

Chapter Three: Is There a Heaven?

One night, because of the chill in the air, we had built a fire in fireplace. The wood burned, the sweet smell of burning sap wafted through the room.

Maggie took her Bible down from the mantel and as she did every night read her favorite passage. After we had finished 'reading' the book, Maggie turned to me and ask in a soft, almost motherly voice, "Son what do you know about heaven?"

I sat for a moment and then answered in a slow deliberate manner. "Maggie, I really don't know much. I've heard of it. I guess everyone has, but I really have no concept of what it is supposed to be like."

"I thought everybody knew about heaven. I can't imagine livin' in a country like ours and not knowin' about the place God has prepared for those who believe," she replied.

"Maggie, why don't you tell me what you think heaven will be like? I would like to know your opinion," I asked.

She leaned forward in her chair and stirred the coals in the fireplace with the poker. She leaned the poker against the mantel and sat back, each movement seemed so deliberate and I watched, waiting for her reply. Then she began,

"Roger, imagine if you can, standing in that bed of coals, with fire burning around you forever. Imagine the pain of the fire and the thirst of not having anything to cool your lips or throat and have that happenin' forever."

She looked at me, waiting and I simply leaned forward so I could hear and understand each word as she spoke so softly. She continued,

"Imagine now a place where everything is perfect. There is no sickness, there is no death, there is no pain, its everything that is good. The fire would be hell and the good place would be heaven. The Bible tells us that heaven is a place prepared by God, for those people who love Him. It has walls of Jasper, gates of pearl, and streets of gold. God lives right in the middle of the city and anytime you want to go visit, you just go knock on the door and you can enter."

"Do you really believe that the walls and gates and streets are all of these things?" I asked.

"Son, I really don't know. I believe the bible and if the bible says its so, then I accepts it. This I do know! That whatever the Apostle John saw on that island, was better than he could describe. He had to use the prettiest

things he could think of that we could understand. Roger, I won't be disappointed if the streets ain't gold and the gates ain't pearls, 'cause it will be somethin' better than that. The one thing that will disappoint me is if'n I don't get to see Matt and Peter and live with them forever," she said.

I leaned back against my chair and rocked as I thought about this lady. I had never heard most of these things before and she seemed so certain.

"Maggie, what happens if you die and none of it is true? Will you be disappointed?" I asked.

"You know Roger, I think I'd still be glad that I've lived the life that I have because I have friends and we share things together. I've had a good life, lots of good memories. I don't think I've missed out on anything that could have made my life any better than it's been. Matt and Peter would be dead anyway and I would have had nothing to look forward to all of these years. But you see son, I am sure about these things," she answered.

Her certainty overwhelmed me. There was no doubt at all in her mind about heaven.

"Do you really believe God will send people to hell, simply because they do not believe in him?" I asked.

"You need to go talk to the preacher, son, I ain't no expert when it comes to the bible. All I can tell you is what I think," she answered.

"That's what I want! I want to hear your beliefs and then I'll go talk to Reverend Flint and let him tell me what he thinks. That way I will have two opinions. I call that research," I replied.

"First, I don't believe that God 'sends' anybody to hell. I think they go 'cause that is what they choose. You see no one is forced to go to hell. Some people are not born to go to heaven and others hell. It's a matter of choice. You chose to stay here in Hendersonville because you wanted to. No one made you stay. You put on them pants and that shirt this mornin' because you wanted too, not 'cause you wuz forced. God don't force people to do anythin'. He simply says, 'You choose. Do you want to spend eternity in fire (hell as she described it) or heaven?' It's your choice, no one can make it for you," she answered.

"Interesting thoughts Maggie, I've never heard that before," I answered.

"I remember a sermon one time, the preacher preached on heaven and he told a story. He asked a question. 'If'n you wuz hungry and someone come to you and told you that

you could have a meal, all the food you could eat, anything you wanted. Or you could have a coupon that would let you go to the grocery store anytime you wanted and get as much food as you wanted, anything you wanted, which would you take?' she asked.

She stirred the fire again and looking at me asked, "Well, which one would you take?"

I thought a few minutes and knew what she was asking but I had to be truthful with her, so I said, "I would take the coupon."

"Smart answer 'cause that's what heaven is. It's a coupon to all the blessin's of God. You can go anytime you want and get whatever you wish. God is ready to supply all your needs, not wants but needs, whatever they might be," she replied.

"Why don't you think about that and we can talk some more about this. We don't have to do it all in one night. Lets go to bed and we kin talk some more tomorrow if'n you want," she said.

With that she stood up, threw another piece of wood on the fire to keep it burning through the night and started for her room.

"Good night Roger. Hope you sleep good and think about what we've talked about. It's a choice only you can make," she said as he disappeared into her room.

I lay awake a long time that night, trying to imagine a place like she described. Wouldn't it be great if it were real and we could live together forever with family and friends?

The next thing I knew, morning had broken and Maggie was rattling around in the kitchen and my watch hands showed it to be four thirty.