

LONGING FOR HOME

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

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They say, “Home is where the heart is.” “There’s no place like home.”

Robert Frost said, “Home is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” T.S. Eliot wrote, “Home is where one starts from.”

Today, we continue our series, “God at Home,” exploring the Bible’s vision of God’s home and ours. A week ago, we started in the beginning, where Adam and Eve were created to be with God. God dwelled with them as they heard the sound of Him walking in the garden “at the time of the cool of the day.” God created the world to be His home and ours. When our sin created a distance, alienating us from God, He set about to repair what was broken. Our text last week (Exodus 29:45-46) led us to the pinnacle of God’s desire to make a home among His people in the tabernacle.ⁱ

However, rather than tending to God’s home, they made a new god. Our exile and our homelessness only grew worse. John says that, in Jesus, the eternal Word of God dwelt – He tabernacled – among us. In Him, we discover a new presence of God in the world. God dwells not only “among” the people, but also *in them*.

This is the gospel message of salvation through Jesus that Paul had been preaching in places like Corinth. However, the Corinthians had noticed about Paul what we also know of our world: things remain broken. The decay of our world is apparent. Our lives are not without sorrow or suffering. The battering Paul has taken in life and ministry have left him with a deteriorating physical condition and a shameful situation. People in Corinth are wondering out loud why God would not do a better job of safeguarding and bringing honor to His messenger.ⁱⁱ

In 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, Paul writes with a need to explain why, in spite of his shameful conditions, all of his life’s afflictions, and his constant persecution, he can still carry out God’s work with confidence and power. What can Christians say about the challenges we face? How can your life look so bad if you say things are so good? How do we live in a world like this?

In this passage, Paul launches into an explanation of how his inner life is constantly being transformed into glory even as its earthly embodiment decays and dies. It’s one of the most researched and commented passages in all of Paul’s letters. Paul expresses the longing of those who know themselves to be exiled from their true home in this present evil age.ⁱⁱⁱ There are complexities and questions we won’t answer today, but it is a passage that offers truths to guide us as we navigate life in our decaying bodies surrounded by our own struggles and stresses. The first truth we find is that we should live like we are not at home.

1. We live like we are not at home.

In a series of contrasts, Paul emphasizes just how different our eternal glory is from our present affliction. He talks about the “outer man” and the “inner man.” Momentary and eternal. Affliction and glory. Tent and house. Sight and faith. We live for what is unseen in a world of sight. We live for the eternal in a world of temporary. With nearly every sentence, Paul is mixing in another image to clarify that we live in an unsettled state, longing for home.

There are a few ways, I’ve found, to keep this truth central to life. They are obvious but can also be truths that hide in plain sight. One way to live like you’re not at home is to let your sorrows say something temporary.

a. Let your sorrows say something temporary.

We heard the reality of our sorrows in the music today:

“Our sorrows leave us weak and worn,
Surrounded by our fears,
We look to heaven through feeble faith and tears,
How long, O Lord, how long?”^{iv}

Paul addresses this question in 2 Cor. 4:16:

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven...”

Paul says our body is a tent. I’m sure you’ve spent some nights in tents. They can be nice for a vacation, but not intended for daily use. They’re good for a while, but not forever. As Max Lucado points out, “Flaps fly open. Winter wind creeps from beneath. Summer showers seep from above. Canvas gets raw and tent stakes come loose. We need something better, Paul argues. Something permanent. Something painless. Something more than flesh and bone. Until we get it, we groan.”^v

Paul can self-describe on one occasion (1 Cor 4:11) as homeless. However, he does not lose sight of the fact that he and all Christians have an eternal home in the heavens, a home not made with human hands. I imagine that Paul, the tent maker, has no problem contrasting the tents that he makes and that people purchase with a home that can't be folded up and moved. This promise gives us hope. Paul says, we must not lose heart. Because our affliction, especially

that which comes as a result of your faith, is not forever. Everything that our sorrows say is temporary.

b. Let your joys point you to what is eternal.

