

Thinkin' About Home

Wednesday night we finished our look at Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. Toward the end of his prayer, Jesus prayed, **“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory...”** What an amazing thought, that Jesus wants us to be with him in heaven. Because Jesus is there, heaven is going to be home for us! We talked about it last Sunday, that we fix our eyes on Jesus and we keep looking for that city, that home that is ahead for us. This world is not our home. We learn that soon enough in this life.

Heaven becomes more than a dream as those we love become residents there. I remember the lessons I learned about death and dying and heaven when I was a boy. My grandmother (my mom's mother) died when I was about 8 and my mom's brother Ed died when I was 11. I still remember the phone ringing in the night, my mom standing in the hallway receiving the news that her brother had died at the age of 61. Sorrow filled with hope because heaven was a real place.

I remember listening to my aunt Cledith at my grandmother's funeral. She seemed to be crying and laughing at the same time. Puzzled by the emotions expressed, my Dad explained to me that Cledith was sad because her mother was gone from her, but happy that grandma was free from her worry and pain and she was at home in heaven. It affected and influenced my view of death and dying and heaven for the rest of my life I suppose.

Heaven is home. It's where we are going. And that hope, fixing our eyes on that heavenly home is central to our faith and to our ability to keep on going through some of the difficult seasons of life.

I realize there must be a balance. We've heard about folks that were so heavenly minded they were of no earthly good. But I think the same can be said of those who are so earthly minded that they've lost sight of the prize, the goal, the eternal reality that provides a constant tugging at our heart. This world is not all there is for us. The apostle Paul said if we had hope in this life only we would be of all men most miserable. Without the hope of eternity and heaven, this life loses value and purpose, it becomes an exercise in futility. We have to keep looking up, keep our sights set upon Jesus and upon Heaven, our eternal home.

I was reminded this week of an event that happened when I was a young teenager in this church. I was probably around 14 when a member of our youth group, Jimmy Bingham, was

murdered. He was working at a gas station across the highway and a man held up the station and then for no reason, shot Jimmy in the back of the head and killed him. Jimmy was about 15 or 16, I think.

I remember the Sunday after his murder, we all cried and prayed and repented in our youth Sunday School class. I think it was the dawning of a realization that young people, teenagers could die too, that death wasn't just something that happened to grown-ups, it happened to all of us, including teenagers. All of a sudden, heaven became more real to us. Heaven was a place that might be just ahead for any of us. It lost that far distant feeling and came close. One of our friends was there.

I think all of us need to be reminded of heaven. We need to be reminded because sometimes the nights here get pretty long and lonely. It seems there is no end to the difficulties and struggles of life but then we remember the promise of heaven and home. It is just up ahead. And our perspective begins to change. Weeping may endure for a night the bible reminds us, but joy - eternal joy - comes in the morning when we arrive safe in heaven and in his presence.

We need to be reminded of heaven and home because it does have an impact and an effect upon how we live our lives today, here and now. The bible says, speaking of the hope we have of Christ's coming and of heaven as our eternal home, **“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1 John 3:3.** We remember what awaits us and that heaven is for all who believe and who by faith overcome and remain faithful to the end. The hope of that eternal home in heaven motivates us to keep the faith, to keep our way pure and clean, to keep walking in holiness and in fellowship with Christ. We don't want to miss heaven.

We need to be reminded of heaven and home because we don't know the day nor the hour when the Lord is going to come. You probably saw the bill boards or heard the news about the guy who predicted the Lord would come yesterday. Once again we are reminded that no one knows the day or the hour. Even if we figured out the day Jesus is going to come back for his church, none of us know the day or the hour when we are going to die. We need to live prepared to meet the Lord. It could be today for any one of us. Are we ready?

If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are on a journey of faith, headed toward heaven. We can't afford to forget that. We can't afford to take our eyes off of the prize of Jesus and of that heavenly home. Like the saints of the Old Testament, we are on a journey,

seeking a new country, a new home, a heavenly home. Paul told us in 1 Thessalonians to comfort and encourage each other with this good news. We are going to be with the Lord forever in heaven one day. Turn with me to Hebrews 11 and let's look for a moment at one view of this journey of faith that will lead to our heavenly home.

Let me read **Hebrews 11:8-16** and then we will make some observations about this journey to our home.

V8 “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” Abraham was called to leave one home and begin a journey to an unknown destination, to another home.

Abraham had to believe there was a purpose to the journey otherwise it would have simply been too much for him. Genesis 12 tells of Abram's call to go to a new land. God would make of him a great nation. God had a plan and purpose for Abraham's life and by faith he believed and he kept on obeying God on the journey. He believed there was a purpose to it all.

And there is a plan and purpose for our lives here as well. To make sense of the journey and all that occurs, you travel by faith, like Abraham. You believe God has called you and he is here with you and he is taking you somewhere. Hebrews 11:6 says, **“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6**

Abraham had to believe God was with him and would be there when he arrived at the destination. Why do we live as we do? Why are we headed for heaven, purifying ourselves, obeying God's commands, encouraging ourselves with this doctrine? Because by faith we believe he called us – that he called us to separate ourselves from the world and the past just as Abraham separated himself from Ur and all that was in his past and began to follow God. We believe God called us and we believe God will be there at the end of the journey. He will be there in that heavenly home waiting to welcome us because “he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Notice it is by faith that Abraham obeyed and started the journey. He didn't know where he was going, but he obeyed God. He trusted God in spite of not knowing what was ahead and there were some strange and difficult places along the journey, but he kept going by faith.

