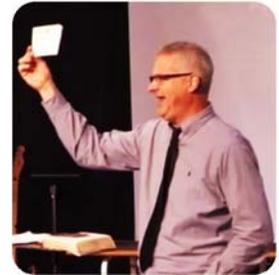


Good morning.

I want to welcome all those of you who are watching on livestream this morning. We have a growing, growing group of people joining us there and we actually have a pastor in the back room that's communicating with them and praying with the people that are online today, so we're excited that our congregation extends beyond here.

Also want to mention, as you're sitting there, in the seat in front of you is a card that looks like this and I'm going to ask you to do something that would be really helpful for us. I would love it if every one of you would reach forward and grab one of these cards; all it says on there is name, phone, and email. Here's the deal. Oftentimes we get a family name or a family phone number or a family email and then we're trying to communicate and we have all the wrong information. We're also starting a new child check-in system next week that operates off of cell numbers and it'll make life so much easier, and so to have all the correct information helps us a ton. So I'm going to ask you to do me a favor right now. Would you reach in the seat back in front of you or one over from you, they're pretty close I think, if everyone would do it. I know there are a couple of you rebels out there, you're like, *You're not getting my email address. I know what you're gonna do with that. I know I'm gonna get robo calls every day.* I have no robo calls planned, so if you would do that that would help us out a ton.



And after the message today we will pass the buckets and we'll give our offering back to the Lord. And I know many of you do that online, that's an incredibly helpful thing, many of you give here in the buckets. I actually give in the bucket here to me, I'm sort of old school so that's the way I like to do it. And here at the end of the year as we're closing out the season one of the things we know is that it's a moment to just sort of step back, look where we're at, if we hit where we wanted to give, what we want to give to the Lord, what we're thinking about giving to everyone else at this time of the year, and so we want to make sure we give what we've chosen to give to the Lord. So as you're thinking about that you can prepare that but make sure this card gets in.

One other quick thing. Christmas Eve is coming quickly. As you know, here at Calvary we always do a Christmas Eve service and a Christmas Eve eve service, just sounds cool to say Christmas Eve eve. Well, Christmas Eve eve is on Sunday this year and so rather than it being an eve service we're gonna have the normal morning service, so Christmas Eve eve will be our two normal Sunday morning services. So on December 23 same time as we normally come here, 9:30 and 11:00. What we're doing this year, because some want to come on Sunday and some want to come Monday night to both services, each of our pastors is preaching. We're doing a different pastor at each service so you're gonna get a different sermon at each service; Christmas music at all four, obviously. So if you would like to come to two different services, one on Eve eve and one on Eve you're welcome to do so.



Here's what we hope is that you will grab some of these cards in the Café today, at either one of the Cafés, grab as many as you'll hand out. Give them to the friends and invite friends, we know that at Christmastime it's the one time of the year people will go to church and they won't go to church any other time of the year. They're thinking about church this time of year. This makes sense for them to at least go to a candle lighting service, and both on our Eve eve and Eve services we're going to be doing candle lighting, so make sure you're part of that and jump in there and be involved.





We're starting a new series today for Christmas called HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS. Christmas has a way of lighting up things. It wasn't but a few weeks ago and it was all starting to happen—Christmas trees were lighting up, whole rooms were lighting up, public places were lighting up, where we're going around to see those things that are lit up. The other thing that gets lit up this time of year are emotions. It brings back phenomenal memories. It has a way of just making our homes feel warm and brings back good feelings and good memories.

We've been playing Christmas music in our home. There's just something about that, it just lights everything up, and then you add to that sweet food and everything comes together beautifully. Go out in the lobby afterwards, did you see that whole photo set up out there today? That's for you. That has perfect lighting so when you use your phone you can set the family up there in front of that fireplace out there and it's all lit up so that you can have a memory. Put it on a postcard and send it out to everyone, put it on Facebook, so afterwards today take your family out there or go out there. There was a group of people out there this morning and I said, "Go over there, all of you in a group, just do this together," just to connect because we love being together. Christmas lights things up. There's something amazing about that.



