

Kids Say the Darndest Things: A Review of the Book, “Heaven is for Real”

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: I have not read the book, *Heaven is for Real*, and don’t intend to waste God’s money or time in doing so after reading Dr. Winston’s accurate analysis.

Art Linkletter was correct, “Kids, say the darndest things.” He asked one young boy, “Who is the most important man in the America?” The boy replied, “George Washington.” Next, Art asked, “Is he married?” The boy said, “Yes, to Miss America.”

On another occasion he quizzed a little boy, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The lad replied, “a bus driver and a pilot.” He was then asked, “What would you say if all four engines went out in your plane.” The six year old replied, “Our Father who art in Heaven...”

These responses are cute and entertaining, without guile and harmless. However, there is another young man making certain claims about Heaven that may not be so cute or harmless. His name is Colton Burpo. He is the subject of the runaway best seller, “Heaven is for Real.” It is the story of a four-year-olds “visit” to Heaven. Published in early November it has already sold over one million copies.

People are passionate about the book. Many have commented that they “could not put it down,” or “they were given new hope.” Brady Boyd, Senior Pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs said, “It will make earth more meaningful and the future more hopeful.” In a recent edition of USA Today (3/31/2011), the publisher, Matt Baugher, was not slight in his praise of it saying, “This is one of those books – an authentic, astounding, supernatural look at the other side of the veil from the trusted voice of a young boy.”

Now, one would not for a moment think that George Washington was married to Miss America or the restart protocol for airplane engines began with the “Disciples’ Prayer,” yet millions of believers are unquestionably taking in the four-year-olds vision of Heaven. In short, up until now I have not found anyone willing to question the assertion of young Colton.

Now at the risk of appearing a bully and taking on a four-year-old (I do like children. I even have one of my own of whom I am most proud!), I find the book utterly unconvincing, but more importantly, unscriptural. In short, I believe Heaven is for real, but this book is not.

The Story Begins...

Todd Burpo, a Wesleyan pastor and Colton’s father, recounts interactions with his son concerning what Heaven is like. (Although Colton did not die, the elder Burpo believes like the Apostle Paul, Colton visited Heaven while in surgery.) But in almost every instance, either Colton or Todd gets it wrong. Their assertions, simply put, do not align with Scripture.

Published in November 2010, the book spends the first fifty pages recounting Colton’s sickness and surgery. What his father at first thought was the stomach flu turned out to be something much more severe. Todd, his Dad, began to think it was appendicitis since there was a family history, but one of the first doctors did not think so because of his blood work.

Colton was not improving in the Imperial Hospital, their hometown. Todd and Sonja decided to take their son to the Great Plains Regional Medical Center in North Platte. The doctor there ordered a CT

scan, which revealed a ruptured appendix needing immediate emergency surgery. The boy's life was saved by this surgery.

Colton spent another week recovering from the emergency appendectomy. Just as they were prepared to take him home, they found "new pockets of infection in Colton's abdomen," p. 48. The doctors were not optimistic. They suggested taking Colton to Denver's Children's Hospital. But the prayers of Christians back in Imperial averted this. Colton began to dramatically and quickly improve enough to go home.

It was not long after this that Colton began talking about Heaven and the afterlife. It began when, like most young boys, he got into a "tug-of-war over some toys," p. 56. His dad told him he had to "treat people better than that," p. 56. To which Colton replied, "Yeah, I know, Dad. Jesus told me I had to be nice," p. 56. Thus began a number of assertions from Colton Burpo's three - minutes in Heaven, p. 76.

According to the younger Burpo he:

·Had angels sing "Jesus Loves Me," and "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho," p. xviii, Was exhorted by Jesus, "Jesus told me I had to be nice," p. 56, Met John the Baptist, p. 64, Petted Jesus' horse, p. 63, Met and sat in Jesus' lap, p. xix, Saw the "markers" on Jesus - the nail scarred feet and hands, p. 67, Did homework assigned by Jesus with other children, p. 72, Grew a pair of wings ("really little" ones), p. 87, Noted that all in Heaven except Jesus have wings, p. 72, Met his great grandfather, "Pop," p. 86, Met his still born sister, p. 94, Saw God's Throne and Jesus' Throne to the right, p. 100, Saw the Angel Gabriel who sits on God's left and is "really nice," p. 101, Had a "little chair" brought in so he could sit next to the Holy Spirit, p. 102, Describes the Holy Spirit as "kind of blue" in color, p. 103, Reminded his dad, that Jesus "really loves the children," p. 106, Revealed that Jesus "died on the cross so we could go see his Dad," p.111, Revealed that "Jesus shoots down power for Daddy when he is talking" (preaching), p. 125, Was adamant there were "swords in Heaven," p. 132, Angels "carry swords so they can keep Satan out of Heaven," p. 133, Saw Satan, p. 134, Predicts a coming war that will "destroy this world" in which "Jesus and the angels and the good people are going to fight against Satan and the monsters and the bad people."...although the women and the children got to stand back and watch," p. 136, Said his Dad would fight these "monsters" with a "sword or a bow and arrow," p. 138,

What are we to make of these assertions? Well, I find them unconvincing but more importantly, unscriptural. In short, I believe Heaven is for real, but not this book!