The path to heaven can sometimes be difficult. It can be shadowed in mystery but by

faith we continue the journey. There is no place to stop till we get home. There may be some difficult terrain between here and our heavenly home, but by faith we journey on. Don't stop because heaven and home is closer than you think, closer than you know. If you aren't sure of where you are on the journey, that's ok, neither was Abraham, but keep walking by faith and someday soon that faith will give way to sight.

V9 “By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.”

You feel a bit tentative when you are in a strange country. You don't speak the language, the culture and surroundings are different. Besides, you know you aren't going to be there for long so you aren't looking to put down roots. Abraham lived knowing that he might be moving on any day. Even in the promised land, he was awaiting orders from heaven. So Abraham learned not to be too tied to any one place or thing or possession. He lived like a stranger, like someone just passing through.

What a powerful picture for us because this world is not our final and ultimate home. Occupy it until he comes? Yes. Try to influence the government and the culture? Yes. Be good stewards of the planet and the environment while we are here? Absolutely. But this world is not our home. We've got another home, another country. Don't get sidetracked. Don't get your eyes off of the real prize. It's not this world, it's heaven! The bible says, "What does it profit a person if they gain the whole world but lose their soul?" What do you get if you own the world, but at the end you miss heaven and spend eternity apart from God in hell? Stay focused on what is eternally important. Don't get your eyes off of Jesus and heaven.

The bible says Abraham lived in tents, in temporary dwellings because he knew whose he was and where he was going. We are living in tents right now, in temporary dwellings. This house of flesh is just a temporary dwelling place for us. But we are on our way home.

Notice too that the passage mentions "as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise." Abraham's son and grandson lived in tents with him because they too knew of the promise as well. He told them about God's call and God's covenant. "Boys, we're just temporarily living here in these tents, but one day, we're going to have a home where we will never have to move again. One day we will be home." Tell your children and your

grandchildren, pass the news of this eternal destination on to the next generation – keep your sights on heaven – don't miss heaven – keep seeking this heavenly city. It's real and it's just ahead for all of us.

V10 “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Abraham was looking for a city with foundations – no more tents put up in the desert, no more temporary dwellings, no more “just got acquainted” and then you have to say goodbye – he was looking for permanence. And God was and is building just such a place, not just for Abraham but for all of us. God is the architect and builder. We are going where his design, his plan, his purpose, his will is first and foremost and it is a permanent dwelling. The foundations are solid, permanent and deep.

Now look at what the bible says about all of us on this journey of faith that are headed for this heavenly home and city: **“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:13-16**

It's not just about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It's not just about those other men and women who are mentioned in Hebrews 11, it is about all of us - all of us who are living by faith, who are journeying in faith. All of us are looking for a country of our own, a new country, a new home - a heavenly home.

The writer says we admit we are aliens and strangers on earth. We don't belong here. We don't fit here. We are just passing through and on our way to heaven, we don't focus on what we are leaving behind, we focus on what lies ahead.

The writer of Hebrews said if we had been thinking about the country we left behind we would have had opportunity to return. Instead, we are longing for a heavenly home - a better country. There are moments along the journey that if we forget what is ahead, if we forget the promise of heaven, we might just start thinking about the pleasures of this life, what is available to us, what we might have left behind. And if we do that long enough, he suggests we might

even abandon the journey and return, going back to something that only ends in death and not eternal life.

Is that the truth for us? Have we forgotten about heaven and what is at stake? Have we stopped looking ahead and forgotten about that heavenly home and reward that awaits us? Hebrews 11:24-25 speaks of Moses as being one who **“...chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward.” Hebrews 11:25-26**

We know what the reward is. God himself is waiting for us. We know what the destination is. There is a city prepared for us. A home prepared for us, and it's not in Tulsa, or Broken Arrow or Bixby or Okmulgee or Sapulpa or Sand Springs or wherever you drove from today. Those cities someday will be gone. The writer of Hebrews said, **“For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” Hebrews 13:14**

We are going to a heavenly city. Don't deceive yourself with delusions about this life. It isn't about making yourself happy here, it is about living with eternity in view. It's about heaven and home.

Have you been thinking about home lately? Have you thought about how marvelous heaven is going to be? Jesus and all God's saints gathered in one place.

We're going to go there one of these days. For some of us, death may be the means by which we arrive there. What is that going to be like? Remember as a child, falling asleep in the car on the way home and your dad carried you in and put you to bed. You woke up and thought, how did I get here? I think that may be what death will be like. Dottie Rambo wrote these words, “Soon I shall hear the call from heaven's portal, ‘Come home my child, it's the last mile you must trod.’ I'll fall asleep, and wake in God's new heaven, sheltered safe within the arms of God.” She experienced that herself just a few years ago.

Perhaps for others of us the words of the apostle Paul will come true. **“I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. For the trumpet of God shall sound, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, wherefore comfort one another with these words.”** It didn't happen yesterday, but it

will happen some day.

I don't know how it will be or when it will be, but I'm looking for a better country, an eternal home in heaven. I plan to keep my eye on the prize, to keep my eye on home. It's just ahead a little farther for all of us. And if you believe it, it will affect the way you live, the way you plan, the way you treat others, because you are going home soon.

Let's determine in our hearts, "I'll not let anything keep me from heaven and my eternal home." Whatever the devil has offered you to get you to turn away from the faith, to abandon your walk with God, it's not enough. It can't compare to eternity with Jesus in heaven. Don't stop. Keep walking by faith. Keep thinking about home because we're almost there. It won't be long and we will be leaving here. Stay true to Jesus. Fight that good fight of faith and don't give up because we're almost home.