

“GOD LOVES YOU AND WANTS YOU WITH HIM FOREVER!”

by Rom A. Pegram (5/27/18)

One of the most delightful concepts in human experience is the idea of ‘home.’ Even the word ‘home’ suggests memories of rest, security, and the presence of those we love the most...

I think back to some ‘homes’ that’ve meant a great deal to me. For whatever reason, I remember fondly the parsonage in South Wayne and have enjoyed taking family back to see it, to reminisce, and so forth. My brother and I had a bedroom window that overlooked the roof of the front porch. You can just imagine what a temptation that was! Of course, we’d climb through our window—even though we weren’t supposed to, out onto the roof of the front porch, and jump down into the shrubs that lined the porch in the front of the house. I’m not sure they ever recovered from all that activity...

But, the things I remember most about that house was the love that was there—the Christmas & Thanksgiving dinners, with both friends and family who were over to eat and share in the conversation. Then there was the story-telling, the laughter, and the occasional argument—all a part of the place we called ‘home’...

No matter where my parents lived, even when we’d grown and moved into our own homes, *their place*—wherever it was geographically—was always known as ‘home.’ It was where our parents were. It was where those who loved us most (or the longest) lived. And it was there we always continued to return—to go back to. ‘Home’ was truly like a magnet for all of us...

Today, we’re like a nation of nomads. On the average, we make 11.7 moves in a lifetime! Can you believe that? Something within us, however, always looks back. *Love always pulls us home.* And the same should be true of our eternal home—a place just as real (if not more) than the homes we remember from growing up. Just listen to what Jesus says about the reality of our eternal ‘home’ (John 14:1-4, NLT)...

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.”

The truth is, no matter how many times I’ve moved in this life ... *I know I have at least one more move left.* No matter how much I love these earthly dwellings, no matter how cozy they’ve been—*this last move will redefine my idea of ‘home.’* It’ll be my forever home. Far from ‘downsizing’ as many do when they get older, this time I’ll be ‘upsizing’—moving to a place where my heavenly Father can gather all of us together for a heavenly reunion that will never end! And there’s something else that’s incredibly special about heaven, too...

If you’re familiar with the novel *Jane Eyre*, you know it’s the story of a lonely heroine that has really never had a place she could call ‘home.’ She’s never had a person in her

life who loved her enough to know who she truly was ... that is until she met Edward Rochester. Her relationship with her employer developed into love. But when she had to leave for a few weeks to see a dying relative, Edward didn't want her to leave, fearing she wouldn't return. 'Her reply? "Wherever you are—dear Edward—is my home."

And that's the message Jesus was communicating to his disciples in John 14. *Wherever he is, that's going to be 'home.'* As you review the long dialogue in the Upper Room, you can't help but notice the intimacy with which Jesus addresses his closest friends, even as he was facing the cross. Jesus is telling us he loves us, and that the time will come when we will never be apart. Wherever he is, that's our 'home' ... That's first and foremost about heaven. But, here're some other things you need to know about our eternal 'home'—that place of God's eternal love: *First, it is...*

A Place of Ultimate Residence. John 14:1-3 says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. ² There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³ When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am."

I read recently about a law firm that sent flowers to an associate in another city to celebrate their new offices there. Through some mix-up, however, the card that accompanied the flowers read "Deepest Sympathy." When the florist was informed of their mistake, realizing two cards had been switched, he exclaimed: "Oh no! That means the card that went to the funeral home read 'Congratulations on your new location!'"

Now, folks, we can understand the florist's embarrassment, but I'd also like to think that the second card was *not* inappropriate! *Congratulations are due to anyone who is finally on their way to the place of deepest joy!* But, do we always think like that? It seems we expend a great deal of prayer keeping our loved ones from it...

But, how can we ever treat heaven as some sort of consolation prize for having to leave this earthly life? The problem, more often than not, is that we have a very weak idea of the reality of heaven—*almost as if it's not a real place at all.* But, heaven isn't like that. It's a destination so real that our present reality will seem like a fairy tale! Let me go on: Our eternal reality in the presence of God's love will also be...

A Place of Ultimate Rejoicing. In Psalm 16:11 (NLT), King David speaks to God in this way: "You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." I don't know; does that sound like a dreadful place to you?