Almost every significant assertion concerning Heaven made in this book deviates from Scripture. You would think that Todd Burpo would take upon himself the pastoral mantle and gently correct his son's aberrant views. After all he says, "As a pastor, I've always been very conscious about what I share about Heaven from the pulpit, (although he seems less careful what he shares with the world in a book) and I still am. I teach what I find in Scripture," p. 149. If this is the case, the elder Burpo needs to spend more time in the Scripture, or before publishing the supposed Heavenly recollections of a four-year-old, he should have examined "the Scriptures to see if these things were so," Acts 17:11.

When Burpo's version of Heaven is compared to the Bible's version, "It is weighed and found wanting," Dan. 5:27. In almost every instance either Colton or his Dad get it wrong. Let me point out a few.

Jesus' clothing

He says Jesus' "clothes were white," p. 65, but the only one in Heaven who is not clothed in white is

our Lord. His robe is "dipped in blood," Rev 19:13. The word for dip is "bapto." This is the word from which we get the word baptize. I would think this might stand out to a four-year-old.

Jesus' Sash

Burpo does get it right that Jesus wears a Sash, but he gets the color wrong. Burpo says, "it was purple," p. 65. The Bible says, "girded across his chest was a golden sash," Rev 1:13. Surely the elder Burpo has read John's stirring vision of Jesus in Revelation One. Would this have not lead him to wonder if Colton was not "making things up." Now you may argue that Jesus has many sashes and just chose to wear the purple one that day, but this is the weakest of arguments, an argument from silence.

Jesus' Horse

Burpo says that Jesus has a horse, "a rainbow horse.... There 's lots of colors," p. 63. Again, he got the horse part right, but not the color. The Bible says it is a "white horse," Rev 19:11. Again you might weakly argue that Jesus had more than one horse, but John tells us the horse Jesus has is white. At this point, would not Pastor Burpo begin to think his son has an overactive imagination? I mean a rainbow horse?

Jesus' Eyes

Burpo is fascinated with Jesus' eyes. "His eyes are so pretty," p. 144. In fact, throughout the book the Burpo's show Colton several paintings of Jesus asking him if this is what Jesus looks like. He rejects them all. Then one day Pastor Burpo received an e - mail about a CNN report on a young Lithuanian girl by the name of Akiane Kramarik, a child prodigy in music and painting. She, too, had visited Heaven and put her thoughts on canvas.

On the computer Todd views a painting of Jesus Akiane did when she was eight, p. 144. Todd describes the eyes as "striking – a clear, greenish blue under bold, dark brows- with half the face in shadow," p. 144. So he called Colton and asked him "What's wrong with this one," p. 145? To which Colton replied, "Dad, that one is right."

However, the Bible says, "His eyes are like a flame of fire," Rev 1:14. Again, I would think a four-year-old would certainly remember meeting an individual whose eyes were like flames of fire. I mean that would be unique.

Humans with wings

Perhaps one of the more perplexing and odd pronouncements in the book is that in Heaven "everybody's got wingsall except for Jesus," p. 72.

Humans are never depicted with wings in the Scripture. The Cherubim have wings, (Ex 25:20), the Seraphim have wings (Isa 6:2), the four great beasts of Dan. 7 have wings, and the four living creatures have wings (Rev 4:8). Nowhere in the Bible are humans either depicted with or predicted to have wings. The Bible nowhere teaches this kind of metamorphosis. In fact, just the opposite is stated, with a one to one correspondence to our bodies here on earth.

We will receive at some future date a resurrection body, 1 Cor. 15:12-32. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that like angels we have wings. In other words, if Colton is correct, we have additional revelation about Heaven from a four-year-old.

This would not be good for the Burpo's! Colton is perilously close to bringing upon himself the curse

of Revelation. "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book", Rev. 22:18-19. We are prohibited from adding to the book of Revelation, which mostly speaks of Heaven. Yet the Burpo's are coming dangerously close to doing so in this book, and those who are promoting and recommending the book must therefore have some culpability. Scary thought!

