

What have we to look forward to?



Stuart Olyott 4 minute read Evangelical Magazine January/February 2024

It will be my turn soon and I'm beginning to get excited! Yet, to be honest, I'm also quite apprehensive. My excitement flows from what I know. My apprehension flows from what I don't know, or what I don't understand.

Like every other human being I have spent my whole life in this large city by the sea but years ago something happened to me. It was like being born all over again. I became a new person. I came to realise that everyone born in this city is by nature a pirate and I didn't want to be one anymore. I felt that I belonged somewhere else. My heart was with our rightful King who lived in the Far Land across the ocean. He became the only person that I wanted to please.

In earlier years, I had always thought of him as someone rather distant but then I learned that he had spent thirty-three holy years in this rebel city. He had come to forgive our crimes and to take us under his rule and protection and it cost him. The price was his blood, but he succeeded in paying our infinite debts. He then returned to the Far Land, promising safe passage there to all who would renounce their piracy and follow him. This would mean them living among pirates as citizens of another country.

For myself, I have never seen him but I love him and I love all the others here who love him. We speak to him on the telephone and we read his daily emails. We listen to his messengers, act on his instructions, believe his promises, think highly of him, talk a lot about him and look forward to the time when we will be with him forever.

Two ways to leave

We have all spotted the two launches that, without fail, come into our harbour every day. Not even the most experienced pirates are able to keep them out. Frankly, both of them are ugly looking vessels but, I am told, they are not identical inside. One is dark and filled with prison cells. Its mission is to take pirates to Condemnation Island, a place from which they will never escape. Men and women, mostly older, resist arrest but they are never successful. Everyone who remains a pirate will one day be taken on board.

The other launch is only dark on the outside. Inside it is bright and comfortable, warm and welcoming. The crew, I understand, are absolute angels. They come to collect named ex-pirates whom the King has summoned. Both of these boats are strange craft. Although you remain visible and audible to your fellow passengers, you can't travel on either of them unless you leave your body behind! There's something else; although these launches have vast oceans to cross, they arrive at their respective destinations the moment they leave harbour!

A place of joy

Where is the boat for ex-pirates heading? Well, it's not the Far Land itself. By that I mean that it's not the mainland. It's a very large island just off its coast. It's a safe place where there are never any storms. It's a holy, happy, peaceful place and it's inhabited by all the believers who have died before us. It's a place of reunion and joyful tears and, best of all, every passenger is personally welcomed there by the King himself.

Does all this mean that we will never get to the mainland? No, but we will have to wait. The two launches will continue to go every day into the harbour of Pirate City. On the city's clocks and calendars this may continue for thousands of years but where the King is, time is measured differently. There, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day!

The King will come

A moment is coming when everything will stop. The two launches will never be seen again. The King will fly through the air, followed in a trumpeting procession by his holy angels and all the inhabitants of his offshore island. He will land in Pirate City where he will puff just once on his enemies and defeat them. Yes, even Professor S. A. Tan, the self-appointed Lord Mayor of that rebel city, will bow at his feet.

An extraordinary event will follow. In an instant we will see that all the doomed prisoners of Condemnation Island have also been brought back to the city. Their bodies will be given back to them, but changed, just as the bodies of the rebels still alive will be. Each rebel will be justly judged and then sent or returned forever to Condemnation Island, where they will never experience anything good or godly throughout eternity. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The believers in the heavenly procession will also have their bodies returned to them. These bodies, together with those of the believers still living in the city, will then be transformed. It will be wonderful. Each Christian will receive a glorious body, just like Christ's, an undying, endlessly beautiful body, at home in every dimension and capable of travelling in a flash to every corner of the universe. For the first heaven and the first earth will have passed away, and there will also be no more sea.

The last judgement will include the judgement of believers but for them it will be a calm affair. All their crimes will be laid before them and it will be seen that the King, by his cross, atoned for them all. There will be no condemnation of any ex-pirate and the resulting songs of gratitude and praise will be endless and overwhelming. There will also be a close examination of how each Christian has lived. The King will find something to praise in each one of them! Rewards will be given but there will be no dissatisfaction, jealousy or resentment, for the former things will have passed away.

What then? The King will welcome us into the New Jerusalem, which is in the Far Land except that nowhere will be far anymore. There he will dwell with us and we shall be his people; he himself will be with us and be our God. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things will have passed away.

There will be no sin, no curse and no rival to the King. We shall serve him, each one of us having a specific, pleasant function entirely suited to our particular character and gifting. Wherever we are and whatever we are doing we shall enjoy the light of his smile. That will be enough to drive away all darkness and to make any sun unnecessary. We shall reign for ever and ever.

For the moment, here I am in Pirate City. I'm looking out to sea. I can see the two ugly launches about to enter the harbour. Has my turn come? Will it be today that I begin my journey home? My apprehension hasn't gone away but that's not stopping me from being excited!

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