It also lights up those emotions that have a tendency to turn off the lights. I don't have to give you much explanation but for many Christmas is also the most difficult time of the year. Depression rates skyrocket and I'm told that research says it's the day after Christmas that that is at an absolute highest point. We long to be home for Christmas. Unfortunately, for some of us there will be people that aren't there and that affects our emotions, and so the problem is is for many of us we won't be home for Christmas. But here's what I want to throw out to you today as we launch this series, there is a spiritual principle that I think if we grab it today it's gonna help us walk through all this all Christmastime. And



so I'm just gonna throw it out right up front and then you begin thinking about it and I'm hoping that you'll bring this back up in your mind throughout the Christmastime and that is this: Home is not here. There is a home that each one of us are longing for. Here's the deal: We long for home because God has placed within us a longing for home, a home that He has made for us. That's why I want you to remember this principle: Home is not here.

It's not to say we shouldn't be creating memories and enjoying the home that God's given us. I believe that actually that home has been given us so that we can begin to – in the smallest way that earth can provide for us – get a grasp of what it might be to have the ultimate home. That thing that we are longing for; that thing that we're dreaming for.

There is a passage in the Bible that I believe will be helpful to us this morning. So if you have your Bibles I would love for you to turn to the back of your Bible to the book of Hebrews, way to the right side. If you start at the back and start turning left you're gonna get there pretty quick. I'd love for you to turn to Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 is known as the faith chapter. It talks about all these people lived way, way, way long ago that were willing to do all sorts of things that God told them to do that didn't make any sense at the time, things that didn't feel right, didn't feel good. You're moving along going down the road feeling like you're a bit blind, headed somewhere where you're not quite

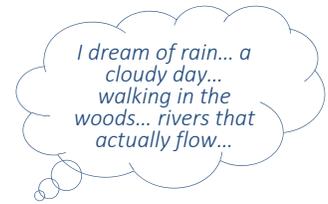
sure where you're going, but God says keep going there and they did it. And then you have the writer of the Hebrews in many cases many, many, many years later looking back, bringing up their names and saying now that was an example of someone who didn't see the big picture, but when God told him to do it they said, "Listen, God, I have faith in You. You get the big picture, I may not, so here we go." So I'm just gonna walk you through some verses in Hebrews chapter 11 beginning at verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

~ HEBREWS 11:8

So he calls this place home, and by the way, this is way back at the beginning of time. I just wanted to clarify that, just rewind the tape back way close to the beginning, he's a long way from home. All right, I'm sorry, the only thing that he knows as home. God says I want you to take up your tent stakes and I want you to begin moving and I want you to move on and I want you to go to a place where you don't know where you're going. Probably a large percentage of us in this room have been at some point in our career transferred; we move from one place to another. And I don't know about you but I get sentimental when those moments happen. I also get a little bit uncomfortable because I don't know what I'm about to walk into. Is this gonna be a great season of our lives or is this gonna be a hard season? What are we dealing with? I know what to expect here; I don't know what to expect there.

I grew up in this area about an hour west of here until I was 17 years old at which time I moved out west, and I lived out west until six years ago. So the whole time I lived out west I just dreamed of it raining because it never rained out there. I dreamed of a cloudy day where you could just sort of put a blanket around you and sit by the fireplace and enjoy the fire in the fireplace. I dreamed of walking in a woods. I dreamed of rivers that actually



flowed. That's what I pictured in my head. I remembered home. Okay, so six years ago I leave that place and I come to all of that stuff. Now this summer when it was raining all the time [Laughter] I was dreaming of those days where the sky was blue all year long; where it was warm all year long. I was dreaming of the smell of grapefruit trees, not oak trees with moss growing on them.



God says to this guy by the name of Abraham I want you to move but you don't know completely what that's gonna look like. You and I, we have moved and we miss one thing. We move to the next place and we miss what was there. And there's this reminder that we're never satisfied here on this earth. There's always something that we're looking back or looking forward to and we're never even if we have everything that we thought we wanted, this earth doesn't satisfy.

