

## The Five People You Will Not Meet in Heaven

*Various Scriptures*

A few years ago (2004), a little book was published that had been anticipated for a long time. Mitch Albom had already had a phenomenal best seller entitled *Tuesdays with Morie*, and his fans were clamoring for more. It took a while, but when his next book was released, it became a best seller as well. It is entitled, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, whose main character was named Eddie. Here is a summary which is found on the dust jacket:

*“Eddie is a grizzled war veteran who feels trapped in a meaningless life of fixing rides at a seaside amusement park. As the park has changed over the years—from the Loop-the-Loop to the Pipeline Plunge—so, too, has Eddie changed, from optimistic youth to embittered old age. His days are a dull routine of work, loneliness, and regret.*

*“Then, on his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Eddie dies in a tragic accident, trying to save a little girl from a falling cart. With his final breath, he feels two small hands in his—and then nothing. He awakens in the afterlife, where he learns that Heaven is not a lush Garden of Eden, but a place where your earthly life is explained to you by five people who were in it. These people may have been loved ones or distant strangers. Yet each of them changed your path forever.”*

As you get deeper and deeper into the book, you discover that Eddie had viewed his own life as meaningless and isolated. But as he one by one meets these five people, he begins to understand how truly interconnected all our lives are, that everything we do has an impact on someone, somehow.

Let me hasten to add that Mitch Albom did not intend this book to be an accurate definition of what Heaven is. I’m afraid, though, that many people who have no other frame of reference have read the book or seen the made-for-TV movie and come to the conclusion that Heaven is indeed a place where your life is explained by reliving events from your life, where five different people explain to you what your life was really all about.

In fact, one of the characters in the book tells us that Heaven is for “understanding your life on earth.” The character goes on to say, “People think of Heaven as a paradise garden, a place where they can float on clouds and laze in rivers and mountains. But scenery without solace is meaningless. This is the greatest gift God can give you: to understand what happened in your life.”

There is no mention of Jesus and His death that makes it possible for anyone to go to Heaven. There is no mention of the holiness of God. There is no mention of the standards of righteousness. There is no mention of sin. There is no mention of hell. In fact, I really don't remember a single reference to Scripture at all. If this little book was the only thing we had to go on to help us understand Heaven (and for some people, that may indeed be the case) we would believe that there is no accountability or punishment for our sins—that Heaven is nothing more than a place where everything we went through in this life is finally explained to us.

Well, to tell you the truth, there are some things I *am* looking forward to finally understanding, once I reach the other side of eternity. **But when I get there, it won't be because I just sort of stumbled into Heaven.** It won't be because I was going there regardless of who I was or how I lived or what I believed. And it *won't* be so that I can have my life here on earth explained to me.

When I read Albom's little book (only about 200 pages), I immediately began thinking that there were definitely some people I would *not* see in Heaven. I thought of a young man who attended the same high school as me, whose name was Mike. I thought of Jack, an older man who lived next door when I was a teenager. I thought of Cindy, a young lady I knew in my first pastorate. I thought of several others. Then I began to list the characteristics of the people I will not see in Heaven. And I began to think of all the people whose ideas about Heaven and who is going there have totally missed the mark.

*Here, then, are five people you will NOT meet in Heaven:*

## **1 The person who depended on his family connections to get him to Heaven, John 8.31-33**

In the book of John, we can read about an exchange Jesus had with some people who honestly believed that their heritage and family lineage would get them to Heaven. In the eighth chapter, Jesus has just said “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (v. 32). He is explaining to the Jews the freedom that Christ gives to those who believe in Him. The Jews respond by saying, “*We are Abraham's descendants...*” They depended on their heritage and their family connections to gain their entrance to Heaven.

People today are not much different. Some Jews may still rely on their heritage to provide salvation, as do some Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus. Yet I am afraid

that there are many who claim Christianity as their faith, but who are relying on the fact that their father or grandfather was a preacher, or that they were raised in a Christian home, or even that they are Americans, to open wide the gates of Heaven for them.

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, there is such a demand for season tickets to the Packers' football games that the Packers organization has developed what is simply referred to as "The List." This list currently has about 30,000 names on it, including some waiting to be born, of people who are interested in buying season tickets. Most years, only a dozen or so of the season tickets became available. At the current rate, if no other names were added, it would take 6,000 years to get to everybody!

The Packers organization, founded in 1919, allows families to hand down the tickets from one generation to the next, making them family treasures worthy of being put into wills. There are hundreds of such transfers each year. However, on the other hand, while we may *influence* our children (and others) to follow Christ, faith in Christ is NOT something which can be inherited.

On the authority of Scripture, I tell you that you will *not* go to Heaven because of any of your family connections or your nationality or your heritage. And if you go to Heaven, you will not find anyone else there who got there that way, either.

