

Home

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During the Civil War, and after the battle at Shiloh, a boat traveled down the Tennessee River carrying wounded soldiers toward a place where they could rest and recover. A man went about the deck giving the wounded a drink of water. At length he came to an injured soldier who made no answer when he spoke to him, so he told the surgeon about him.

The surgeon looked at the soldier and said, "He cannot recover. He has lost too much blood."

The first man said, "I can't find out his name, and it seems a pity to let him die without knowing who he is. Don't you think we can bring him to?"

At the surgeon's direction the man gave the wounded soldier a little water and brandy. As he was doing this he asked another soldier standing by if he knew the boy's name.

The soldier answered, "I do. He is my friend. His name is William Clark, and he has a widowed mother."

Presently, the young man opened his eyes, and the first man said to him, "William, do you know where you are?"

Still dazed, the young man looked around for a moment. Then he said, "Oh, yes, I'm on my way home to mother."

"Yes, you are on your way home, William," the first man said, "but the surgeon says you won't reach your earthly home. I thought I'd like to ask you if you have any message for your mother?"

At that the young man's face strengthened and he answered, "Yes, tell my mother that I died trusting in Jesus."

- And so it is for all of us that if you can't reach your earthly home, be sure that you have a heavenly home—where you'll be welcome.

Mingled with thoughts of returning home are feelings that at home we will find rest and relief from the injuries and wounds of life, and respite from its rigors and troubles. After Shiloh, William Clark evidently saw his home as the place of comfort where he might regain his health. When he realized that was not to be, he reverted to the eternal home where every burden is lifted, and every pain is relieved.

The Christian should never forget where his home is. He may be in a land convulsed by war, or in a land blessed with peace; nevertheless, he is a sojourner. The Christian's experience is like that of the sons of Israel as they suffered captivity in a strange land beside the Euphrates. The Psalmist lamented in Psalm 137,

BY the rivers of Babylon,

There we sat down and wept,

When we remembered Zion.

2 Upon the willows in the midst of it

We hung our harps.

3 For there our captors demanded of us songs,

And our tormentors mirth, *saying*, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

4 How can we sing the LORD’S song

In a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

May my right hand forget *her* skill.

6 May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,

If I do not remember you,

If I do not exalt Jerusalem

Above my chief joy.¹

The heavenly Jerusalem is the Christian’s home.

Solomon spoke of man’s eternal home in the book of Ecclesiastes,

1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them": 2 While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened, And the clouds do not return after the rain; 3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim; 4 When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird, And all the daughters of music are brought low; 5 Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. Eccl. 12:1-5.

The Bible tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

13 ... died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Hebrews 11:13.

What promises were these? They did not receive them during their earthly pilgrimage. They only saw them afar off, and greeted them as the wanderer greets his longed-for home, even when he comes in sight of it at a distance drawing himself it were, magnetically, and embracing with inward love that which is yet far off. They were like the psalmist who wrote in Psalm 84,

1 How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!

2 My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

¹ Scripture quotations: *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself, Where she may lay her young; Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God.

4 Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You.

C. E. Macartney wrote,

"Years ago people brought skylarks from England, and set them loose in one of the eastern sections of the United States. The birds found a home. Soon their numbers increased. One day an ornithologist came across some of them. Interested, he listened to the song of the emigrant birds. As he listened he saw an Irish laboring man suddenly stop, take off his cap, and turn his face skyward. On his countenance he had a look of surprise. The joy of pleasant memory overspread his face as he listened to the song of a bird that he had heard in his youth. He had heard the larks sing in Ireland. To the bird expert it was only a scientific observation, but for the Irishman it was the sound of home."²

You love the land in which you live, but is it your home? Is it that permanent dwelling you long for? Despite its familiarity and its beauty do you see it as your perpetual and everlasting abode? Or, do you see it as the place where you live—for now, a place that you expect to abandon one day?

As it was with the Irishman and the skylarks, so it is for the Christian and the scriptures. In the gospel of Christ there is the song that tell us of our heavenly home. It is by love that toward that home we are prompted and driven, As Milligan wrote,

... by one of the strongest and deepest natural instincts of the human heart. And hence, though many may, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, wander about as pilgrims and sojourners for awhile, it is always with a view of securing a permanent home somewhere.³

The Hebrew writer said,

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:14-16.

Some of us have migrated to our present homes from other states of the United States, others have migrated from other countries. Many of us are like Abd Er Rahman.

