

### 'Resident Aliens'

If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?" I asked the children in my Sunday school class. "NO!" the children all answered. "If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?" Once more they all answered, "NO!" "Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?" I asked them again. Once more they all answered, "NO!" "Well," I continued, thinking they were a good bit more theologically sophisticated than I had given them credit for, "Then how can I get into heaven?" A five-year-old boy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!"

In the movie **the Majestic**, Jim Carey, in one of his more serious roles, is blacklisted during the McCarthy days. The movie depicts the unraveling of his life and the beginning of a new life — a new life full of meaning. There is one scene in particular that stays with me. It is in the last scene, Jim Carey returns to a place where he now calls home. He arrives by train and as the train pulls into the station the entire town comes out to meet him and they are cheering and calling his name. They wear these great big smiles on all of their faces and they are filled with joy. It reminds me of what our arrival to heaven must be like. Where all of the saints who have gone on before us are waiting and clapping and saying "Welcome Home" we've been waiting for you. They are waiting with joy and filled with the glory of our heavenly father.

An anonymous writer, writes about an American tourist's visit to the 19th century home of Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim: Astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books, plus a table and a bench, the tourist asked, "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" replied the rabbi. "Mine?" asked the puzzled American. "But I'm a visitor here. I'm only passing through." "So am I," said the rabbi.

We are only passing through. This is not our home. We are wanderers in a foreign place. Resident aliens.

In today's scripture passage, the writer of Hebrews is addressing the Jewish people and in that address, he is appealing to them to understand who Jesus Christ is in their life. They were a wandering people. Wandering in their disobedience to the laws brought forth from Moses. But in the midst of their wandering they were not lost. God was with them as a community of chosen people.

We are also wandering people. We are wanderers who seem lost. We are resident aliens, living here temporarily. We are in a place where we do not belong.

There was a man who hated his wife's cat and he decided to get rid of it. He drove 20 blocks away from home and dropped the cat there. The cat was already walking up the driveway when he approached his home. The next day, he decided to drop the cat 40 blocks away but the same thing happened. He kept on increasing the number of blocks but the cat kept on coming home before him. At last he decided to drive a few miles away, turn right, then left, past the bridge, then right again and another right and so on until he reached what he thought was a perfect spot and dropped the cat there. Hours later, the man called his wife at home and asked her, "Is the cat there?" "Yes, why do you ask?" answered his wife. Frustrated the man said, "Put that cat on the phone, I am lost and I need directions."

Because we are resident aliens, we need help living in this foreign land. We need guidance and instruction. God provides us a book to live by to help us while we live in this temporary life.

Today the passage of scripture says that God's word is living and active, calling God's word a double edge sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow.

God gave us His word to help us to live by as we live our lives in this foreign place. The Bible keeps our souls healthy and whole. It helps live out our lives here in a way that glorifies God and keeps us safe.

The Bible, together with the Holy Spirit, is able to separate the flesh from the soul and spirit. Together they convict us and teach us the ways of God. We discover ourselves in the Word of God. We are searched and known by God in deep ways. The Word of God, the word incarnate in Christ, discerns who we really are, our true person.

Without the word of God we would fall into the trap of our own devices. We

would be the owners of our own fate – follow our own directions. There are so many things that lead us away from our course. There are so many voices calling us to different ideas and views. Without the Word of God we would end up following the wrong path, headed down the wrong road. We would be truly lost.

The Word of God helps us grow in the likeness and image of Christ. It is not to be used to judge and to be judged, it is not to be used to condemn and be condemned but a guide to live by and to love by. It is the mirror into our souls making us aware of who we are.

A man was standing downtown waiting on a bus. It was raining cats and dogs (I know he stepped in a poodle). A lady was standing next to him so he tried to be friendly and make conversation. "If it keeps this up, we'll all have to buy an ark," he said. "What's an ark?" she asked. "You mean you haven't heard about Noah and the great flood and all those animals?" he asked incredulously. "Look, mister," she replied, "I've only been in town for four days. I've scarcely had time to read a paper."

We have a way of using the Bible to measure our own salvation. We measure ourselves so much that we carry shame and guilt over our not knowing enough scriptures or not being spiritual enough and our devotion time is next to nothing. We have to remember what the Apostle Paul said, "We all fall short of the Glory of God." Not one of us are without mistakes.

Children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Christian school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. Someone had written a note and placed it next to the apples. It read, "Take only one, God is watching." Moving through the line, to the other end of the table, was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One little boy wrote his own note and snuck it next to the cookies, "Take all you want, God is watching the apples."

The author says we are all vulnerable. Our God knows it all, "we are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one who we must render account." All of us have something in our lives that we do that we know we can do better. We all fall short of the glory of God. We all are wanderers. We can't help it, this is not our home.

However we are not lost, as the author says that we have a high priest who has past through the heavens. It is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who knows who we are and the things that we endure in this life. For He has been tested and is sinless and we are to go to Him in our weakness and with our confessions.

Now listen to one theologians understanding of being with Christ. Union with Christ imparts an inner elevation, comfort in affliction, tranquil reliance and a heart which opens itself to everything noble and great, not for the sake of ambition or desire for fame, but for the sake of Christ. Union with Christ produces a joy which the Epicurean seeks in vain in his shallow philosophy, which the deeper thinker vainly pursues in the most hidden depths of knowledge. It is a joy known only to the simple and childlike heart, united with Christ and through him with God, a joy which elevates life and makes it more beautiful.

“We are to go boldly because He is a God of compassion and is our help when we need it.” He is our rest.

**Closing:**

We are just sojourners and our lives are just a journey. We are wanderers but we are not lost. We wander but are free from our wandering. We are restless as our certain eternal destination seems distant from our everyday lives but we have a place of rest until we reach that final destination.

But now at this moment in our lives Christ calls us to find rest in Him.

We wander as we are resident aliens, but we are free from wandering because while we are here in this foreign place God provides our direction and rest.

A place that we can call home until God calls us to our permanent home and resting place.