonderful. But it's better to be saved and KNOW you're saved. Do you have full assurance of your salvation? Have you confirmed your reservation in Heaven?

### **3. There's a book in Heaven with names written in it**

When you walk into a hotel and approach the desk clerk, the first thing you do is tell them your name. They check their computer to find your reservation. If your name is there, you are assured that you'll get a room.

The Bible says there are books in Heaven as well. One of them is called the Lamb's book of life. If your name is written down in His book, you have assurance of Heaven.

Moses was the first to mention God's book. When he prayed for the sinful Israelites who had worshipped a golden calf, he suggested that if it would save the people, then God could blot his name out of His book. God refused that request.

King David wrote about God's book. In Psalm 139, he wrote "All the days you ordained for me are written in your book." (Psalm 139:16) The prophet Daniel wrote that there would be a future judgment day when the books of Heaven are opened.

In Luke 10 Jesus sent out seventy disciples in teams of twos. They came back rejoicing that the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. In Luke 10:20 Jesus said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits are submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven."

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John was given a vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth. He describes the population of Heaven this way, "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27)

As we've been discussing Heaven over the past month, I haven't talked much about hell. But the Bible makes it clear not everyone will be in Heaven. In Revelation 20 we read about a final judgment of those who rejected God's free gift of eternal life. "If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15).

But God doesn't want anyone to go to hell. 2 Peter 3:9 says "God is not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

There are people who say, "I can't believe a loving God would send anyone to hell, especially those who have never heard the gospel." God doesn't send anyone to hell; a person chooses hell by refusing to accept God's free gift of eternal life. In order for a person to spend eternity in hell, they must reject the love of God demonstrated on the cross.

Bible scholar Michael Green wrote, "The love of God, with arms extended on a cross, bars the way to hell. But if that love is ignored, rejected, and finally refused, there comes a time when love can only weep while man pushes past into the self-chosen alienation which Christ went to the cross to avert."

There is a book in Heaven with names. Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? Have you confirmed your reservation in Heaven?

#### **4. Your confirmation number in Heaven is JN316**

JN316 stands for John 3:16. Several years ago, I had a speaking engagement in Nashville. I arrived late at night in a hotel in downtown Nashville. I was certain I had made a reservation months earlier, but I had neglected to copy the confirmation number. When I tried to check in the desk clerk had no record of my reservation. He asked me if I had a confirmation number, and I didn't have one. So I asked him if I could have a room anyway. Unfortunately, there was a convention in Nashville and they were full. I had to scramble around and find a room in another hotel. It was frustrating, and since that time, I always use a travel agent, and I ALWAYS write down the confirmation number in case I'm asked.

John 3:16 has been called a summary of the entire Bible. It is a personal promise to you. I want us to read the verse aloud and I want you to add your name in the place where it says, "The world." "For God so loved (your name) that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

The word "believe" means "to trust." Without faith it is impossible to please God. Everyone exercises faith, even atheists. It's just a question of the object of your faith. When you came into this room you decided to sit down, you were placing your faith in the strength of the seat to hold up your weight. When you drive across a bridge, you're placing your faith in the engineers that designed it and the workers who built it. When you take medicine you're placing faith in the doctor who prescribed it and the company that manufactured it. Everyone exercises faith.

The object of saving faith is God. It is believing Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for your sins and that God raised Him from the dead. But it is more than just an intellectual affirmation of those facts. It is TRUSTING God for eternity.

So how do I confirm my reservation for Heaven, by working hard and performing many good deeds? No, the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8 we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast. Salvation is a gift of God.

Well, if I can't work for it. Maybe I can buy it. It's a reservation after all, and I have to give my credit card when I make a hotel reservation. You can't pay for it. Jesus already did. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

The only choice you have when someone offers you a gift is to accept it or to reject it. I read a true story about a honeymoon couple spending their first night at a nice hotel. Early the next morning they were going to catch a flight to Hawaii for the rest of their honeymoon. The manager of the hotel was a friend of the groom's family, so he offered to take care of their room that night at no cost.

