



SERMONS

Our United State Homesick for Heaven

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

October 18, 2020

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Good morning Chapel Hill. My name is Rachel and I'm delighted to be with you this morning as a newly ordained Pastor. Thank you to all those who came or watched our ordination service this past weekend. I'm so grateful for your support on this journey, and so thankful to get to continue to serve this beautiful church family.

I wonder, how many of you did *not* grow up in Gig Harbor? (Hand raise) How many of you grew up here and you missed it so much you couldn't help but move back?!

One of the most common questions I get asked is "do you miss England?" Of course! I miss the rolling hills, the endless cups of tea, my family, my friends, my hometown. This past weekend I really longed to have my family with me celebrating my ordination.

If you've ever moved away from people or a place you love you know that feeling. That longing to be back together, that longing to be "home".

In our passage today, Paul talks about experiencing homesickness for our heavenly home; a longing to be at home with the Lord.

In a time when our nation is divided over so many things, we as the church need to remind ourselves that earth is not our home. Regardless of birth town or background, we are united in our eternal citizenship and in our earthly experience of homesickness for heaven. We are going to explore this over the next few weeks in the sermon series we are kicking off today: "Our United State".

Turn with me to 2 Cor 5:4-7

⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷For we live by faith, not by sight.

Pray

Citizens of heaven

Our kids were born in the USA, but both their parents are British. My favorite question to ask them is are you English or are you American?

When they were little our kids' accent was so strong much of the time other adults didn't understand them, their introversion was so unlike their friends that we had teacher conferences to explain their cultural differences and all the while their grandparents back home were upset they didn't know how to follow simple instructions like "go fetch your jumper".

Our kids have gone through several phases already of which culture they most identify with. The day Evelyn first came home on the school bus she said she was American at school, but British on the bus. Nowadays she says she's only American because she was born here and she will gladly "teach" us how to be American. My favorite explanation is Ezra's latest; he says he is "Americish".

Knowing where we come from makes a big difference to our sense of identity! I wonder if you've ever thought about the fact that you too are not from around here. Your citizenship is not of this earth. You might be a citizen of the United States by birth, but your true home is heaven. Our passage today says that our citizenship is not of this earth; we were made with an eternal purpose in mind. In verse 5 says God "fashioned us for this very purpose".

This eternal citizenship looks very different from our mortal experience. It's far better! Paul illustrates this contrast in a few different ways in this chapter; in the contrast between a flimsy, temporary tent, and a building, an eternal house, built by God. Instead of nakedness, being clothed. In the contrast between being at home in the body and at home with the Lord.

In each of these metaphors, Paul describes the far superior, eternal, secure, much desired and longed for heavenly home with the Lord. We were designed with heavenly citizenship in mind. Our true home is heaven.

How do we know that we are designed this way? While on this earth, we are homesick for heaven.

Homesick for heaven

Paul uses the word "groan" several times in this passage. He says while we wait for our resurrection bodies we "groan" and while we are in this tent we "groan and are burdened". At first glance you might think this word groaning refers to complaining about the troubles of this life. Whining about our suffering and our circumstances.

But that's not actually what Paul means here. This groaning is not complaining, and it's not focused on the present circumstances. Remember from last week, Paul's eternal perspective helps him see his current suffering as only "light and momentary troubles", he is "fixing his eyes on the unseen", he is living "by faith, not by sight". He's *not* focused on his sufferings.

This groaning is not being fixated on sufferings, this groaning is actually the complete opposite. This groaning is a kind of hoping and expectation. It is future focused, and it's positive! It is the same word used in Romans 8 to refer to groaning of all creation as in the pains of childbirth, the inward groaning of the people of God waiting eagerly and in hope, and the wordless groans of the Spirit who intercedes for us. It is with this groaning that we pray "Come Lord Jesus, Come".

This groaning is strongly connected to the word longing which Paul also uses several times. I find it helpful to think of it this way:

When Ezra was just four months old we went to England to visit family. We're that family that never wants to pay for bags so we maxed out our luggage allowance and proceeded to juggle it through the airport. Strollers, a diaper bag, a backpack for Evelyn, small suitcases, big suitcases, car seats. I think in all we had 9 pieces of luggage. We were insane. AND totally exhausted by the time we even got on our 9.5-hour flight. I settled the kids, flopped into my seat, filled with anticipation of seeing my family, my home country again after a long time away. I was filled with this overwhelming sense of homesickness as I allowed myself to picture where we were going... And then began the flight from hell. Hours of settling and nursing and rocking and walking, trying to keep the kids quiet amongst the darkness and sleep masks, I finally settle baby Ezra into the bassinet... and then the seatbelt sign comes on. I have to pick him up. He wakes up so I nurse him to sleep. He throws up. He needs a new diaper. He's clean again but now Evelyn explodes her pull up. Need I go on... IT WAS AWFUL! And yet... I was so filled with anticipation for the future, it was all worth it. Far bigger than the pain of the present moment was the expectation and longing for what was to come. This is what that groaning and longing of this passage is like. We groan because we are homesick for heaven and we can't wait to get there!