No Time in Heaven

In trying to figure out how his son could have experienced so much in 180 seconds, Pastor Burpo speculates that there must not be time in Heaven. His support for this is 2 Pet. 3:8 which states "with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Big problem: this verse is not speaking of Heaven in any way. Its focus is the patience of God. It points out the delay in winding up the ages is not, from God's perspective, a long period. After all, He is The Eternal God, Deut. 33:27. (The idea of no time in Heaven comes from a misleading translation of Rev. 10:6, which says, "there should be time no longer." However most other translations translate it "there will be no more delay.")

The Bible actually does speak of time in Heaven. As Randy Alcorn, in arguably the best book on Heaven entitled, "Heaven," says the Bible "contains many...evidences of time in Heaven," (Heaven, Randy Alcorn, p. 259). The Martyrs are told to wait a little while longer, Rev. 6:10-11. People serve God night and day, Rev. 7:15. In Rev. 8:1 there is silence in Heaven for about thirty minutes. There are many other instances of time and progress in Heaven (See Alcorn). This time the elder Burpo is seemingly ignorant of time in Heaven.

No Sun in Heaven

Pastor Burpo, like many Christians, assumes that there will be no sun in Heaven. This comes from a cursory reading of two Bible passages:

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Rev. 21:23)

And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:5)

Please notice that neither of these passages states there will be no sun. Rather they say the New Jerusalem will not need light from the sun or moon, because God is dwelling there, and His glory outshines the celestial orbs in that city. This does not at all mean the absence of the sun in the New Heavens and New Earth. Again, this book misstates and/or misrepresents Scripture.

New Bodies in Heaven

Colton tells his dad, "Jesus told me if you don't go to Heaven, you don't get a new body." Now while it is true that at some time all who have gone to Heaven will get a new, glorified, resurrection body, it is not true that only those who go to Heaven get a new body. Non-Christians will be resurrected and will get a body different in composition than the one that went into the grave, because it will enable their spirits to live in "everlasting contempt," Dan. 12:4. They will gain a resurrection body that will allow them to experience judgment, John 5:24. This body will enable the soul and spirit, the immaterial part of mankind to exist in the Lake of Fire forever, Rev. 20:11-15.

Heavenly Guards

There is this odd interchange between Colton and his mother in the chapter "Swords of the Angels." He tells her "the angels carry swords so they can keep Satan out of Heaven," p. 133. The only problem is Satan has access to Heaven until he is thrown into the Lake of Fire, Rev. 20:10. Satan is called the "accuser of our brethren...who accuses them before our God night and day." Again, the elder Burpo needs to sit down with the younger Burpo and explain the Bible to him. Satan is not kept out of Heaven. Why would Jesus or someone else in Heaven lie about this? It is clear from Scripture that up until the Lake of Fire Satan has access to the throne of God [Pastor Kevin Lea – actually Satan loses access in Revelation 12].

Now, in connection with this, there is the curious incident in the same chapter where Pastor Burpo asks his son if he saw Satan. The young boy says he did, p.134. The Pastor, who seems fascinated with what everyone in Heaven looks like, asks his son what Satan looked like. In his dad's words, "Colton's body went rigid, he grimaced, and his eyes narrowed to a squint. He stopped talking. I mean, he absolutely shut down...."

Three observations, if the angels are given swords to keep Satan out of Heaven, they must need to be better trained. Secondly, why would they have to keep Satan out of Heaven when the Almighty has given him access? And thirdly, is this incident the tease for a sequel, Hell is for Real?

Armageddon?

In the chapter, The Coming War, Colton tells his dad, "There's going to be a war, and it's going to destroy this world. Jesus and the angels and the good people are going to fight against Satan and the monsters and the bad people. I saw it.... In Heaven, the women and the children got to stand back and watch. So, I stood back and watched.... But the men, they had to fight. And Dad I watched you. You have to fight too."

I really do not know where to start on this one. I assume the war he refers to is what the Bible calls Armageddon. It is found in Revelation 19. Now, are we to assume that while in Heaven, this four-year old got a sneak preview of the battle? I know John did, but he was a Christ ordained Apostle. Did Colton actually see it? There is something that doesn't ring true about Jesus disclosing this battle to a four-year-old. In fact, due to the graphic nature of this battle, Colton would not even be allowed into a theatre on earth showing it. It would certainly be rated over his age. It is a horrible, gruesome, bloody, gory battle scene. Certainly it would traumatize any four-year-old to watch such carnage. Why would Jesus show this to a four-year-old?

Next, once again, the Burpos' vision of Armageddon does not align with Scripture. He says the good people (I take that to be the Saints in Heaven) are "going to fight against Satan and the monsters and the bad people," p. 136. The good people, minus the women and children who "stood back and watched," but the Bible does not exclude women and children. It says "and the armies which are in Heaven, clothed in fine linen white and clean, were following him on white horses," Rev. 19:14. There is no mention of the army being only adult males. Again, this is getting very close to the "adding to these words" curse found in Rev. 22:18-19.

