

# Saturday Evening Communion Service English

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Date: 30 August 2014

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] For those who were here last night, we considered just a little of the heavenly pilgrimage, the heavenly pilgrim.

And now, if we may, we can move on a little and to consider a little of the heavenly homeland, the heavenly country that is described here in verse 16.

And we come here especially in terms of seeking to find our identity with this place as our home. And here there is the great affirmation in verse 16 that the people of faith desire a better country, a heavenly one, and God is not ashamed to be called their God.

And I wish us just to consider this in what we understand of the gospel and what the gospel means to us. And for us, there are different aspects of the gospel that we find easier to apply for ourselves than others.

The whole issue of forgiveness and reconciliation are easily taken up in our mind. But the gospel speaks to us in terms of our new identity and our new home.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] And the focus of the Bible is very clearly a focus that takes us towards heaven. Even as we come and read the scripture together, and as we begin in the book of Genesis, we begin in a garden.

And we find there how Adam and Eve are put out of the garden. And the quest then is to take us all the way to the end of the book of Revelation, where we see the new heavens and the new earth, the place that is prepared for God and his people.

And that should be our desire. And it is a true and biblical desire. And when we set in our heart this great desire for a heavenly country, it should impact who we are.

It should impact our identity, our lifestyles, and everything we do. That if we are able to keep this aspect of what eternity is offering us, and what belongs to us when we take Christ by faith, and able to have our own spiritual lives empowered by this sense of belonging to heaven.

And this is what the gospel is all about. And at its heart is his great rescue mission in the incarnation, and also in the sacrifice of Christ, and in his resurrection.

[ 2 : 4 5 ] And it's speaking to us of opening the access to heaven to God's people. And for us, it ought to be the point of great comfort, that throughout all the storms of life, that God has prepared for us an eternal haven, a place of rest and security, a place of eternal bliss and joy.

And we're called to affirm all the promises of the gospel, all the promises that belong to the people of God. And I feel that for the church today, and for the Christian, this is the one thing that we have neglected to our own detriment.

And the call tonight is to recover this, to recover the reality of our eternal identity, to recover the reality of where we really belong, and how we're to live this out in this world and this life.

That is to take our thoughts and our own relationships and everything we are, and everything is to be lived out in response to the promise of heaven for God's people.

I think we should be contemplating this in our own hearts and souls daily, to be affirming what the gospel promises, to affirm what Jesus tells us and what he promises to do for us.

[ 4 : 12 ] And we ought to so live by them, that they are affecting our daily conduct and our daily lives, that we are able to affirm that if we're trusting and believing in Jesus, he is taking us home.

That he has a place set for us in the Father's house, that we belong there in that place with God's people, the new Jerusalem, the city of God, and to reflect in our own lives on those who have gone before us, and to realize that even our worship here is united with the praise in heaven, with the church that is triumphant, and the angelic choir around the throne.

And we anticipate and we long for that completion, where we will enter in, and we will be with them, inheriting this great reward that belongs to God's people, the reward of being with the Lord forever, in eternal bliss and joy.

Let's turn then to what we have in verse 16. And what we have here is this sense of a desire. And I think it's an attraction and a drawing.

It is magnetic that there is this drawing in the life and soul of the believer, taking them home, taking them to where Jesus is, and taking them to this heavenly country.

[ 5 : 50 ] In verse 16, we are reminded that there is a reference again to it has been a city. And this is a common reference for heaven in the Bible, the city, paradise, the garden, all of these different expressions describing what this is.

But in verse 16, it's called a country. And it's called a country here, but it's actually an addition in verse 16. It's not there in the original, but in verse 14, we have it there.

They're speaking of this heavenly homeland. And so it's qualifying with this heavenly homeland is. It is this heavenly country. And when the writer to the Hebrews is bringing this before us, he's speaking in terms, especially of Abraham.

In verse 10, he's looking forward to a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. And so this is the identity of Abraham.

This is how he lives his life. This is how he conducts himself in his business, in his labor, in his relationships, in his family, in all his struggles and tribulations and trials.

[ 7 : 04 ] This is how he lives life. He lives as somebody who looks forward. And he looks forward to this city and this heavenly country. He is drawn to it throughout his life, walking in his life's journey towards this country.

great eternal destination. Longing to be there with God. Longing to be there with God's people. Living his life under the security of the promise that God has given to him.

And as we seek ourselves to apply what belongs to the people of faith, and to learn what Abraham lived and how he conducted himself. When we realize the great blessings that we have from the gospel, and our own identity amongst God's people and God's heaven, we realize that there is somewhere we don't belong.

There is somewhere that is not our continuing city. There is somewhere that is not our home. And it's this world.

We don't belong here. And here in this chapter, this is full of affirmations of this. It's reminding us in its language that this world is a place of sojourn.

[ 8 : 28 ] that we are pilgrims here. That there is this realization of a lack of fulfillment in this life and in this world.

In verse 9, it says here, By faith, Abraham has gone out to live in a land of promise, as in a foreign land living in tents.

He's living in tents. A temporary abode. In verse 13, These all died in faith, not having received the things promised. Not having received in this world.

And again in verse 15, it speaks here of, if they had been thinking of that land which they had gone out, they would have an opportunity to return. They don't find the fulfillment of the promises here in this world and here in this life.

They are strangers here. They are pilgrims in this world and in this life. And here is Abraham. And he is in the promised land.

