

The body of a sixty-year-old man, known as Thomas Gray, was found under a Wyoming railroad bridge two days after Christmas in 2012. According to law officials, there was no sign of foul play or any indication of a crime. Gray was simply a homeless cowboy who'd died of hypothermia, except for one detail: he stood to inherit millions of dollars.

The man's great-grandfather, you see, was a wealthy copper miner, railroad builder, and the founder of a Nevada town you might have heard of: Las Vegas. His fortune had been passed down to his daughter before she died in 2011.

She left a \$300 million fortune and, as it turned out, the man found under the railroad bridge wasn't really poor after all. According to lawyers, he may have inherited as much as \$20 million.

One of the most famous stories in the Bible, remember, has to do with inheritance. After delivering the Hebrews from Egyptian captivity, God led them and Moses to the edge of the Promised Land and made this offer: ***“The LORD said to Moses, “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders”*** (Num 13:1-2).

God didn't tell the Israelites to conquer, take, or invade the land but that he was giving it to them. All they had to do was trust his promise and receive the gift, but they didn't. And it was a bad decision with a forty-year probation period. God left them to wander in the wilderness for an entire generation, until a new breed of followers surfaced.

And Joshua was the leader of that generation. Upon the death of Moses, God reissued the Promised Land offer. ***“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.”*** (Josh 1:1-3).

We typically think of Joshua taking the land but, more correctly, he took God at his word. Joshua took the land but he did so because he trusted God's promise. The great accomplishment of the Hebrew people was this: they lived out of their inheritance. In fact, the story ends with this declaration: ***"Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance."*** (Josh 24:28).

The Hebrew people had adversity and adversaries on every front. The Jordan River was wide and the Jericho walls were high. And the evil inhabitants of Canaan were not giving up without a fight. Yet, Joshua led the Hebrews to cross the Jordan, bring down the walls of Jericho, and defeat the thirty enemy kings. Every time he faced a challenge, he did so with faith, because he trusted his inheritance.

Do you think that Thomas Gray, the heir to an unknown fortune, ever thought about investigating an inheritance? Let's take a few minutes to talk about ours, especially since the apostle Paul reminds us that God's ***"unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us"*** (Eph. 1:5). Is that not great news or what? To the audience of Paul, being adopted by God was especially significant because by Roman law, an adopted son gained all rights to the new family, and became an heir to the Father's estate.

And Paul reveals its value to us in Rom. 8 when he writes: ***"And since we are his children, we will share his treasures – for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours too."*** As an heir with Christ of God's estate, what words do you think the lawyer would read if there were an execution of God's will?

I think it might just say this: ***"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" - the things God has prepared for those who love him"*** (1 Cor. 2:9).

But let's be honest with ourselves. As Christians, how often do we really give any thought to housing our soul? Maybe we should just pick up our Bible, turn to Genesis, and read the genealogies in chapter 5. There's a story of a man who welcomed a non-Christian friend to church, and it just so happened that the pastor read this passage. The man who invited his friend was rather angry with himself, thinking that of all days, the pastor would choose such a boring passage. But shockingly, this non-Christian friend committed his life to the Lord immediately after the service. When asked what had led him in that direction, he said he kept hearing the words and "*he died*" over and over again as the passage was read. Only so many sands occupy everyone's hourglass, and sooner or later they all run out, don't they?

So why do we keep the subject so hush-hush? Believe it or not, we've all been closer to heaven than we might realize. Zero in on your early childhood years when you weren't old enough to worry, and your schedule was simple. Childhood has no alarm clocks, does it?

But suddenly, alarm clocks started buzzing, school bells started ringing, and birthday candles increased. We like to think that we're masters of time, but we don't really tell time anything, do we? Time does all of the telling.

But the Apostle John puts it very clearly for us: Eternal life is found in Jesus Christ, and if we have Jesus, then we have life. When Ronald Reagan was running for Governor of California, a woman confronted him one day and berated him severely. Finally she said, "*I wouldn't vote for you if you were St. Peter.*" He smiled and replied, "*Lady, if I were St. Peter, you wouldn't be living in my district.*"

You and I are planning to live there, but what do we really know about St. Peter's district? We won't find it on a map or described in a realtor's journal for sure, but we will find it in our Bible. And the best way to find out about it is to learn from someone who's gone there and returned. And who did that, you ask?

On an island, banished by the Roman government for refusing to stop witnessing about Jesus, the apostle John received his greatest revelation of the life to come. The reality of the place called Heaven is seen in Revelation chapter 21. Here we have an eyewitness report, first-hand information, and John recorded what he saw so that we can know about it as well. Look at his excitement when he wrote: ***“I John saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”*** (2).

Yes, John begins with a portrait of a *“Holy City, the new Jerusalem.”* And why should a New Jerusalem interest us? For one, God has space for us. John writes in verses 15-16. ***“The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.”*** John lets us know that the size of the New Jerusalem stretches the imagination, which some have calculated to be an area large enough to contain the land mass from Canada to Mexico.

