

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



March 23, 2014

The Far Away Land

The life of the righteous is not easy. But it is made so much easier when we contemplate the joy that awaits us at the end of our long struggle.

“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil: he will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off” (Isa. 33:15-17).

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Eastern religions view the hope of the righteous as a kind of vague oneness with the universe, a state in which our personalities dissolve into nothingness. But Isaiah describes our hope in much more personal terms, as a very real experience in which our own eyes “will see the King in His beauty . . . [and] the land that is very far off.”

The Scriptures often speak of this far away land. The patriarchs saw themselves as pilgrims here on earth, looking forward to “a homeland . . . a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb. 11:13-16). Jesus promised that He was going away

“to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14:1-3). The closing pages of the Bible promise “a new heaven and a new earth . . . [where] God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Rev. 21:1-4).

Many of the songs we sing remind us of this land that we can see only dimly: “O they tell me of a home where my friends have gone / O they tell me of that land far away / Where the tree of life in eternal bloom / Sheds its fragrance thru the unclouded day” (*O They Tell Me of a Home*, J. K. Alwood). You can’t sing songs like that without feeling a deep longing for what lies ahead.

The thought of spending eternity in a land of absolute harmony, free of any trace of sadness or pain, should draw our souls like a powerful magnet. But even more enticing is the prospect of finally seeing God face to face. No longer will we have to endure the ridicule of those who mock us for believing in a fairy tale deity; no longer will we wrestle with the nagging existential questions about suf-

fering and evil and divine providence, because when we reach that destination, we will “see the King in His beauty.” What once we believed by faith, we will finally know by sight. All doubt will vanish away in His tender embrace.

We can read about this land in the Bible; we can sing about it, and dream about it. Yet it remains so “very far off” precisely because it is so unlike what we experience here, stuck in a world of hardship and pain. It’s difficult to keep that image of a far away destination alive in our minds while struggling with the troubles that are right in front of us. That’s why we need to continually remind ourselves of what awaits us at the end of our long journey.

But while we fondly dream of that far away land, we must not forget what else Isaiah said about it. It is reserved for the one “who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,” who refuses illicit gain and shuns evil. In other words, if we really want to live in an eternal home of peace, harmony, and joy some day, our lives should be reflecting that lifestyle here and now.

– David King