

Christmas Morning 2016

"I Won't Be Home for Christmas"

*... for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Second Peter 1:11*

I Googled "home for Christmas," and these are four of the heart-warming headlines:

- Aer Lingus surprised 3 Irish families by bringing their loved ones home for Christmas.
- Soldier dressed as Santa comes home for Christmas to surprise his children.
- Heartwarming moment as daughter flies home for Christmas to surprise mother battling breast cancer.
- Missionary family flies home for Christmas to surprise their family.

On the *Tonight Show*, Jimmy Fallon and Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson surprised one of the show's producers on live TV by bringing her husband home for Christmas from Afghanistan.

I cried.

"I'll be Home for Christmas" is a melancholy longing we seem to share. It somehow seems wrong to not be home for Christmas.

It's probably why the song is so popular. Of course, you know that the song, made famous by Bing Crosby, is a soldier expressing his longing, knowing full well he will **not** be home for Christmas. That's why he sings, *If only in my dreams*.

We are not home for Christmas. Physically, you may have traveled to be with your loved ones; that's great. But spiritually speaking, this world is not our home.

We are, in fact, soldiers in a cosmic spiritual conflict. Until we are in Heaven, the last line of our song should reflect our embedded position on the earth, and the deep longing to be home.

Jesus let us know that He would be returning to Heaven for a time, and that while He was there, He would be preparing our permanent homes.

Joh 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

Joh 14:2 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.

Joh 14:3 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.

Our mansions will be in a gated city called the New Jerusalem. The apostle John was shown this city, "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God..." (Revelation 21:10).

The patriarch, Abraham, is an example to us of life on earth as we look forward to Heaven. He lived as a stranger, looking for "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Hebrews 11:10).

We'll be going home one day - to our mansion in the New Jerusalem.

Travel is always a big deal around the holidays. According to AAA, holiday travel will exceed all previous records in 2016, with more than 103mil Americans on the road, or in the air.

There are two, and only two, ways of getting home to Heaven.

One is by dying. We know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The moment a believer dies, he or she is immediately in Heaven.

I hope you don't think it morbid that I'm speaking to you of your death. The apostle Paul was not being morbid when he said,

Php 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Php 1:22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

Php 1:23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Death was once our fierce enemy, but it was conquered by Jesus when He died in our place, then rose from the dead promising that we, too, would live after death in Heaven in resurrection bodies.

The final destruction of death lies in the future and the fight with death continues at this present hour, but death was defeated in the past, at the cross and by the resurrection.

The other manner of entering Heaven is the Rapture of the church. Paul said,

1Co 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -

1Co 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1Co 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

The majority of believers will enter Heaven through death, while a significant minority - those who are alive at Christ's coming to gather His church - will not die, but be immediately changed.

What I want to talk about for the next few minutes is the homecoming you can expect, especially should you die prior to the Rapture.

The Bible indicates that when we die, we will have an angelic escort to Heaven. Jesus spoke of a poor man, Lazarus, who had suffered much. When he died, Jesus said "the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom [i.e., Heaven]" (Luke 16:22).

It's sometimes referred to as a parable, but Jesus uses proper names, and I rather think it's the true account of what happened to Lazarus.

By the way, angels are also present at the Rapture of the church, and presumably will provide escort to the saints.

We just got done doing a bunch of air travel. The airlines offer perks for club members who fly in first class.

It's nicer than coach, but it's still limited in its comfort and convenience. When our plane was 6 hours late, it was just as late for first class passengers.

Having an angelic escort is the ultimate in concierge service. It's traveling in first class on steroids.

One commentator said, "The journey to Heaven will not be dark, fearful, or lonesome. God will dispatch His angels at just the right time, and they'll meet us just within the veil and carry us to the heights of His glory."

Then, upon arrival, we read the following:

2Pe 1:11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This means more than there is an "entrance" into Heaven. That's, of course, true. But this is something more.

While we are on the subject of the entrance itself... It must be quite an entrance, wouldn't you think?

I don't think it will be like those freeway signs cities construct that tell you you are "now entering."

