

Heaven Is For Real

I recently saw the movie "*Heaven Is For Real*". The screenplay for the film was well written. The actors gave great performances. I enjoyed it! The movie is about Colton Burpo, a preacher's son. When Colton was four years old his appendix became inflamed and he had to have emergency surgery in order to remove it. His condition was described as very grave. Colton truly fought for his life during the surgery. Colton claimed that he had a life changing experience while he was under general anesthetic. The young lad claimed that he had been to Heaven.

When citizens of Colton's home town of Imperial, Nebraska, first heard his revelations, it caused a crisis in faith. Most refused to believe the boy. Some made fun of him. Some prominent Christian writers have since criticized Colton's revelations. However, many believed him. The boy's account of heaven was set out in a book by the same title. It sold over a million of copies. The book has been so successful and well received that the movie was produced, potentially widening the audience for the boy's revelations.

Colton's experience is not unique. He stands beside many men, women and children who, following a near death experience, testify with one voice: "There is life after this life!" Many, as in Colton's case, have set their life after life experiences down in writing. Many of these stories have been published. Millions have purchased the books that chronicle the life after life experiences. Behind every purchase is a question: "What happens to me after I breathe my last breath and all my vital signs cease? We long for an answer. I saw that longing in a fellow pastor who faced his mortality. A few days before he breathed his last, my colleague gave me a book written by a man who had a near death experience. He told me to read it. It clearly had given him some solace and he wanted to share his solace with me. If my colleague struggled with the question of life after death, I am confident that there are many who wrestle with his issue. I am sure that the release of *Heaven Is for Real* in the theaters will spark discussion on the subject of life after death. Perhaps you have contemplated this question and are searching for an answer.

The Bible teaches that God created this world, and all that is in it, and created another world inhabited by God and the heavenly hosts. God's world is hidden to us. Jesus declared that this hidden world, Heaven, is for real. Luke's Gospel records: "*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.*" (Luke 23:44-46). Jesus taught us that in the middle of the agony and suffering of His last hours and minutes, when God seemed so very far away, God was in reality very close to Him. Jesus pointed to a Father who was watching and waiting to save Him. Jesus relied on a Father who would take His spirit, His human nature, into His loving arms and into eternity.

The Book of Acts records that Stephen, one of the first Deacons and the first martyr of the Church, declared Heaven was for real. Stephen had preached the Gospel of Jesus in public. He was accused of the religious crime of blasphemy against God. Stephen was tried by the religious establishment of Jerusalem. He was sentenced to death by stoning. As he awaited his execution, Stephen looked up into the sky. The Book of Acts records: "*Stephen... looked up to*

heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55-56). His accusers could not bear to hear what Stephen had to say, so they dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60) Stephen taught us that in the middle of the agony and suffering of his last hours and minutes, when God seemed so very far away to others, God was, in reality, very close to him. Stephen pointed to a Father and His Son who were watching and waiting to save him. Relying on the example and teaching of Jesus, Stephen believed in a God who would take his spirit into His loving arms and into eternity.

The Apostle Paul testified that Heaven is for real. He declared that God took him up to the third heaven. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. He did not describe Heaven. The Holy Spirit did not move and inspire Paul to provide us with a description of the geography of Heaven. Paul testified that he heard things he simply was not at liberty to disclose.

Based on the testimony of these witnesses, I believe that Heaven is for real. I believe that eternity is real and those who have faith have eternity today. Jesus said "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24). I rely on a God who is always near me, always watching over me. I believe in a God who, when I breathe my last, will take my spirit into His loving arms and into eternity.

The Bible also teaches that God will not stay hidden. It teaches that Jesus will return and all who ever lived will come to life. God promised that one day He was going to change and transform creation. "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17). God will judge all who ever lived. God's most passionate desire is that in this life, right now, we all pass over from death to life through faith in Jesus. Jesus wants you to believe that He never tires of reaching out with His love and grace. Read Luke 23:26-43. As Jesus was suffering and dying, He reached out and granted salvation to a criminal who was dying with Him. Jesus is reaching out to you today. He wants to give you the blessed assurance that heaven is for real.

Come hear His word at Grace Lutheran, 9:00 and 10:30AM on Sundays.

In Christ

Pastor Ed Skutshek