But that’s just the ground floor! Since the city stands as tall as it is wide, it’s been estimated that if it were stacked in stories like a building, the New Jerusalem would easily have as many as 600k floors! Absolutely no congestion in this city! There will be plenty of room for each of us if we have Jesus.

But for those who prefer country living, well, heaven has that too. The Old Testament book of Isaiah describes our eternal home as a “country” with houses and fields and even animals living peacefully together. Isaiah 65 says of the new heaven and earth: ***“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food.”***

But hold on for a moment! Heaven is also described as a “whole world.” God says later in Isaiah (17): ***“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.”*** Our eternal home, then, will be *“Our Father’s House,”* a city, a country, and a world.

Skip ahead five verses and you'll find that our eternal home will be surrounded by a great wall, 216 feet wide, with 12 gates guarded by angels. In other words, it will be a place of absolute safety, located in a "*gated community*," and comes with its very own built-in security system. No evil, danger or harm will ever touch us. No more crime or violence; no more terrorists wreaking terror; and no more drug dealers, child molesters, or rulers pillaging the poor.

Our "**Father's House**," as the apostle John so aptly named it, is also said to be made of precious jewels, as "*pure, transparent gold, like glass*," with the walls made of jasper, and built on 12 layers of foundation stones inlaid with gems ranging from sapphire to emerald to topaz. The twelve gates are made of pearls; each gate from a single pearl. Wow!

Now, think of the most beautiful landscape you've ever seen. John speaks of a river and trees in the New Jerusalem that you can't find anywhere else. Just look at the first two verses of chapter 22: "***Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.***" Yes, we will have waterfront property with an orchard. But *this* river contains the very water of life, and the tree of life brings health, nourishment and healing for all.

Heaven won't be anything like we imagine because it will be much greater. No more eyeglasses, wheelchairs, false teeth, bald heads, hearing aids or crutches. Aspirin gone, accidents over, cancer disappeared, heart attacks banished. No more hospitals, nursing homes, or doctors. Is growing older getting old? Are you tired of being tired? We can relax because God has promised: "***See, I am making all things new!***"

But don't forget that this beautiful home God described for us is home to our friends and loved ones too. God says in Isaiah 66:22: ***“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.”***

A man toward the end of his life was to have said, *“You know, one of the things about getting old that's kind of tough is you have more friends in heaven than you have on earth.”*

As I was thinking this week about being adopted into God's family, I was reminded of a true story that I read about the Orphan Train of 1850-1930. During that 80 year period, it's estimated that some 200,000 abandoned children in eastern cities were placed on westbound trains and shipped across our country in search of homes and families. Those who were not selected boarded the train again for the next stop and viewing.

One of the youngsters, Lee, along with his two younger brothers, boarded a train in New York City. The three siblings were taken to several towns before someone in a small Texas town adopted the two younger brothers on the sixth day. Then another family selected Lee.

But soon afterward Lee was sent to another home, a farming family. But the city boy didn't know not to open the doors of the chicks' cages, so the angry farmer sent him away.

Finally, Lee was taken to yet another home. Lee went to bed the first night making plans to run away. And when he was greeted with a breakfast of biscuits and gravy the next morning, as he reached for one, well, I'll let him explain what happened.

“Mrs. Nailling stopped me. ‘Not until we've said grace,’ she explained. I watched as they bowed their heads while Mrs. Nailling began speaking softly to ‘Our Father,’ thanking him for the food and the beautiful day.

Then Mrs. Nailling thanked God ‘for the privilege of raising a son.’ She was calling me a privilege. After breakfast they walked me to the barbershop for a haircut, and we stopped at each of the six houses on the way. Each time I was introduced as ‘our new son.’ And as soon as we left the last house I knew that I would not be running away.

But there was something else. I had the strong feeling that I had found not one but two new fathers, and I could talk to both of them. And that’s the way it turned out.”

We may not be orphans on a train traveling west in search of homes and families, but it’s probably safe to say that most of us, at one time or another, have planned a trip to somewhere. And the trip planning process likely went something like this: we selected our clothing, checked the weather, and chose our jacket, if needed. The suitcase was fastened and the hotel was confirmed. But before we walk out the door, we pause to inventory our list. Water bottle? Got it. Spending money? Got it. Smartphone? Book to read? Check. Check.

We’re good to go, right? Wouldn’t it be foolish not to be? Ask any traveler one question: “*Where are you headed?*” Not once have I heard someone say, “*I have no clue.*” Travelers know their destination, don’t they? Travel 101 instructs, “*Know where you go.*”

And we’re all headed somewhere, aren’t we? So shouldn’t our destination, as Christians, be an obsession? That was Paul’s opinion in his letter to the Phillipians: “*I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us*” (Phil. 3:13-14 NLT).

Just look at those phrases: “*looking forward to what lies ahead,*” “*end of the race,*” “*heavenly prize.*” Yes, the best of life is yet to be. *And yes, of all we don’t know in this life, we know this: “**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life**”* (1 John 5:13). Now that’s what I call an inheritance!
AMEN.

