

As I recently read the Facebook walls of some of my friends who were related to Shirley Rexin, I sensed the importance of family get togethers. Although Aunt Shirl never had any children, she made her nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews feel like they were her own children. The Rexin home was a meeting place for kids and adults to go swimming, enjoy a family barbecue, eat cheesy potatoes, pretzel jello, orange push ups and icecream. In the summertime it was a place where Shirley and Jerry enjoyed being together, holding hands, and watching the different types of birds with binoculars. At Christmas time, the house was very nicely decorated, as the family gathered to celebrate the birth of the Savior. Great memories of a home located on Yorkshire Drive. Family being together, hanging out, enjoying the love that was flowing in the atmosphere.

Unfortunately, on this earth, the good times just don't seem to last. Family members move to different parts of the country, and we see each other rarely. Also, there are family feuds where relatives don't talk to each other. Or there are work and other commitments that make family get together's obsolete. Finally, there is sickness and death, which makes those good times, just distant memories.

Today, I would like to talk to you about a home, that is much better than Aunt Shirl's home. This home is a place where the good times truly roll on and on. Of course I'm talking about heaven. Let's take a look at the thought today, "At Home with Her Real Father!"

When I say the word "heaven" most of us kind of put that in an "I'll think about that later" category. In our minds we have three boxes of importance of thinking about things. The first box is Urgent. For young people that would be hanging around with friends, school, and parties. The second box is Not Urgent. The third box is After I'm Dead. And heaven is in that third box. Because of that we just don't think about it much.

That is a huge mistake. Because there is no greater truth than the truth of heaven to give you perspective in life today, especially in those times when you face problems and you're going to make it through. There's no greater truth than the truth of heaven to give you the strength to make it through the tough times of life this year. There's no greater truth than the truth of heaven to help you see the great kind of life that God wants you to live. There's no greater truth than the truth of heaven to reduce anxieties in everyday life and show you significance of everyday life. So let's move heaven into the first box of importance today.

Some of you may have had your 3 or 4 year old ask you this question. It's a tough question to answer. Where in the world is heaven? If this world were filled with 1st and 2nd graders, and I asked them "Where is heaven?" what would they do? They'd point up. Heaven is up! The fact that a four year old points up when we say where is heaven, may sound simple but its one of the most significant things you can say about heaven. The word "heaven" has always had the idea of up. It has that idea in the Bible. Psalm 123:1 "*Lord, I look up to You, up to heaven, where You rule.*" Even Jesus looked up to heaven when He prayed. Mark 6:41 "*Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and looked up toward heaven and He asked God's blessing on the food.*" Heaven is up.

That doesn't mean up in the sense that it's out there somewhere beyond the orbit of Pluto. Up means higher. Higher than anything we experience on this earth. Up means beyond. Beyond anything that I can imagine on this earth. Up means above. Who amongst us does not wish, long sometimes, to live above the pain that is in this world? There's something in us that realizes this isn't right. I should be able to live above this. We will one day.

Up means where God lives. He is everywhere but there's a special sense of His presence in heaven. He is there in the most incredible way. As Shirley Rexin neared the time when she

would see Jesus face to face, she made comments like, "Its all in God's hands right now. It doesn't look good, but I'm ok. Boy, its hell to fight to stay alive. Why did she assure people she was ok. Why wasn't she scared to die? Its because she was a silent warrior whose trust was in Jesus. Ever since she was a little girl, going to church, and studying her Bible was an important part of her life. And as she studied that Word she was strengthened to face whatever challenge life dished out to her. Shirley Rexin knew that she would be ok, because Jesus was taking her by the hand and leading her safely to her heavenly home. We may not be able to celebrate her 70th birthday at the Rexin home, but we celebrate today her new birthday as she enters the Father's house.

When we talk about heaven and what it's like, where do you think most people today get their ideas of heaven and what it's like? It's not from the Bible. It's not even from great books. Most people get their ideas of heaven from movies. There's a particular picture that we usually get from movies of what heaven looks like. Just a cloudy sort of place. Why do movies picture heaven that way? They couldn't afford to picture what it really looks like! It would be a multi billion dollar set even if they could figure it out. Something we can't even imagine in our minds the greatness. How do you picture it in a movie? Just go with the clouds! People will go with that!

The problem with clouds when you look at that is it looks so boring and dull. Heaven is not some boring place where you sit around on a cloud playing a harp – choice of one of two songs: "Stairway to Heaven" or "Hey you! Get off of my cloud!" That's not what heaven is like. It is not a boring place.

Can you imagine, if you're a surfer, riding a perfect wave every single time? That's what heaven will be like. If you love nature, can you imagine a perfect sunset, a perfect waterfall? Can you imagine perfect relationships for every single relationship? That is the joy of heaven that we look forward to. Heaven is up! I don't know how to say it any more profoundly than that. That's what heaven is.

