**THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD**

***This Church Is Our Home***

There is always a debate between book readers and movie watchers. The former argues the book is superior to the movie. The latter replies the movie is better than the book. Of course, in my experience, it is far more likely that the book reader has a decided advantage over the movie watcher because he or she has actually read the book, while the movie watcher often doesn’t bother reading, or only does so half-heartedly. But there are some who are both avid readers and qualified movie critics who can give a fair review of both book and flick. Personally, I might enjoy a good movie, but I treasure a good book. In almost every comparison I’ll take the book over the movie. (Spoiler alert: Moses played Moses better than Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments*).

Several years ago I read a couple of the 20-volume Patrick O’Brian novels about a British navy captain named “Black Jack” Aubrey and his ship’s surgeon Stephen Maturin. They sailed aboard the *HMS Surprise* on behalf of the British empire during the days of Napoleon Bonaparte’s wars. Those were the days when Britain and France ruled the high seas with their mighty naval armadas. O’Brian’s historical novels combine accurate history with fictional characters. One reason for the popularity of O’Brian’s series is his careful attention to navy lore and natural history with penetrating insights into human nature.

His book, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, was written in 1986 and turned into a movie in 2003, starring Russell Crowe as Captain Aubrey. While most movies rarely capture the exact emotion that the book gives you, in this case both the book and the movie describe perfectly a gripping scene that is worthy of our attention. After chasing each other over the entire Pacific Ocean the *HMS Surprise* had finally caught the French warship *Acheron*. Just as the life-and-death battle is about to happen Captain Aubrey assembles his entire crew to prepare them for the fight. He leaves them with these patriotic words,

**“England is under threat of invasion, and though we be on the far side of the world, this ship is our home. This ship is England!"**

I loved that quote when I read it, and when I watched it. But after deeper reflection I love it even more now. Let me tell you why.

Captain Aubrey’s view of citizenship is based on **loyalty**, not location. And this conviction clearly illustrates a Biblical principle. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, a Roman colony. He, and they, were both certified Roman citizens. Tarsus, Paul’s birthplace, was rewarded by Pompey and Augustus for its loyalty to Rome with citizenship to all born there (Acts 22:27-28). Philippi was also a city rewarded by Caesar for its loyalty by giving its people Roman citizenship. To own a Roman passport had tremendous advantages. Just ask Paul, who used it to his benefit several times to save his skin and to help spread the gospel (Acts 22:25-27; Acts 25:10-11).

To these Philippian disciples Paul does what Captain Aubrey did, he gave them a stirring pep talk that would inspire them to faithfulness. His exact words should stick in our memory and be a battle cry for our daily war with Satan. Hear Paul:

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. 20 **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Chris**t, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

*“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20). That puts chills up my spine and goosebumps down my arms. It is as if Paul is saying, “We are under threat of invasion, and though we be on the far side of heaven, this church is our home. Right now, this church is heaven! Be strong. Be faithful! Fight the good fight!”

It is important for us to be reminded that though we live on the earth for now, our eternal home is the place where our loyalty should lie. The church, like Aubrey’s ship, is our home away from home. Being with God’s people is the closest thing we will ever know of heaven this side of eternity. As Kingdom citizens we *“set our mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:2).

Don’t you just love to sing *This World Is Not My Home*? More and more I now sing it with greater faith and more gusto! Let’s sing it together.

This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through,   
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue,  
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door,  
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

They’re all expecting me, and that’s one thing I know,  
My Savior pardoned me and now I onward go;  
I know He’ll take me thru tho I am weak and poor,  
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

Just up in glory land we’ll live eternally,  
The saints on every hand are shouting victory,  
Their song of sweetest praise drifts back from heaven’s shore,  
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

When I have traveled overseas to do evangelism in places like China, Fiji, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines, I did not have to remind myself that my loyalty was to America. I was born here and I love my country. But I have also been “*born again*” (Jn. 3:3) and it was necessary to remember that my first loyalty was to my King in heaven. It’s as if the Captain of my salvation was saying to me,

“Though you be on the far side of the world, this church is home. This church is heaven.”

That’s all I needed to hear, then and now. That would be the best book, and movie, ever.

Onward and Upward. – Rick