Clive (Lewis) was born November 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland. His mother died when he was 9 years old, and his father never remarried. Between the death of his mother in August 1908, and the fall of 1914, Clive attended four different boarding schools. By 15, his emerging atheism was confirmed. As a young adult, he found in Roman poet philosopher Lucretius, the best argument for his unbelief: “Had God designed the world, it would not be - A world so frail and faulty as we see.”^{vi}

He remained angry about the world and at the God who made it until one night when he stumbled onto George MacDonald’s fantasy novel *Phantastes*. “That night,” he said, “my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized.” Something had broken in — a “new quality,” a “bright shadow,” he called it.^{vii}

Six years later, Clive (better known as CS Lewis) professed faith in Jesus Christ and began living in the conviction that Christianity is true. Within ten years, he had become the “voice of faith” for the nation of England during the Second World War, and his broadcast talks in 1941–1942 “achieved classic status.”^{viii}

After God overcame Lewis’s atheism in the spring of 1929, Lewis looked back on all his experiences of longing and knew why these desires, though pleasant, were inconsolable. It was a desire for God. It was evidence that he was made for God. He wrote:

“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things — the beauty, the memory of our own past — are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of the tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”^{ix}

When Lewis stopped turning joy into an idol, he found, by grace, that it was “a pointer to something other and outer,” a pointer to God.

We live and move in a world marked by this groaning and longing because our world is not as it should be. Not only has sin interrupted the good and beautiful world God created, but the distance it creates between us and God only further displaces us. Early church father, Augustine, famously said, “Our hearts are restless, oh God, until they rest in you.”

This mortal life is marked by being broken down, groaning, and longing because our humanity hinders us off from full fellowship with the Lord. We are plagued with the sense that our home is not here. Our sorrows can, painfully, make that clear, but even our joys should point us in God's direction.

Our experience and the Scriptures both teach us that we ought to live like we are not at home. It's equally important that we know, deep down, that our true home is coming.

2. We live like our true home is coming.

Beginning in verse 2, it reads: *"For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life."*

"Home" can bring with it so many images. For many, the thought of home recalls warm and cherished feelings of family and nostalgia. I'm fully aware that for many the image of home is a memory of only grief or hardship or pain. Homes are places, but they're also much more than that. Home is the people who live there, the relationships within. To think about home eventually leads you to think back to your childhood home, the place where your life started.

Better Than Home?

I spent my childhood in one house. Early in life, my brother and I discovered that a friend lived in the house directly behind ours. His age was between the two of us brothers, so we became something of a trio. Our two lots shared a dividing privacy fence in the back, but my father built a gate between them so that we could come and go freely. We would knock on each other's back doors daily, looking for a friend to come play. We'd spend hours making up games, creating imaginary worlds, and doing what boys do.

Around the time it got dark or when it was time for dinner to be shared, one parent or the other would open the back door to announce it. You couldn't quite see from one back door to the other, but you could certainly hear. Our friend went by his nickname, "PC." I can still hear the sound of his mother's voice as she would crack open that back door and yell, "PC." It meant the fun was over.

On our best days the toys would hit the ground, we'd exchange disappointing glances, and we'd wander back into our homes. I'm certain other times we'd say something noncommittal like, "Coming!" Then we went back to what we were doing. We knew the fun was over, but we'd buy all the time we could. Rather than running in to take our seats at the tables that had been prepared for us, or rushing back to be nurtured in care or connected to our families, it seemed fitting to finish up that game, settle the score, or live in whatever world we'd created outside. Rather than longing for home, we settled for amusement.

Sometimes I get the sense that our view of God's eternal home is equally misled. We imagine it to be a good, warm, nurturing place, but all the fun is out here, isn't it? Consumed by our own creativity, distracted by our own toys, lost in our imaginations, we reject the invitation. We'll take temporary tents over eternal buildings. Rather than tend to God's home, we opt to make our own. Where is home? It's better than outside. Some of us live as if it is worse.