Thirdly, Colton says that his dad is going to fight in this battle. Wrong again. His dad along with all the Saints, shall return with Christ, but it is Christ and Him alone who slays them, Rev. 19:21. He does not need our help. We merely get to witness this glorious triumph of Faithful and True, Rev. 19:11. Once again the Burpo's seem to be adding to the "words of prophecy." At this point, one wonders if Pastor Todd has ever read the book of Revelation. Even if he had, why in the world would he not go back and scour it to see if what the younger Burpo has said is true? I can only conclude he did not, or cared not, since he allowed these blatant errors to be published as non-fiction.

Not the Biblical Heaven

I cannot understand why the elder Burpo, the pastor of Crossroads Wesleyan Church in Imperial, Kansas, would not correct his son's skewed perceptions of Heaven. Why would a loving father not kindly and gently correct the son's errors? Was it ignorance on his part? Was it wanting to believe what his four-year-old was telling him was true? Was it something that simply got out of hand? Or could it have been something else? I have no way of knowing. However, of one thing I am fairly certain, Colton Burpo never visited or had a vision of Heaven. If he had, there would not be so many blatant errors, discrepancies, and plain silliness.

Let me illustrate. If I described a visit I had to the U.S. Capitol in Washington State, where I also visited the Red House and saw all six branches of Congress, and that I had met the President who was the first native Indian to serve as President, and the five U.S. Justices who were all women, you would probably conclude that I had never visited the Capitol. You would be correct.

There is no other conclusion one can logically and Biblically come to upon reading "Heaven is for Real." Colton never left this earth!

A final Word

Even more unsettling than the unscriptural assertions, is what is missing in the book – a clear Gospel presentation. If you write a book about Heaven, why would you not conclude it showing how to get to Heaven?

First, surely if Jesus took the time to assign work for Colton to do, why would He not ask him to memorize a Gospel presentation that he could take back to earth with him. (Even children understand the "Wordless Book.") The book of Revelation ends with this glorious and Grace based offer of eternal salvation in Heaven. "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost," Rev. 22:17. Jesus said He came "to seek and save that which was lost," Luke 19:10. John said he wrote his Gospel that you might believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life in His Name," John 20:30. Surely this same Jesus (Heb. 13:8) would have given Colton a Gospel message.

The closest the young Colton comes to explaining the Gospel is when he tells his dad, that Jesus "died on the cross so we could go see his Dad," p.111. He was also concerned that a gentleman died, without Jesus in his heart, p.57 & 59. This is hardly enough information to insure the sinner safe passage to Heaven. There is no mention of sin, repentance, faith or any other idea commonly associated with a Gospel presentation.

Even if Jesus did not have time in the three minutes Colton spent in Heaven to school him in the Gospel, why did Pastor Todd not add one in the book as an appendix? Again, how about the "Wordless Book," as a starting place? Originated with the famous London expositor, C. H. Spurgeon, it consists of a "book" with different colored pages. Black stood for our sin. Red stood for His blood. Blue stood for our faith. White stood for perfect righteousness. Gold stood for Heaven. The Burpo's could have included it in the book but they did not

I even went to their website (Heavenisforreal.net) hoping that this horrible omission might be corrected. Sadly, it was not. I could buy their book online, but not know how to receive the Free Gift of Salvation that our Lord bought for us. This is quite frankly shameful, shocking, and reprehensible.

There are over one-million copies in print of this book. This means that the Burpo's squandered over

one-million opportunities to present the Gospel. I would not want to stand before the nail scarred Savior and try to explain this one!

I am reminded of the sage and sober words of my friend, Todd Strandberg, of raptureready.com, "I am generally dubious of tales of Heavenly visitations. Over the years, I've heard many of them, and they tend to offer an uninspiring survey of the spiritual realm. The information is always aimed to please the viewer. If someone truly went to Heaven, they would have observations that defy our stereotypical view of Heaven." Although Todd has not read the Burpo book, this sums it up well.

Kids do say the darndest things, but in the case of "Heaven is for Real," they are not funny or cute, entertaining or edifying, and certainly not convincing or convicting. In the final analysis, the book is not compelling, but if I may say, childish. And in the end, since it is not based upon the Truth of God's word, it is confusing.

For anyone truly interested in studying Heaven, you will not find a more excellent, insightful, fascinating, informing and biblically based book, than "Heaven" by Randy Alcorn. Upon finishing it, I was longing for it.

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