{ ...THIS EARTH DOESN'T SATISFY }

Let me keep on reading verse 9 of Hebrews 11:

*<sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

~ HEBREWS 11:9-10

This tells us in this chapter that when he did what he did even though it didn't make sense. Now God was working to create. He had a bigger plan going on that they couldn't ever have grasped. He was trying to put together, because God always works with a people, He was putting together a people of promise that would ultimately birth the Messiah that would bring about our salvation who would come here to this earth, the Christmas season that we're talking about. It starts all the way back here with a guy picking up his tent and starting to walk even though it doesn't make any sense. Now looking back it makes a ton of sense. Looking back you can go, "Wow! Look what God did! Look how God pieced all that together." But in this in-between time sometimes this all seems very, very frustrating. It's a phenomenal reminder when we read this that there is always something bigger going on.

*THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING BIGGER GOING ON*

And these guys, Abraham, he had faith even beyond this life. And it said he had faith in a city, he had a faith in Heaven, something that was bigger, something that was beyond this life. I love what these words in this verse whose foundation and designer and builder is God. There's this reminder that everything that we know here there is something more, there is something greater yet to come.

The next verse is, I don't know, it's sort of a downer. I want to look at verse 13:

*<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised,*

— It's like, "AH!" We hear, so many times we hear, "Hey, if you do this and you do this and you do this, everything's going to come together, everything's going to be perfect." Well, the things they were dreaming of, the things they were hoping for didn't come to be. And you say, "Well, that's not right. That's not fair." But listen to what the rest of the verse says:

*but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

And what this is doing is it's setting up this premise that I started with—this place isn't our home. So when we talk about home for the holidays, if there's a given point where what home turns out to be for the holidays isn't the home that we were dreaming about, rather than going down the path of lights out in a time where the lights seem to be bright on everything, stop allowing the lights to shine bright on this darkness that home isn't what you experienced today but realize, *realize* there is something more, there is something greater ahead. Change your mindset from this very moment and my expectations of what this should be, where I'm looking back and saying, "Oh, I wish it was like that," or we're looking forward going, "Someday it'll be like that," but stopping and saying, "Hey, I'm going to enjoy today for what it is because today is not all that it should be. There is a home that I have not yet enjoyed, but the lights being turned on Christmas that are so bright reminds me that this drive that I have to be home for Christmas is only in a microcosm, this physical home right here that we get to enjoy, but rather it is the bigger picture of home in Heaven for eternity." Verse 14:

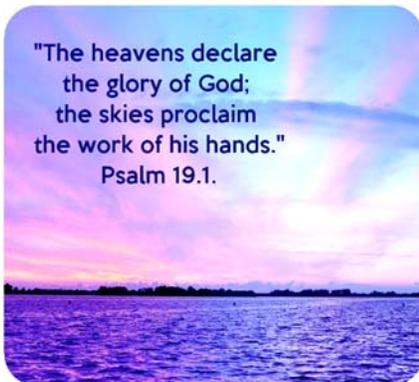
**Change your mindset from this very moment and your expectations of what this should be saying, "Oh, I wish..." but stop and say, "Hey, I'm gonna enjoy today for what it is..."**

*<sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

~ HEBREWS 11:13-14

You see, here's the deal. We long for a home because God has placed in us a longing for the home that He has made us. He's made us a home and He's placed in us a longing for that home. Verse 14 that we just read, "*For the people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.*" There is something inside of us that God has wired us with. We think it's just wanting to be home for Christmas with the family and the special things that we have learned to do in our little world for Christmas. And God says that's just a picture, that's just a taste; I have something so much more, something so much better.

Every Christmas I like to start out with this concept of a thought that comes to my mind that Jesus before He was born, He leaves Heaven and you can just take whatever you can imagine Heaven as and expand it ever so exponentially, eternally, to infinitely to try to—we can't even grasp what Heaven is—but whatever that is, however phenomenal that is, Jesus leaves Heaven and comes to this earth. And you can imagine in the grandness of Heaven and the smallness of earth, Jesus steps into our world. And what I find so amazing about that is that's how much He loves us. And so I always think of myself, what's the smallest, most insignificant thing, tiniest thing that somehow I could enter myself into it doesn't even compare. But here's what I wanted to throw out to you, that's sort of the concept I think of when I think of incarnation of Jesus being born, but what I think of as I'm reading this passage is that when I discussed that one of the things I never discuss here at the Christmastime is this place Heaven, this home that Jesus really left to come to *our* home to rescue us from this home that isn't what it's ultimately going to be, that there is something so much greater and to begin to think about that home.



