

# OpenTheo

## #76 Will my daughter see the child she lost? Qs about heaven and loved ones

July 29, 2021



### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

What does Jesus mean by 'many rooms in my father's house'? Will my daughter see the child she lost in pregnancy? What about marriage in the resurrection? Tom answers questions on heaven and loved ones.

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## Transcript

[Music] The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast. Hi, welcome to the show. It's Justin Briley, Premier's Theology and Apologetics editor.

Welcoming you to another edition of the programme that brings you the thought and theology of Tom Wright. In partnership with SBCK and NTWite Online, always love to hear your feedback to the show. I had this lovely message in from "I think the name is Soninad" - forgive me if I mispronounced that - but Soninad says, "In a world spinning with soundbites, woke sloganism and ideological polarity, this show and its sister podcast, Unbelievable, offer a bright and shining example of how we can engage constructively and Christianly with people of other faiths and no faith on the big questions and tough topics.

Thankful for the thoughtful insights of NTWite, who answers the questions posed here with humility, reasoning, respectful dissent and disagreement when necessary. His words firmly resting on God's word and pointing always to Jesus. What a lovely endorsement of the show that was.

If you'd like to add your own, if you'd like to rate and review as it helps others to see the podcast as well. So feel free to do that wherever you're listening to this podcast from. We're running a special competition at the moment.

We are saying anyone who is registered over at askentiright.com that means you're receiving the regular newsletter, you've signed up essentially there to receive info from us. Then your name will be put into the competition hat and we're drawing out five of them in September and it's five signed copies of Broken Signposts, Tom's latest book. It's a real cracker of a book.

It's all about how Christianity makes sense of the world. So if you'd like to be in with a chance of winning one of those five signed copies, then do make sure you're registered at askentiright.com. For now, it's time to get into your questions. Welcome back to today's show.

Always a pleasure to be joined by Tom Wright and Tom. We're talking about something that's right in your wheelhouse today, something that you've really put on the map in terms of people reading, writing about this theologically, the concept of heaven and what we mean by it and the idea of a new creation and so on. And I've got a number of questions here.

A couple of them really quite pastoral actually and need to be dealt with in that sense as much as pastoral as theological questions. But let's start with one from Ben in Canada who says, "If going to heaven isn't the point of the gospels, as you've often told us, Tom, what's going on in John 14, verse 2 and following?" And he quotes from the NRSV here, "In my father's house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also.

And you know the way to the place where I am going." So where is Jesus going in this passage? Is it heaven? Go ahead, Tom. Okay. Yeah, great question.

And I come back again and again at this. It's interesting because I was doing a seminar paper in the Oxford faculty here just a week or two ago and it was on Purgatory and Paradise and all these questions, yet one more time in the light of some recent scholarly writing, et cetera. And I recently acquired a big new fat dictionary of ancient Greek published by Brill, edited by somebody called Franco Montanari, which is supposed to be the modern dictionary of ancient Greek.

Actually, even since then, yet another new one has come out from Cambridge University Press, which I haven't yet acquired. But anyway, I went to this Brill dictionary of ancient Greek and I looked up the word here for dwelling places, which in Greek is *monetai*, quite an easy little word, "mu omakren-nu-etam," "monet," "m-o-n-long-e." And "monet," fascinatingly, is never used, at least not according to all the examples given in this

dictionary and in others I've checked, never used for a place you go and live permanently. It's always for a rest during a march or a pause in a dance or a breathing space in a piece of music or something like that.

In other words, its regular use in ancient Greek was for a waiting period before completing whatever it was you were doing. This is made more difficult by many of us having grown up with the Old King James Version, the authorized version, so-called, where the translation was in "My Father's House" and many mansions. And I've heard sermons about the mansion waiting for you in heaven.

But Monet never meant a mansion. It meant a place where you go and wait and rest. And it's interesting because the New Testament actually never ever uses the word heaven to denote the place where God's people go after death.

It talks about going to be with Christ, which is far better. That's Philippians 1, or indeed departing and being with Him, leaving the body and being at home with the Lord in 2 Corinthians 5. Or here, Jesus says, "I will take you to Myself." It's as though this is the only language we've got better to talk about being with Jesus than being in heaven. Because if you say being in heaven, first, it conjures up all sorts of medieval images about clouds and harps and so on, which today frankly leave most people cold.

