

Recognition in Heaven?

No. Thirteen

A man said he really never understood what Jesus meant by a treasure in heaven until he had lost a child. After the death of his child, he said, "Ah, my heart is there now. How real heaven became for me." Many Christians seem anxious about whether they will be reunited with their loved ones in heaven. Will we know our parents, a son or daughter? Will we recognize friends? Is our comfort in the seeing again of father and mother, son and daughter? Does the joy of heaven consist of eternal fellowship with loved ones? If this were so, what about the many unbelieving loved ones who will not be in heaven?

The Bible does indicate that the saints in heaven know each other. They don't only know their friends and relatives who died in the Lord, but also those glorified saints they had never seen before. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, two glorified saints, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. Luke called them "men" and not disembodied ghostlike spirits. He reported that Peter recognized them and said to Jesus: "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters -one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Luke 9:33).

Here both Moses and Elijah were recognized by their real identities. If Peter recognized Moses and Elijah, whom he had never seen before, then surely in heaven the glorified saints shall know each other. Our Lord testifies of the same truth when He speaks of Gentiles joining with believing Jews in a great reunion in heaven. "I say to you that many will come from the east and from the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven"(Matt.8: 1). This wonderful promise is not possible unless there is a full recognition of all who have died in the faith when they come together in the life to come. The patriarchs will know each other. They will keep their identity and their names. All who die in Christ will keep their identity. The Lord said in the book of Revelation that He will never blot out from the book of life him who overcomes, but will acknowledge his name before His Father and His angels (Rev. 3:5). We have names in heaven. We will be known.

Recognition in heaven? Yes! But our blessed hope is not in the reunion with loved ones. In heaven, all human family ties as we know them on earth will cease. We will be joined together as the new family of God (cf. Matt.12: 48-50). Not the redeemed saints are the focus of attention in heaven, but the Lord. The apostle Paul longs to be with Christ (Phil.1: 23). He doesn't say anything about desiring to be with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or any other Old Testament saint.

He wants to see Jesus, our "priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure."