

Heaven's Purpose

Several years ago, a good friend of mine (Are there *bad* friends?) questioned a statement I made. I had said: "My faith only gets me to heaven; my deeds decide my position there." Her genuine concern was that I said faith *only* gets us to heaven. She objected to the word "only." She felt I was *downgrading* heaven – the place. But I was simply drawing attention to the *purpose* of the place. (Generally speaking, though, I'm sure "*Heaven is a wonderful place.*")

I *get* to heaven by faith. However, upon my arrival there, the quality of my life in heaven will depend upon the quality of my life on earth. The level of my life in heaven will be directly related to the good works I did on earth following my salvation. Good deeds do not get me *to* heaven, but they decide my status *in* heaven. Salvation is unearned; rewards are earned.

What makes heaven, heaven? What elevates, what exalts heaven? God exalts persons, not places. We miss the whole point of eternity with God, if we think it's just to get us snugly settled in a lovely location. From God's perspective, no geographical place is important in and of itself. The Garden of Eden was not created for itself; it was made for Adam and Eve. Jesus promised to "...prepare a place for *you.*"

We personally didn't do anything to *get* to heaven, but we can do a lot to enhance our presence there. By definition, heaven simply means "air or sky." Heaven is not so much an eternal Shangri-la, as it is *a new base of operations* for The Church – the Bride of Christ. The emphasis is not on place but on performance. The duties and responsibilities the Lord will entrust to you and to me up there will depend entirely on how we lived our lives down here. We will be rewarded or reproved, depending on how faithfully we are currently using our gifts and resources.

The Lord is a romantic, but he is also practical. Adam and Eve were not created to be decorative in Eden. They were not only social; they were utilitarian. They were in the Garden not only to enjoy it, but also to work it, to be responsible for its maintenance. In heaven there will be both worship and work.

So, God's primary interest is not to get us to *heaven*. Heaven is not just a nice place to exist forever and ever; it's a venue for something far more important. The Lord is much more concerned about our personal and working *relationship* with him than about our geographic whereabouts.

He wants to reestablish – with humans – the communication, the fellowship that was lost in the earthly Paradise. That task is more complicated than simply relocating us. However, he can manage it – if we trust him, if we cooperate with him. His intention is to be intimately and intrinsically involved in our lives – for time and for eternity.

The more good deeds we perform, the more faithfully we administer our divinely-given talents, the more we upgrade our position and responsibilities in heaven, the more treasures we accumulate for ourselves, the better God likes it. ◇◇