But second, it gives you the impression of a final dwelling place, which is not the point. So you go to be with Jesus and you say, "What is Jesus in heaven?" In a sense, yes, but isn't it interesting that the New Testament doesn't usually talk about it like that? So we have to be very careful when we find ourselves assuming something which isn't actually what the New Testament says. So I would say Jesus is saying, "Look, I'm going away and I will receive you to Myself.

You'll be with Me." And that's as much as in John 14 they need to know at the moment. But the larger context of John's gospel, whether it's that striking passage in John 5, or the resurrection narratives themselves in John 20 and 21, the larger context of John's gospel is about resurrection. The new creation launched by Jesus, which will be complete with the totality of the new creation.

So we go to be with Him after death in a restful place, a place where we pause and are refreshed. Very interesting, some of the early church fathers, people like Tertullian and Cyprian in the second and third century, they saw this very clearly. Don't worry too much about the time in between.

Focus on the great new creation which is coming on the resurrection which will happen then and trust that in between while you will be with Jesus, which is as much as any of us could ask for. We've got a really tough one here, because this is where the rubber hits the road in terms of what people, you know, there's one thing is to think about it in the abstract sense but this is a real pastoral question from Paul in North Yorkshire who says,

"Dear Tom, we met in Harrogate, you kindly signed my copy of your biography of Paul. I'm a licensed lay minister in the Church of England.

But recently my daughter lost her pregnancy at 14 weeks. She was heartbroken. And I do believe that heaven is for real." And Paul mentions a book by Todd Berpo which is about someone's sort of claimed experiences of seeing heaven and experiencing heaven.

But I believe that books like that offer us the hope that her lost child Robin will grow in heaven. Now is that something you subscribe to? And Paul says, "Your prayers for my daughter, Jen and Johnny in their grief would be much appreciated." But yes, I mean, so this is the, you know, is there some sense in which we can hope that we will meet our children in that life to come, even if they never had the opportunity to experience life in this? It's obviously a hugely sensitive one and I will pray for Jen and Johnny that's just a terrible, terrible thing. And our society has become so heartless about this very often.

And obviously the parallel stuff to this is the whole abortion industry. Let's not go there but yeah, there are questions there as well. And partially I have known situations where people who have either lost children or people who have had abortions have through times of healing prayer been aware, I don't quite know how to put this, been aware of the presence of these little people around them.

Or maybe a priest or a clergy person who's been praying with them and for them has had a sense that the whole family is here, even though there were only maybe one or two currently alive children there. And I don't think that's something I want to poo poo or wave away. And I don't know the book by Todd Berpo.

I do know that in many different Christian cultures over the years, people have had vivid experiences, vivid dreams, which very often fit with whatever the current mythology about heaven and clouds and harps and angels happens to be. It's like people who've had so-called near-death experiences. In other words, I don't want to say these are unreal, I want to say that they, like all our language about the ultimate future, is a sign, are there signposts pointing into a fog, they're not accurate descriptions of what it's going to be like, but they're saying somewhere down here, there is a time and a place where all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

So I want to say, I think, cautiously, that children who were conceived and who were then lost during pregnancy for whatever reason, I don't think they're lost to God. I think they are real human beings. I've actually got right beside you, can't see it, but right beside the camera, I have an in vitro photograph of my youngest grandson who was happily born and is a healthy little boy of six months now.

But I put that there when he was about minus four months, and I prayed for him through his last few months in the womb, and the photograph is still there to remind me of that.

And I don't think he only became an image-bearing human being at the moment when he was actually born. I think he was that from conception.

And somehow in the mercy of God, I think these lovely little people, whether they will grow in the new creation, I don't know. And in a sense, I suspect that'll be a non-question when we get there, but it wouldn't surprise me at all if they are actually beloved children of God with whom we will be reunited. And how that will work and what it will mean, we don't have good language for, but it's a way of saying God knows God loves, and they are part of God's overall strange world which he is making and in the new creation, as I say, all shall be well.