Paul says this groaning, this experience of homesickness for heaven is what clues us in to our eternal citizenship. This experience of groaning reminds us earth is not our home - our true citizenship is in heaven. But what effect does this have on our present?

Confident

We've heard several times over the last few weeks that an eternal perspective can help us to not lose heart, to not give up. In today's passage, Paul takes this one step further. Not only do we not lose heart, we also have confidence. Verse 6 says "we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord" and verse 8 says "we are confident...and would prefer to be...at home with the Lord". We have confidence and are certain of our future with the Lord; we can be sure of the fact that one day we will receive resurrection bodies, we will be clothed in our heavenly dwelling, we will be at home with the Lord, we will appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

I think this confidence is something we need to recapture for our present moment, not least because this future hope makes a difference to our present reality.

I was once invited over for lunch to my grandparents and had the pleasure of hearing more of their story. They shared how their beliefs about the immanence of the second coming had fueled their passion for global mission, gave them an urgency for the gospel and for living lives of integrity in view of the coming judgement. This focus on their longing for this future time when they would be at home with the Lord gave them zeal and passion to live for him now. My grandfather passed away earlier this year, but I'm forever grateful for a legacy of a life lived well in view of eternity.

Paul tells us that with that confidence in mind, "we make it our goal to please the Lord". "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ". Whether we are in our earthly tent or our eternal house in heaven, we aim to live in view of the coming judgement. This confidence and groaning, this awareness that heaven is our home, this hope and expectation is not a form of escapism. Paul isn't talking here about just ignoring the sufferings of our present time and thinking happy thoughts about heaven to entertain and distract ourselves. This isn't some spiritual version of watching Netflix! This hope, this confidence has a real and tangible effect on our present, our now. Our belief that we will inherit eternal life changes the way we live right now.

One of the interesting things about living in a country but not being a citizen of it is that you kind of get a license to be a bit different. When people meet me, they don't mind if I use words or pronunciation that isn't like theirs - in fact they find it interesting. In an election season where friends are so divided in their opinions, I don't have a vote, so in a sense I'm a neutral third party. When I'm more outgoing than I could get away with in my home country, that's accepted, and when I'm more introverted people assume it's because I'm British. I really enjoy the freedom I have to just be myself.

As I think about how heavenly citizenship has made a difference in the way I interact with people I realize I've applied it the same way. I have friends who don't know Jesus, and I'm well aware that my Christian vocabulary and church culture is weird to

them; my call to ordained ministry needs a little explaining to someone who doesn't follow Jesus and we don't always have the same values. I don't live to please people in this culture, I live for the audience of my heavenly Father. I'm not ashamed of my culture, my heavenly citizenship, and it can be kind of interesting for people from other backgrounds to learn about my faith if it's presented in a humble, respectful way. I'm not from here, so I *get* to be a little different and I embrace that! My citizenship in heaven gives rise to confidence, not just in my future, but in my present.

Our text today reminds us that earth is not our home; we are citizens of heaven. So my charge to you today is to embrace your heavenly citizenship, let your sense of homesickness for heaven remind you that you were built with eternal purpose. Lean into that longing and pray "Come Lord Jesus Come". And while you wait, live a life flavored with confidence. Confidence that comes not from your own sense of achievement or ability, but confidence that comes from being a citizen of heaven. Let that confidence spur you into conversations about the gospel, about Jesus, about heaven, lives that look different from the culture we live in. Let's not be afraid to talk about our faith, to live distinctive lives flavored with honor, respect, humility and servant-leadership. It doesn't matter that that's not "normal" for the place we live. We're not from here!

Conclusion

In a divided, difficult time, we need to recapture this confidence in our future hope, this longing and groaning for what is to come, and its tangible effects on our lives now. More than ever, we need to recognize our citizenship is in heaven, acknowledge our common experience of being homesick for heaven, and live in the confidence of that citizenship, living every moment to please the Lord.