Huckleberry Finn didn't think much of heaven. Did you know that? In the opening chapter of Mark Twain's classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck is living with the spinster Miss Watson, a starchy, crabby old woman who is bent on Huck's reform. She's going to knock the wilderness out of the boy if it's the last thing she does, using of course the lethal weapon of 'enforced religion.' She bludgeons him with Bible verses.

She threatens him with hell. And she coaxes him with heaven ... sort of. In his streetwise, cocky, cock-eyed way, Huck tells us what he thinks of all that:

“She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it ... I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”

Twain here, of course, is writing satire ... but he touches a real nerve. We’ve all met people who feel exactly that way. Many non-believers who don’t have a good grasp on the reality of heaven would simply say, “Booooooring!” And, unfortunately, the church too often has painted a picture of heaven that makes even hell look better; what an injustice to the mission we’re supposed to be on!

Folks, Randy Alcorn reminds us of this: “All that is admirable and fascinating in human beings comes from their creator.” You can make sure that neither God nor heaven will be boring—and neither will you! The transformation to heaven will not take away who you are, but will remove the flaws, weaknesses, and incapacities you inherited from the Fall (sin). Even if you’re presently the dullest, most boring individual in the neighborhood, in heaven you’ll be dynamic! *It’s a place of ultimate rejoicing!* Then,

A Place of Ultimate Recognition. 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NLT) reminds us, “Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.”

One of the questions I get asked the most about heaven is this: “Will we know one another in heaven?” And the answer, folks, is a resounding ‘YES!’

- After his resurrection, Jesus’ disciples recognized him right away; they believed so much in this reality that they all willingly died as martyrs defending the reality of his resurrection ‘recognizable’ body...
- When Moses and Elijah appeared out of heaven to stand with Jesus at his transfiguration, the disciples who were there recognized both the OT saints, even though they’d never seen them before...

When Jesus describes heaven in Matthew 8, he speaks of it as being a real place with real, identifiable people present (Matt. 8:11, NLT): “And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Why would God be so intentional about molding who we are in this life, only to scrap the whole thing in the life to come? I like the way Pastor Tony Evans put it one day when a woman asked him, “Pastor, will we know each other in heaven?” And Tony smiled and replied, “I would say that we won’t really know each other *until* we get to heaven.” Again, in heaven, we will be fully what God intended for us to be! *Heaven will be a place of ultimate recognition...* Also, it will be...

A Place of Ultimate Relationships. Think of this: In heaven, our relationships won't be limited to eras of time or boundaries of territory. We'll be able to speak to people from every era of history—have friendships with both the ancients and those far in our future. I can't wait to speak with the Apostle Paul, and Moses, and David, and Daniel ... and most of all, be in the presence of our Heavenly Father and Jesus; also, it will be...

A Place of Ultimate Responsibility. This epitaph describes what some people *think* of heaven:

Here lies a poor woman who always was tired,
 For she lived in a place where help wasn't hired.
 Her last words on earth were, "Dear friends, I am going
 Where washing ain't done, nor sweeping, nor sewing;
 And everything there is exact to my wishes,
 For where they don't eat, there's no washing of dishes.
 Don't weep for me now, don't weep for me ever;
 For I'm going to do nothing forever and ever.

That's sounds more like a nursing home, doesn't it, than a biblical idea of heaven? I suppose it's natural for us to think of heaven as a place of rest. But, when we enter heaven, we're not put on a heavenly Social Security list. On the contrary, the Bible speaks a great deal about *service* in heaven (see Revelation 7:15, 19:5, 22:3). It'll be a working environment free from restrictions of time, money, greed, lack of energy, frustration, and even mistakes. It'll be doing what we love ... to the glory of God ... whose love will absolutely permeate the place! Folks, not only does God want us with him forever, but God wants us to find immense JOY and satisfaction in our new home. And finally, heaven will be...

A Place of Ultimate Reality. Have you ever had a strong inner sense, in your life, that there must be more? I believe that's the 'groaning' that's talked about in scripture (2 Cor. 5:2, 8)—that desire to be all God wants us to be, to have all God wants us to have; *heaven is the prescription for that craving of our spirits* ... and it's only in heaven, in the presence of God's eternal love, that we'll have those deepest longings of our hearts fulfilled...

Folks, on the day we see him face-to-face, we'll know beyond all doubt just how much God loves us—how much he always has, and how much he always will! As we kneel in his presence, tears of joy staining our faces, we'll finally understand how much God has longed to be with us. And it is then that we'll hear those two words that every soul longs to hear above any other: "Welcome Home!"