The top question that I hear people asking about heaven is Will I know? Will I be able to recognize other people in heaven? Will I recognize my loved ones in heaven? What does the Bible say about this? The answer in the Bible is yes. We will be able to recognize people in heaven. How do we know that? Jesus' disciples recognized Him when He had His glorified heavenly body. Not immediately but eventually they recognized Him. That's one indication. The Apostle Paul indicates that he will be able to recognize the people he ministered to on this earth as they will stand beside him in heaven. The indication of the Bible is yes, we will be able to recognize people. You will recognize Shirley as Shirley, like a best friend to all of us.

The second top question that people ask about our home is what will we look like? I hope a lot better than here, don't you? A lot better. The Bible answers this. Heaven is a material place where will have new bodies. True, right now, the soul of Shirley is in heaven, but soon when Jesus returns, he will resurrect this body and glorify it. The Bible says, "He will change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. Ever since Shirley was 4 years of age, she had to deal with physical problems. At age 4 her eyesight was very bad. So she had to get glasses, and deal with kids calling her 4 eyes. In addition, the past 7 years, Shirley has fought a battle against breast cancer, that ended up being state 4 spine cancer. She was a true warrior as she fought the battle to live. I never heard her complain about this battle or shake her fists at God. Jesus is going to fix this cancer laden body up. Shirley will soon have a perfect glorified body. Another way to say that is there will be no health clubs in heaven because we won't need them. Perfectly able to enjoy all that God has made. Also perfectly able

to enjoy all that God is in a way that you've never imagined. That's what heaven is going to be like.

Why did Shirley Rexin go to heaven? Was it because she showed so much love to her nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews? Was it because she went to baseball and basketball games that her family was involved in? Was it because she was such a quiet-spoken and caring woman? Was it because she went to Sunday School for 8yrs, every week, and won a Bible? No, there is only one reason, Shirley knew Jesus Christ as her Savior.

We all have this picture in our mind of waiting in this long line that snakes up to the pearly gate and we just step one step at a time up to Saint Peter who has this book. In this book is all the good things we've done, all the bad things we've done. If we've done more good than bad, if it balances out right he's going to say, Come on in. Each step we take we're sweating more and more, hoping that somehow we make it in.

But we've got the wrong picture. Because heaven is a perfect place. Because it's perfect even one imperfection will keep you out. It does keep us out. If you have even one bad thought, one wrong action, one sin in your life your entire life that's enough to keep you out of heaven. It's not a matter of balancing the books. Someone needed to wipe the slate clean for you to let us in.

That's what Jesus did. That's why Jesus came to this earth. That's why He died on the cross. To wipe your slate clean. To offer you forgiveness. That's why He's the way. So the idea of the long line? You don't have to stand in that line. Jesus gives you a fast pass out of that line. A different way in. You can know for sure, based on what He's done. Heaven is a gift of God's grace. The Bible says, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." *It is not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it.* It's not based on what you've done. The more we base our thoughts on whether we'll get into heaven or on what we've done the less sure we'll be. The more we recognize it's what Jesus did, the more security we'll have. Shirley had security, eternal security in Jesus.

Shirley was good at taking up the cause of her great nieces and nephews when they got themselves into trouble, especially Jacob. She didn't say a lot, but when she did, it registered with the adults and the kids. Likewise, Jesus Christ has come to the aid of Shirley. He takes up her cause before the Heavenly Father, and says, "This child is one I died for." This child trusts in me." As a result of this intercession, the Father in heaven has allowed Shirley to enter heaven.

Heaven, what a place. A Norwegian cruise. Dinner on a beach at St. Thomas. Watching the Tigers win a thriller game. Having breakfast at a tailgate party at MSU. Jumping in the pool on a 90 degree day, playing store and roller skating as kids. When the memory ends, realize, "That was just a taste. That was just a taste of what I'm going to enjoy forever in eternity."

I don't know how to picture this any better than this. A miniature Hershey bar is a picture of the joys God gives us on this earth. A king size Hershey bar is a picture of the joys God gives us in heaven. One is just taste of the other. The taste makes me look forward to the great joys I'm going to enjoy for eternity.

Look forward with every taste of joy that God gives you to the great joy He's going to give you in heaven. This idea that earth is more fun than heaven, this thing you get from movies where angels come back to earth so they can enjoy things more relationships and food and all those things. That's ridiculous. The joys in heaven are multiplied. Incredibly more than you and I could ever imagine from what we experience on this earth. So today, let's Celebrate with Shirley today. Instead of saying, "Happy Birthday Shirley, let's say, "Happy Heavenday Shirley.