Abd Er Rahman was the first Caliph of Cordova, Spain, There, thousands of miles from his native haunts along the banks of the River Euphrates, the Moslem prince set up his kingdom and ruled over the conquered Spaniards. But always he was homesick for Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers). He had a palm tree brought to him and planted in the courtyard of the palace at Cordova, to remind him of his home. Never could he gaze upon that palm tree without bursting into tears.⁴

² Clarence. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, Abingdon Press, New York, Nashville, 1946, p. 168.

³ R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary, Epistle to the Hebrews*, Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, 1961, p. 312.

⁴ *Ibid.*, C. E. Macartney, p. 168.

The palm tree was the reminder to the caliph, but the Lord himself gave us our reminder, the reminder that our citizenship is in another country, that our allegiance is to another king, that our home is in another place. On the night he was betrayed, the Lord

23 ... took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

So we eat the bread and we drink from the cup, and we remember. And as Paul said to the Corinthians,

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

In this life we look for friends, and find only a few. Regrettably, the world is not our home and many of the people who belong to it are not our friends.

The Roman Emperor Vespasian began the construction of the Coliseum but his son, Titus, finished it. Titus also conquered the Jews. The Romans built the Coliseum to satisfy their lust for the spectacular and the exciting, for bloodshed and for cruelty. Covering five acres of ground, the colossal bowl could accommodate eighty-five thousand of the populace of Rome. Built in the shape of an ellipse, and founded on eighty acres, it rose to the height of 160 feet. The outside consisted of four rows of columns, representing successive orders of architecture—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—and it was encrusted with marble and decorated with statues. Inside, tiers of stone benches rose one above the other. Huge canopies could be spread over the seats to protect the spectators from rain and sun. Sixty-four exits, or vomitories, in a short time admitted or poured forth the blood-loving throngs. And to this day you can see the Roman numerals on fragments of the arches showing the number of the entrance corresponding to the ticket held by the patron.

C. E. Macartney said of the Coliseum,

...gushing fountains cooled and refreshed the air and aromatics diffused a pleasant odor to offset that of the wild beasts. The open space in the center was called the arena, from the Latin word for the sand with which it was carefully overlaid. Under the lowest tier of benches were the dens of the wild beasts, for which the whole earth had been ransacked, and side by side with them

the gloomy caverns where the prisoners and martyrs spent their last hours before they were thrust forth into the blazing arena to fight with beasts."⁵

When Domitian, the son of Titus, came to the throne he launched a bitter persecution against Christians. His hatred caused the arrest of thousands, many of whom were put to death by torture. Others were sacrificed to wild beasts in the arena of the Coliseum."⁶

For Christians, then and now, the world holds nothing but "Coliseums" in one form or another, because the world knows nothing but its lust for pleasure, its scorn and hatred of a just and quiet life, and its prideful boasting in towers and Coliseums, in palaces and glittering images. The world knows Christians only as impediments, as outsiders saying untactful and discomfoting things.

Peter wrote in his first letter,

9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. I Peter 2:9-12.

When the ten thousand Greeks fought their way out of Persia the one hope that sustained them and made them brave in battle was the thought of reaching the sea toward which they were marching. For when they reached the sea they knew they would not be far from home. The sea was the hope that, like a banner, floated before them as they fought and marched. Let the thought of the soul's true home be often in your mind. Think on its joys, its powers, its enterprises, its fountains of knowledge, its happiness, its absolute harmony with the soul's deepest desires, think of catching up the broken threads again and finishing what we began here. Think of the company of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect, the Lamb on the throne, and those thrilling reunions.⁷ And as Henry Alford wrote,

"O then what raptured greetings
On Canaan's happy shore,
What knitting severed friendships up
Where partings are no more."

As Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 33,

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

⁵ Ibid., C. E. Macartney, p. 63.

⁶ Robert H. Brumback, *History of the church through the ages*, Mission Messenger, St. Louis, p. 14.

⁷ In the spirit of Macartney.

- 18 Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?"
- 19 You will not see a fierce people, A people of obscure speech, beyond perception, Of a stammering tongue that you cannot understand.
- 20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, A tabernacle that will not be taken down; Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, Nor will any of its cords be broken.
- 21 But there the majestic LORD will be for us
A place of broad rivers and streams, In which no galley with oars will sail, Nor majestic ships pass by
- 22 (For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us); Isaiah 33:14-22.

Let heaven be on your mind.

And remember what the Lord Himself said,

- 1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." John 14:1-3.

The Athenians used to have a race in which the runners carried lighted torches. The victors who were crowned were those who arrived at the goal with their torches still burning. May you come to your goal—reach the end of your journey—with your torch still burning.

Let home be on your mind.