When Walt Disney was designing *Disneyland*, he wanted guests to feel like they were taking part in a living, breathing, interactive movie for which they had to purchase multiple tickets.

As part of this strategy, he designed *Disneyland's* entrance with red stone on the ground and a pair of entrance tunnels that were originally supposed to sport large curtains that would open and close like the curtains in front of a movie screen.

It just wasn't functional, so it was scrapped; but you get the idea of the grand entrance he envisioned.

Heaven must have a grand entrance. Is it the much-touted pearly gates?

The pearly gates are often considered as the entrance into Heaven, but the Revelation shows the gates as belonging to the city of New Jerusalem. The city and Heaven are not exactly synonymous; the city comes “down out of Heaven” (Revelation 21:2) and is part of the new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Also, contrary to the popular idea that the pearly gates bar Heaven's entrance, the Bible says the gates of pearl will always be open: they “will never be shut by day - and there will be no night there” (Revelation 21:22-25).

The gates, made of a single pearl, will be entered by the redeemed in the eternal state: “Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Revelation 21:26–27).

I said there was something more in this verse than just the door to Heaven. The particular word Peter used for "entrance" is a picture drawn from the Greek Olympic games. A victorious athlete would be escorted through a special "entrance" through the city in a lavish parade.

So the "entrance" is the way in, *and* it is what happens when we arrive. Our entrance is "supplied."

When you throw a party, or host a wedding, you work off a tight budget. Imagine if you had to monetary limitations.

Heaven has infinite supplies. But it isn't just things. Heaven's resources are spiritual as well as physical. Whatever will add to my entrance being perfect, that is what Jesus will supply.

"Supplied abundantly" means there are no limits to what awaits us.

First of all, we can send stuff to Heaven ahead of time. The Bible promises us rewards in Heaven for the work we do, for the service we perform, for Jesus, from right motives. Once rewarded, our stuff is safe from rust and robbers.

More than what we send ahead is what is being prepared for us. I already mentioned that Jesus promised He was going to Heaven to prepare a place for us.

He called it a mansion, and later we learn it is in a city - the New Jerusalem.

Read the incredible description of the city in the Revelation and you get a feel for what your mansion will be like. I mean, Jesus isn't going to build a shack; the CC&R's won't allow it.

So your "entrance" can mean a celebration at your initial arrival. Like an event where you are the guest of honor, and are introduced as such to all those who have gathered.

They have regular parties in Heaven:

Luk 15:10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

After your abundantly-supplied entrance is over, you find yourself in "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

We understand that there are three aspects of the kingdom of God:

There is what could be called the universal kingdom. It refers to the fact that God has always been, and will always be, in charge of His creation.

He has chosen, for a time, to allow kingdoms of men to rise and fall. He allows Satan to rule over a kingdom, calling him the god of this world.

But God has never abdicated authority. By His providence, He is working-out His plan to redeem lost mankind, and restore creation.

Then there is the promise of a literal, future kingdom of God on the earth, ruled by Jesus from Jerusalem. It is promised and described in the Old Testament. The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ describes how the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of Jesus at His Second Coming. The earthly kingdom will last one thousand years; which is why it is called the Millennium, or the Millennial Kingdom.

After that, there will be a forever kingdom. We read in the Revelation,

Rev 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

The spiritual conflict will be over. Eternity will have begun. All of us Christians, from all the ages, will be home with Christ.

Can you say "I'll be home for Christmas?"

Can you say you'll be going home to be with Jesus Christ?

You can if you've been born-again. You can if you've been saved. You can if you believe Jesus died on the Cross to take your place.

There is a verse that captures Christmas in just a few words.

2Co 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

We call it the Incarnation. It is God with us; God in human flesh.

It sounds splendid, but in reality the Incarnation was an incomprehensible renunciation of spiritual and material glory. The One who was rich, who had everything, became poor, making Himself nothing.

He did it, voluntarily, to assume mankind's debt of sin and pay for it with His life.

By His poverty, we become rich in salvation - we who trust Jesus as our Savior.

Jesus is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe.

Do you? Believe, that is?