The ruler of this world, the powers of the enemy, would love nothing more than to unsettle your faith in God's future by convincing you that the present is the best there is or that what you make of it is all you will get. Don't try to mask your profound spiritual homelessness by thinking that if you build a great enough family, house, career, or name, that'll deal with it. We should live like our true home is coming, like it is better, and that, in God, it is enough.

The Bible says the home that your heart seeks - in fact, even the home that your heart "remembers" - it has never even had. It's the collective memory of the Eden of God. It's the image of God created in us for a world we were made for, but have never even known. We groan with a memory of Eden; we long for the face of God walking with us in the cool of the day.^x

Psalm 90 says, "*Oh Lord, you have been our dwelling place through all generations.*" Isaac Watts puts it in his hymn based on Psalm 90, "You are our eternal home." God has promised to remake the home we're missing. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely, to settle for earth, to be content in a strange land, to join with the Babylonians and forget Jerusalem.

Instead, we live like we're not at home, and we live like our true home is coming. In light of the Scriptures, a third truth is also necessary: we live like our true home is already here.

3. We live like home is already here.

2 Corinthians 5:5 explains:

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight—⁸we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Here, our experience of this world is met by the message of Christ. Both remind us that our true home isn't just a physical place, but a deep connection with God. Paul is saying, "What you do now is part of God's future," because in Christ and by the Spirit, God's future mysteriously comes into the present and starts to transform us right here and now. "We are being renewed day by day," Paul said (2 Corinthians 4:16). So, we are already living the future life in advance.

It's imperfect and incomplete. We still sin. We still get sick. We will still die, but the point is this: the home God intends to make - that new world - has broken in. By the Spirit, God's world is

here in and through our lives. So, the work to which we are called to do and the things we do as his servants and followers will last into God's future.^{xi} As David Garland describes, “The Spirit’s presence in the lives of believers guarantees that some of the splendor of the world to come has already broken into this present age.”^{xii}

Eugene Peterson, in paraphrasing our passage today, captures some of that splendor well:

“So, we’re not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There’s far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can’t see now will last forever.

¹⁻⁵ For instance, we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven— God-made, not handmade—and we’ll never have to relocate our “tents” again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move—and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what’s coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we’re tired of it! We’ve been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what’s ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we’ll never settle for less.

⁶⁻⁸ That’s why we live with such good cheer. You won’t see us drooping our heads or dragging our feet! Cramped conditions here don’t get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead. It’s what we trust in but don’t yet see that keeps us going. Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? When the time comes, we’ll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.

Some of us are here today carrying into worship more sorrow than any arms should hold. Others are living so flooded with joy that they can hardly keep from raising their arms in celebration. Most of us, I would guess, have known both at one time or another.

But if you can let your sorrows say only something temporary, and make sure your joys point you in God’s direction, you’ll find that you’re living like you’re not at home. And when, in God’s grace, you remember that our true home is coming, don’t forget that you need to start living like some of His home is already here.

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- ⁱ Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God: A Brief Story of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022) 5-10.
- ⁱⁱ David Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, Vol. 29 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1999) 239.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Garland, 264.
- ^{iv} “How Long, Oh Lord,” Sovereign Grace Music
- ^v Max Lucado, *Heaven: God’s Highest Hope* (Word Publishing, 1994).
- ^{vi} John Piper, *He Was Made for Another World* (29 Nov 2018).
- ^{vii} C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 220-222.
- ^{viii} Allister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis – A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Tyndale Elevate, 2016) 210.
- ^{ix} C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 32.
- ^x Tim Keller, “The Longing for Home,” *Gospel in Life*, 28 September 2003.
- ^{xi} NT Wright, “Does Our Present Work Matter to God? - 1 Corinthians 15:58” (N.T. Wright Online, 8 Aug 2022).
- ^{xii} Garland, 264.