Jesus at the end of his life in John chapter 17 and verse 24 prays this amazing prayer for us at the end of His life, and He's praying to God and in that prayer He says to God, I desire that they—those who have trusted in Him—may be with Me where I am.<sup>1</sup> And He says this, so that they can "*see my glory.*" The word glory is so incredibly hard for me to grasp. We oftentimes talk about, you know, you spend eternity in Heaven before the throne of God, worshiping God, and in our earthly minds all we can picture is some sort of a big chair with God sitting on it and us bowing down or something before it and we're going is that exciting for eternity? I mean, how can I figure? And it's because I don't think we understand the glory of God and

what that's going to be like. When you think about glory I would love for you to think about something that is beyond anything that has ever been beautiful to you, has ever sounded amazing to you, has ever created sights and expressions that were amazing to you, that moment when you walked up to something and said, "Wow!"

I mean, in our world so often there's that initial burst of wow and then it's sort of gone. Do you ever get that steak brought out, it's still sizzling and it's wet on the top and, you know, it's got the – you can still see the big salts there and you cut into that—I'm gonna make you hungry but I think about food all the time—you cut into that and you put your fork in that and you put that in your mouth? *Ahhhhh!* I had that moment with my son a couple weeks ago, we went out to eat together, just the two of us, and he goes, "Stop that. I'm having a moment." [Laughter] But by the fourth or fifth bite the moments were over and it's just like [*gestures mindlessly shoveling the food into his mouth*]. It doesn't taste as good, right? By the time you get to the last bite you're just like you hate to waste it, right? Imagine—we were talking about stupid little thing as a piece of steak—imagine if Heaven's glory is, whatever beyond our wildest imagination, that just continues on and on and on and on for eternity.

<sup>1</sup> "*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*" ~ **JOHN 17:24**

I believe it was Exodus 34<sup>2</sup> Moses, remember when he goes up on the mountain to be with God and he comes down, and he continued to just glow because he had been in the presence of the glory of God. You know, you start thinking about this a little bit more. If somehow you can allow your imagination to go, because all we can use are words and metaphors that we know and they're just not enough to explain it, we begin to see Heaven in this new light and Jesus, when He prays to God says, "O God, I want them to be there. I want them to be part of it."

As I was thinking about this this week I was thinking about home for the holidays, that's a real close view, that's a couple weeks away. We'll all be in a massive panic between now and then, we'll ask each other how we're doing, we'll say we're busy, we'll all sort of be freaked out because of all the parties we have to go to, we'd be just as freaked out if we didn't get invited to those parties but, you know, it's – whatever. And then all of a sudden it'll be over and it isn't so much fun taking down those trees and packing up that stuff and pulling down the lights. A few years ago I was so frustrated with it that I just put the tree out at the curb. I did. I had to go get a real one this year. But think about it for a moment. We're here for what? What would you say – 70, 80 years? – and we think about that 70, 80 years. We spend a lot of time fixating on that 70 or 80 years. We're gonna be somewhere a thousand years from now. We're gonna be somewhere 10,000 years from now. We're gonna be somewhere a million years from now. But you were all freaked out this week when the stock market plunged. I know, some of you weren't. Because we're focused in on the next 20 years, the next 30 years, the next 50 years. What about a million years from now? What about a trillion years from now? We'll be somewhere.



You see, the longing for home, ♪ ♪ *I'll be home for Christmas* ♪ ♪ – an amazing song, that longing for a home that actually can cause you to tear up if you're in the right emotional state when you hear that song played, that longing for home inside of us is for Heaven, not a place in time. "*If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return . . . they desire a better country*"— that is a heavenly one.

Jesus said in John 14:2<sup>3</sup> in my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would not have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and I prepare a place for you, I will come back and I will take you to be where I am so that you can be with Me forever. James says life is like a vapor,<sup>4</sup> appears for a moment and disappears. Jesus says I go to prepare a place for you.

