

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Who's Going to Heaven?

This is a legitimate question, but our standard answer tends to be simplistic and misleading. Dig a little deeper, and the true answer ought to make all of us a little nervous.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).



These words of Jesus should settle once and for all the question of what is required to go to heaven. Mere expressions of loyalty are not enough; faith without action is not enough; warm, fuzzy feelings about God and Jesus are not enough. No, it is only the one who “does the will of My Father” who shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

So let's take this principle for a test drive. Consider the Pharisee in Jesus' parable, for example, a man who could boast to God, “I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (Lk. 18:11-12). It's an abbreviated list, no doubt, but he appears to qualify as heavenly material, right? Especially compared to the tax collector, who could only beg, “be merciful to me a sinner” (v. 13). Clearly, the tax collector fell short, while the

Pharisee passed with flying colors. But Jesus turns our expectation upside down with His conclusion: The tax collector “went down to his house justified rather than the other” (v. 14). The one who “did the will of the Father” was rejected, while the “sinner” got in. Huh?

The same conundrum appears in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). The younger son went wild with sin, yet was eagerly embraced by his father when he returned home. The older brother, who “never transgressed your commandment at any time” (v. 29), was the one left out of the banquet. Here, too, the rule seems to break down.

So Jesus declares that going to heaven is predicated on obedience; yet His stories seem to suggest that those who obey actually have *less* of a chance of making it than those whose lives are an unholy mess. What's going on here?

Jesus is not contradicting Himself. The solution is to revisit our definition of “doing the will of the Father.” Look at the context of both parables and you'll notice that Jesus was not emphasizing the details of outward conduct, but *the*

manner in which we approach God. The external behavior is important, certainly; but the *inward attitude* with which we come before God is more important. The tax collector and the younger brother made a lot of mistakes, but they humbled themselves and came clean before their fathers. The Pharisee and the older brother, on the other hand, were proud of their performances, confident that their own goodness had earned their way in.

Here's the bottom line: “Doing the will of the Father” *first* requires that we cleanse our hearts of all the stubbornness, pride, and smug self-righteousness that prevents us from coming into the presence of God. This humbling of the heart is the one act of obedience without which all the others are meaningless.

Then, having fixed what's broken on the *inside*, a remarkable thing will happen: what's on the *outside* will begin to undergo a natural and gradual transformation into a life of genuine purity, as an outgrowth of the new heart. We are prepared for heaven, not by our superior achievement, but by the power of God's grace working in the inner man.

– David King