The newlyweds arrived in their room. They were disappointed. They had been hoping for a large suite. But instead, it was a small room with only a pull out sofa bed. The bathroom didn't have a tub or shower. The only food available was the expensive snacks in the mini-bar. But they didn't want to complain because it was free.

The next morning, when they checked out the manager met them and asked them, "How did you enjoy your suite?" The groom said, "They must have given us the wrong room because we had to stay in a small room and sleep on a pull-out sofa."

The manager looked again at their room number and said, "That was just the small den of your suite. Did you walk through the door into the large living room and bedroom? I had prepared a meal for you including champagne, and there was an oversized tub. Our housekeeping staff had sprinkled rose petals on the king-sized bed. Did you not see that?"

The husband and wife sheepishly admitted that they saw the door, but they thought it went to a closet. They never opened it. They missed out on the wonderful honeymoon suite because they didn't open the door.

When I read that story I thought about how that's a parable about Heaven. Jesus loves you and has prepared an amazing room for you to enjoy for eternity. By faith, you must simply open the door. And Jesus is that door. He said in John 10:9, "I am the door. If anyone enters through me he will be saved."

## CONCLUSION

Awhile back I found myself on a flight back from Houston to Tyler. I sat next to a young man who looked to be in his mid-40s. He worked in the oil and gas industry. He was a talkative guy and he was letting a few profanity bombs drop. Then he said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a pastor in Tyler." Without thinking he said, "Blank, man, I've never met a pastor before!" He wasn't trying to be rude; he was being honest. He was just one of those rare East Texas individuals who had never set foot in a church except for a couple of weddings and funerals. Over the short trip from Houston we engaged in a friendly discussion. He didn't believe in God. He said, "I don't believe the Bible. I think it's just bunch of fairy tales written by some drunk guys." As we talked, it was obvious he was a long way from even considering the possibility in believing in Jesus. I was interested to hear what he had to say because, as you can imagine, I don't get a chance to rub elbows with guys like that very often. Just before we landed I said, "So, tell me. What do you think is going to happen to you when you die?" He thought about it for a minute and said, "I think death is the end, but I try not to think about that very much." When we got off the plane he introduced me to his girlfriend who was there to pick him up. I invited both of them to worship sometime at Green Acres. He had a quick answer to everything I asked him. But the one topic he didn't want to think about was death and what happens after death. For a person who doesn't have faith, death can be a scary, ominous thought.

In Greek mythology, the edge of the world was the strait of Gibraltar at the western edge of the Mediterranean Sea. According to the Greeks, there was a huge statue of Hercules blocking the exit out to the Atlantic Ocean. It was called the Pillars of Hercules and it had three Latin words on it: *Non Plus Ultra*. Which means, "No more beyond." For centuries, the sea captains believed that was the edge of the world, so they never ventured far past that point.

But we know they were wrong. And explorers like Christopher Columbus went beyond the point of where they believed there was "no more beyond." In the city of Valladolid, Spain, where Columbus is buried, there's a huge monument built to his memory. Below Columbus, we can read those three words again, *non plus ultra* or "no more beyond." But when you look closer you see that there is a lion in the monument who is tearing away the "non." Columbus had the courage of a lion to venture beyond the point where most people thought there was "no more beyond." He discovered that there IS more beyond.

Like my friend on the plane, there are some people who still feel the same way about the grave. They think there is *non plus ultra*—no more beyond.

But there was a man named Jesus who was crucified and buried. After three days He emerged from the grave and ripped away the idea that there is no more beyond. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away your sin. But the Bible also calls Him the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. And like the lion in that monument, Jesus tears away the doubt and fear you might have about death and the afterlife. He came out of that tomb to declare to the world that there is **PLUS ULTRA!** There is **MORE BEYOND** the grave!! And for those of us who know Jesus as our Savior that **MORE BEYOND** means spending eternity with Him in Heaven. And if you trust Him, you're your reservation is confirmed in Heaven.

## OUTLINE

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### 2. You CAN be certain about spending eternity in Heaven

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes