


ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

by Tom Wacaster



It was late Friday afternoon, and I was tired and exhausted from a sleepless night before I ever began this journey, followed by a long ten hour flight from Moscow to JFK airport in New York. In spite of the fact that we made good time from Moscow and arrived almost an hour early in New York, I was still facing a five and a half hour lay over before catching the last leg of my journey from the “Big Apple” to Dallas. With time to kill, I tried to amuse myself by “window shopping” in the airport shops, reading, and even trying to catch a cat nap in a futile effort to alleviate the groggy feeling that naturally comes with traveling so far, so fast in our modern day jets (they call it “jet lag” – the effect on the body where your biological clock says it is later than you think). I am always amazed that the people would spend their hard earned money to purchase T-shirts, electronic gadgets, and even leather goods from those little shops in an international airport. The prices are always higher than at the most expensive malls, and if something goes wrong with the item you purchased you have no recourse to make amends with the dealer (unless, of course, you stand ready to purchase another airline ticket to some far off destination in order that you can “pass through” the same airport and take care of any complaint you might have).

After clearing customs and catching the escalator to the upper floor where you enter the terminal for connecting flights a passenger can obtain information by consulting the “big board” (as some are wont to call it) for arrivals and departures. Other than the airport employees, security personnel, and shop owners, every person in that terminal had an interest in the information on that board, specifically the information having to do with their “departure.” It was interesting how that information affected the behavior of those seeking to make a connecting flight. If running late, you would find them scurrying through the airport with little or no time to stop along the way to shop, eat, or visit. Those with plenty of time to spare could be found in a restaurant, browsing in a shop, or relaxing in a chair. But no matter what they might have been doing, in the back of their mind they were thinking of their “departure.”

I took the time to stop at Wendy’s and order a hamburger, and as I sat there watching the passengers heading to their “departure,” I was struck with the thought that each one of us will face our eventual “departure” from this world into eternity. I wonder how many of those passengers had given any thought at all to that moment in time when they will face death and pass from this life into the eternal abode of the soul?

Eternity! Men have attempted to capture the essence of eternity, but their attempts are weak at best, and completely inadequate. Here is how someone

sought to describe eternity: "If you can imagine an ant marching around a steel globe the size of this planet. How long would it take that ant to wear a path one inch deep in that steel globe? How long would it take to wear a path one foot deep? Ten feet deep? The time it takes is only an inkling of eternity." But friends, even that illustration measures activity related to time. In eternity, there is no time. How can we even begin to grasp the concept of eternity? If we could but capture its essence, it would be but for a fleeting moment, for we are quickly drawn back to the temporal; the here and now. But will you, for just a moment, imagine yourself standing before the judgment bar of God, as you hear the sentence pronounced, "Depart, I never knew you." Now will you try to imagine that you find yourself, like the rich man who refused to give unto Lazarus the things for which that beggar lacked, opening your eyes in "torments." And so begins the punishment that you must now endure forever, time without end. If your punishment were to be for a million years, you might could bear it, for after that first year you would know you have only nine-hundred-ninety-nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ninety-nine years to go. There would be a ray of hope that someday, though far, far removed, you would eventually be released from that torment. But my friend, in hell there is NO hope; NO release to be expected; NO cessation of the punishment that you will receive for your disobedience to God. Oh what despair! No longer will that television program have any importance. How you did in the stock market will be completely insignificant. The closing balance of your bank account will seem so little, regardless of the dollar figure the bottom line might show. Those things that we placed so much importance on in this life will seem so trivial, so completely unimportant.

When Sir William Russel was sentenced to die, someone recorded that along the way to the scaffold he handed his watch to a friend and said, "Will you kindly take my timepiece and keep it? I have no use for it. I am now dealing with eternity." When the time comes for us to enter eternity there are a lot of things we will no longer have any need of. One second after my heart beats its last beat, and I breath my last breath, I will realize that much of what I valued in this life will pale in comparison to what I will value in the life to come. One drop of water was of great value to the rich man; but alas he could not obtain it. And while he fared sumptuously every day while living upon the earth, he was a pauper the other side of death. Let us keep our priorities straight in this life, and when it comes time to depart the walks of this earth, may each one of us calmly and victoriously cast off those things that we cannot take with us, with the glorious expectation that we shall embrace that which is of lasting value when once we cross over the Jordan river into that eternal abode that awaits those who are faithful in this life. The question we must entertain now is, "Am I ready for my departure?"