In theological circles, in church world, in popular writings, there are ongoing cyclical things that happen. About ten years ago there was an ongoing discussion among church leaders and authors that we need to take this attention off of Heaven because what we're doing is we're trying to convince people to put their trust in Jesus so that they can get to Heaven, and as a result we've got a bunch of people trying to get to Heaven but we don't have a lot of people falling in love with God, and so they basically said we probably ought to talk less about Heaven. It wasn't real long until there came out a new conversation and that conversation was it's really off-putting to people to talk about Hell because if we talk about Hell it's so negative and it's so dark, and so we ought to be more positive than that. So now we're not allowed to talk about Heaven, we're not allowed to talk about Hell—and what did we get? Now there's this huge complaining that we have such a secular society and the church is just interested in being a consumeristic group of people just trying to receive goods and services, spiritual goods and

<sup>2</sup> See Exodus 34:29-35

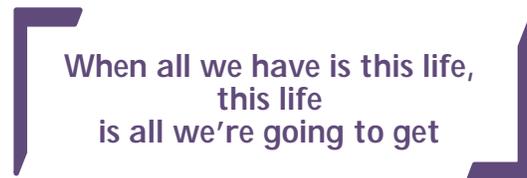
<sup>3</sup> "*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*" ~ JOHN 14:2-3

<sup>4</sup> *What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* ~ JAMES 4:14b

services, and if they like it they take it and if they don't like it they'll go down the street and find something else somewhere else.

And so now there's the whole big discussion on, well, it's not just about me and it's not about what is provided for me. When we take away these biblical things, Heaven and Hell, if we stop thinking about *Hey, where will I be a thousand years from now? Where will I be a hundred years from now?* I realize, you know, listen, there is a literal Hell and I do not want to be there. It's a place of punishment. The Scriptures say wide is the path to destruction, narrow is the path to Heaven,<sup>5</sup> to eternal life, to God, and we step back and say, "Wait a minute. No, I want to spend an eternity in Heaven with God."

Here's what I want to leave us with: If this life is all we focus on, then this life is all we're going to get. Think about that on December 26 when everything you had planned didn't work out the way you had expected it to, when home for the holidays didn't seem like the song and didn't feel like what you remember twenty years ago, and it's not what you had pictured at this point in your life. When all we have is this life, this life is all we're going to get. But God has made for us an eternal home and he says this: "...*God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*" That longing inside of you for home can only be filled by God, and the home that you're longing for is really the eternal home.



When all we have is this life,  
this life  
is all we're going to get

What do you do with that? For some of you today, I want to introduce you to Jesus because I want to see every one of you go to Heaven. Scriptures say he who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life.<sup>6</sup> The only way, the only narrow path is through Jesus. I don't want to see anyone in this room not go to Heaven. I hear people all the time say, "Oh, he (or she) is in a better place," but there's no testimony of Jesus, and all of a sudden you and I know that may not be the case. Have you put your trust in Jesus? It's as easy as just right now saying, "Jesus, I want to trust in You. You came to this earth to save me from my sins; I trust You for that. You took my place in death; I want to trust You for my salvation. I want to have eternal life with You. I don't fully grasp Heaven, but I want it."

[Closing Prayer]

*Lord God,*

*I want to pray to You right now for each person in this room that feels that tugging. I pray that they would say yes to You right now and put their trust in Jesus alone for their salvation. Just to call out to You, "Jesus, save me. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my life. I come to You through your cross and I want to come to God through You only."*

*Lord God, I want to pray for each person in this room right now that this Christmas time, as it lights up and those wonderful emotions are lit up, that You would bless these people in this room right now. That they would focus in on Jesus; they'd focus in beyond this life. And Lord God, when those lights go out and we feel that darkness and that disappointment, I pray that You*

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<sup>5</sup> *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* ~ MATTHEW 7:13-14

<sup>6</sup> *Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.* ~ I JOHN 5:12

*would remind us that this home is not our ultimate home, and that we'll put our trust in You. We love you, Jesus.*

*It's in Your Name we pray. Amen.*

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