## **2 The person who counted on his good behavior or accomplishments to get him to Heaven, Matthew 7.21-23**

We read these words in Matthew 7.21-23—*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

**Pay close attention to that.** Jesus Himself was telling us that you might be involved in a lot of very good things. You may be a very good person, one everyone looks up to and respects, but that in and of itself will not be enough to get you into Heaven. And the rest of Scripture agrees. Listen to these verses:

Romans 9:16—*“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”*

Titus 3:7—“*So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*”

2 Timothy 1:9—*[God] who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.*”

Titus 3:4-5—“*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*”

### **3** **The person who thought his possessions would buy him a place in Heaven, Matthew 6.19-21**

We can't depend on our possessions for a couple of reasons. **First, we can't take them with us when we leave this life.** We read in 1 Timothy 6:7, “*For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*” The book of Proverbs was written and compiled by Solomon. We believe him to have been the wisest human who ever lived, but he was also very, very wealthy. So it is interesting that we would find in the book of Proverbs these words, “*Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle*” (23:5). We also find, “*...riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations*” (27:24).

Jesus Himself warned us, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:19-21).

The **second** reason we can't depend on our possession is that our entrance into Heaven is a gift from God. I went to Captain D's one night a few years ago to pick up a quick dinner, and while I was waiting to place my order, I noticed a little sign attached to the front of the counter by the cash register. It read, “*Now you can get heaven by the slice,*” otherwise known as pecan pie. According to this marketing tactic, a slice of Heaven would only cost you a couple of bucks. Even though it was a pretty clever turn of a phrase, Heaven is not found in a piece of pie. Salvation is a gift, and by definition a gift is free to the recipient. **If it is free, then no amount of money could ever buy it.** Not even the richest man or woman in the world could buy his or her way into Heaven.

The Scriptures are very plain about this. John 3:16 tells us, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” Romans 6:23 gives us the bad news/good news: “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” We find this question in Romans 8:32—“*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” And what a beautiful exclamation we find in 2 Corinthians 9:15—“*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*”

Ephesians 2:8-9—“*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*”

## **4 The person who thought it didn’t matter what he believed, as long as he was sincere, John 14.6**

You may even have said this yourself, but if you think about it for longer than two minutes, you will realize how empty this is. I’m pleading with you to consider the implications of what you’re saying. Think it all the way through. **We didn’t create Heaven, and we don’t make the rules for how to get there.**

If sincerity is what qualifies a person to go to Heaven, then shouldn’t the same rule apply to everything else? What happens if you forget to pay your light bill, and your electricity is shut off—will it help to call them and say, “You know, I sincerely intended to pay that bill”? Would you say that the suicide bombers in Iraq are sincere? Is a man who fires a gun into the head of a convenience store clerk sincere? Is a doctor who kills babies while still in their mother’s wombs sincere about what he does? It is very possible to be extremely wrong, even if we are sincere. Sincerity is not what saves us.

I am a fan of the Atlanta Braves baseball team. Suppose I drive to Atlanta and walk up to the ticket gate, and tell the man there that I am a fan of the Atlanta Braves. I can even tell him that I am the biggest Braves fan in Mississippi. Then I tell him that I want to see the Braves game. He’s going to look at me, hold out his hand, and say, “Where’s your ticket?” Then I would say, “Well, I don’t have one.” He would reply, “Well, you’re not getting into this game without a ticket.” To which I would answer, “I’ve got to have a ticket? Man, that’s so narrow-minded!”

That’s the same attitude many people have about getting into Heaven. They think that one day they’re going to saunter up the gates of Heaven and demand to be

allowed to get in. But Jesus told us, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). There are some who say, *“You say Jesus is the only way to Heaven? That’s so narrow-minded!”*

What makes us think that we can get there some other way? Do we think that even though Jesus said *“No one comes to the Father except through me”* He somehow will make an exemption for us? **And yet there are people, perhaps some here today, who believe that they can charm their way into Heaven, or bluff their way into Heaven, or somehow sneak in under the tent, like a little boy at the circus.**

A few years ago, the weather phenomenon known as *El Nino* was the cause of several storms which pounded California across several weeks. The storms created some very real problems for residents there. The damage caused by landslides was estimated to be in the one BILLION dollar range--but there was no insurance to cover any of it. Mudslide insurance provisions don't apply if the hillside collapses--only if a creek or river rises, carrying mud with it.

Think of the people who assumed that the mudslide provisions in their insurance policies would cover the disasters they found themselves in--only to discover that they had trusted in the wrong things. Does that sound like those who have placed their hope of salvation in effort, church attendance, family history, etc.—anything but Jesus Christ? Does that sound like what you’re doing?

**5 The person who never accepted Christ as his Savior.**  
You see, it comes down to this. If you have never accepted the finished work of Christ, never believed in your heart that Jesus died for your sins, that God raised Him from the dead, and accepted what He did for you, personally, you will not go to Heaven. This is not something I have made up. And I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know.

The problem for many people, and perhaps for some here today, is that they honestly believe that one day, one day they’ll get their lives together and accept Christ as Savior. One day, when things have turned around for them. One day, when they get older. One day, when they’re through having their fun. One day, when life slows down. One day, when all their doubts are resolved. Maybe even one day when life is winding down for them.

Is that where you are? Then hear these words from God’s Word:

Hebrews 2:3—*“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”*



Romans 10:9—*“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Acts 2:21—*“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

What are you depending on to get into Heaven? If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I beg you to take care of it today.