We certainly will pray for Jen and Johnny. Thank you, Paul, for that question. Just could have gone to the other end of life.

Matt in Alabama says, "My grandfather passed away last March in my grandmother upon opening the Bible that he left her, read Matthew 22, verse 30, for the first time. Jesus's teaching regarding there being no giving in marriage in the resurrection. Well, it greatly saddened her, and she spoke to me and my sister about it.

Now, I've been a Christian for many years and admittedly this verse has always troubled and confused me, especially since marriage was part of God's original creation design. So what do you make of this verse that in the resurrection, there will be no giving in marriage? It's as though it's very interesting that this is the only passage in the whole of the gospels, and it's parallel Matthew, Mark and Luke, and a very similar passage, but that passage is the only place in the gospels where Jesus talks explicitly about the resurrection. It appears he takes the resurrection for granted.

He stands in that stream of creational monotheism which says, "Of course God is going to remake the world and remake human beings within it. And if the Sadducees have a problem with that, well, then I have a problem with them." So that's what the passage is actually all about, but he's also talking here about the fact that the new creation is going to be on beyond where we are at the moment. And it's just like in Revelation, Chapter 21 and 22, when there will be no sun and moon in the new creation, but in the original Genesis creation, the sun and the moon are enormously important.

They're signs of what the world is all about, and for times and seasons and so on, very much part of the original good creation design, but it appears in Revelation 21 and 22 that actually looking back, we see how to see them even the sun and moon as pointers towards an even greater reality that God himself will be with us and will shine his light upon us. And so we won't need created lights anymore. That's an extraordinary image.

In the same way in Revelation 21, there is the ultimate marriage of the Messiah and his bride, the church. And in that ultimate marriage, it seems to me all other marriages are kind of more fully and firmly and finally consummated. And I suppose one might want to

say, pastorally, that of course every relationship which has been a gift of love and a receiving of love will be honored and validated and made new in the new world.

But it won't be marriage as we know it because marriage as we know it. I mean, in the Old Testament, it's really quite down to earth. The passage that the Sadducees have been quoting back of Jesus is about somebody who marries and then dies and his brother has to take the widow and then the next brother and so on, which is the Levirid law of marriage, which was designed to perpetuate that person's inheritance and family.

And Jesus says, but in the resurrection, they won't be dying anymore. So there'd be no more need for procreation. So all that stuff about whose wife will she be is totally irrelevant.

That's what Jesus is saying. He's not saying you won't have anything to do with one another. And the early fathers debated long and hard as to whether there would be what we call sexual activity in the new creation.

I don't know about that. I come and go on that. But it seems to me that the point of the new creation clearly isn't about the further propagation of the species.

And insofar as we are hardwired to do procreation, some of us more, some of us less, then there will be no need for that anymore. It will be as though all that is swallowed up in a larger joy, a greater reality and a deeper relationship. And I'm convinced that that relationship will include all the good life giving relationships we've had in the present life, but they will be transposed into a new mode.

Like it is when the organist suddenly transposes the hymn tune up a tone or puts a minor tune to a major or something. It's as though it'll be the same but different. And our calling is to trust in the God of that difference and not to cling on to the thing we've known, which we've loved so much of in the present life.

The shadows as Lewis puts it of what will become the greatest story once we get there. Thank you so much. Ben and Canada, Paul in North Yorkshire, Matt and Alabama for your questions really helpful and thank you for your responses, Tom.

But for now, thank you and I'll see you next time. Thank you very much. Thank you so much for being with us on this week's edition of the show.

Next time, your questions on the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. That's a popular topic and we'll be looking at that one again next week. Don't forget, you can get signed up at [AskNTRight.com](http://AskNTRight.com) to receive the regular newsletter, more info about the show and ask a question.

You'll also get your name put into the hat for the five signed copies of Tom's latest book, Broken Signpost. So if you'd like to be in with a chance of winning one of those, then do

make sure you're signed up at [AskNTRight.com](http://AskNTRight.com). We'll be during the winners in September. So, make sure you're signed up now.

For now, thanks for being with us on this week's edition of the show. See you next time.

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(buzzing)