

STREET WISE 2: WHO'S IN HEAVEN?

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:43, NIV)

FORGIVE THE CLICHÉ, but if you’ve heard it once in the past 18 months or so, you’ve heard it a thousand times: “Arnie is smiling down on what’s happening here today.” If we’re talking of Tiger Woods, the same sentiment gets extended to his father, Earl, who died in 2006. Through the years, we’ve heard it of many favorites who have passed away, just as you’ve heard it in your family circles, with reference to beloved relatives no longer with us. In fact, you hear it of almost everyone. Which sure makes you wonder—is anyone *not* in heaven?

As we take up the many spiritual references you hear on the street, this one likely tops the list in terms of frequency. It’s one of many theological stabs in the dark that bear a common thread: strong with sentiment but lacking any serious dive into the Scriptures. In this case, that sentiment comes with a dark-clouded background, because no one wants to be the bad guy who has to lay bare the fact that your closest loved one may not be with God today.

But when we take that dive into the Word of God, we cannot escape the fact that the murky question of life after death that runs through the Old Testament (maybe you’re familiar with Sheol) is replaced by some rather stark lines in the New Testament, beginning with Jesus himself.

In John 14, the disciples engaged Jesus in a conversation about the way to the Father’s house, which was another way of saying everlasting life in God’s presence. Jesus answered them absolutely, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Philip pressed him, “Just show us the Father and that will be enough,” to which Jesus replied, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?”

This passage should strike us. Many of us, too, have been with Jesus for a long time, yet we let the sentiment of the street cause us to question whether Jesus is all there is, whether Jesus is all we need. He is. And the life of the apostles as we see them played out in Acts confirms this: Why preach and die for the exclusivity of Jesus if any old way will get you to God? Friends, we are not drawing lines when we make this clear for others; we are only tracing the line Jesus has already drawn.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. In introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/hXARenkZhi>

Opening questions Have you ever wondered whether Arnold Palmer or Earl Woods is in heaven, or have you taken this for granted? • Who is someone personally you most desire to see in heaven?

READING Acts 16:25-31; Acts 4:8-12; Acts 10:1-6 & 23-43

Belief and salvation (Acts 16)
 When Paul and Silas assist their own jailer when an earthquake throws the prison doors open, they answer his question by telling him how he may be saved. What is their answer? What is he wanting to be saved from?

The exclusivity of Jesus (Acts 4)
 Peter’s words about salvation coming through Christ alone were given without equivocation. How does this sit with you? Are you willing to speak this firmly when explaining why you believe in Jesus?

Good men and salvation through Jesus (Acts 10)
 Cornelius was a good man who believed in God, yet he still needed Jesus for forgiveness of sins, as we read in verse 43. Who are “good people” you know who still need Jesus? How might God use you to reach them?