[ 9 : 29 ] And he is a stranger and an alien in this place. And a sense of a lack of fulfillment. And yet here we are reminded again, even in scripture, of the promises that belong to the Jewish people from Abraham.

The importance of the land of Canaan. Even today our news is still filled with the political struggle that goes on. Where the Jew is able to identify himself with this land.

Wherever he is in the world, Canaan is his home. Canaan is his possession. Canaan in the land of Israel is where he belongs.

It's his land, given to him by Abraham. It is the promise of God that is given to him. And here is Abraham in that land. And he lives in tents.

He is a stranger through it all. The promise belonged to him. And yet he finds here a temporary abode. That he doesn't find here the fulfillment of all of these promises.

[ 10 : 37 ] He is a stranger. And he doesn't belong. We know what it is to have a sense of an identity with a place. And a people.

The Jews knew it, as I've already hinted at. They knew it even in the Diaspora where the Jews were dispersed all over the empire. And today the Jew is all over the world. But wherever he is in the world, he's a Jew.

He belongs to Canaan. And we have the same idea in the mindset of our own people. That wherever the person from the islands is gone, he remains a Gael.

Wherever the Scot is gone, he remains Scottish. And the British man the same. Wherever he is, he seeks to maintain his culture and his identity with the old land. The place that he's come from.

He finds his identity there. That's where he belongs. He invests himself in his energy to retain his culture, to retain his language and all that he does.

[ 11 : 41 ] Because this is where his identity is. It's in the old land. And his association is deep and meaningful to him. Even till the end of his life.

That he wants his remains to return to the land where he was born and where he had such an association and an identity with. He feels he belongs there in that place.

That that's who he is. But you know, Abraham came from somewhere else. He came from a different land. Not from Canaan.

He came from Ur of the Chaldees. And yet his identity isn't in what's behind him. Isn't even from the origin of his father's house.

His identity is ahead of him. And this is how the Christian lives. That his identity is ahead of him.

[ 12 : 41 ] It's before him. It's not what he was. It is in the realization of the promises of God. What he is, is the heavenly citizen in a different world and in a different place.

And so the Lord calls us to move on and to move forward and to keep progressing towards this great realization.

to live even here in this world as a citizen of the world to come. To be longing for that kingdom. To live out that citizenship.

Isn't the whole issue of our identity at the moment up for grabs? Up for debate? That is continuing. Are we Scottish? Are we British? Are we both? What are we?

And the question is going into the core of our society that wherever we go we cannot in any way hide away from this debate. Everybody's speaking about it. What are we? What's going to become of us?

[ 13 : 46 ] What kind of citizens are we? At the moment we go away and we go on our holidays and we take our passport. And wherever we are in the world the passport tells everyone we're citizens of the United Kingdom.

We're strangers in their land. We belong somewhere else. And this is the idea that we have presented before us in our heavenly citizenship. That we belong somewhere else.

We're passing through. We're strangers in this world. And we are living for the world to come. We realize here how Abraham himself understood this.

One of the early church fathers spoke of Abraham and he said he was accustomed to yield the first place to others. He exposed himself to danger, endured numerous afflictions, he built no splendid houses, he enjoyed no luxuries, he had no care about dress, which all belonged to the things of this world, but he lived in all respects as one whose home is the city which is yonder.

And the description that we have here is Abraham living for what is really important. Seeing beyond the things of this world, seeing beyond its positions and its possessions, and realizing what it is to possess something far greater.

[ 15 : 20 ] And yet he lives as a true citizen. He is a salt and light in his community. He interacts with his neighbors. He is respected by them, but he does so with this distinct citizenship, that he belongs to somewhere else, that all his goals are somewhere else, that what he longs to receive is from another world, the world to come, his home with God forever.

That's what he longs for. That's where his identity is. It's in the real promised land. And so we have to question our own identity.

Are we living out our heavenly citizenship? Or are we consumed with this world? And God is calling us to be consumed with the world to come, to live out our eternal destination, to live out our eternal identity with everything we are, all our different relationships, with people, with our homes, with our money, with our work, with our wealth, with everything.

We are the people who are to be seeking to live for something else, distinct, different from this world. Why is it we find ourselves filling our lives with the same thing that the world does?

Being obsessed with our homes and our work and our money, where God is giving us something far greater, something that lasts forever, something that will not rot or rust or be taken from us at the grave, but this wonderful prize, immeasurable, lasting, and eternal.

[ 17 : 08 ] we are called to be citizens of the kingdom of God and the world to come, but we are called to do it here and now and that calls us to patience.

Patience for our possession, patience through trials and we examined this a little last night in terms of David, the trial that he faced as he himself was a fugitive from his own son, Absalom.

And the Bible reminds us time and again that the way to heaven isn't easy. It's not easy for you and it's not easy for me.

As we saw last night, there are valleys of Beka, there are tears to shed. There is a journey to live out. There is suffering and tribulation and hardship.

And I don't want to minimize that in any way for you. Your citizenship calls you to sacrifice. The citizenship of the kingdom of God calls you to go through a difficult journey.

[ 18 : 25 ] And yet, this is an important point in this very book because this is what's going on in the context of where this book was being originally written into.

The Christians were suffering. They were being persecuted. It was a sore trial for the church. Not least of all because many had had enough.

They couldn't go on. They renounced their faith and they went back. they forsook the assembly of God and they turned away from the gospel.

And those left there are still facing these great difficulties. The trial and tribulation of the Christian life. The sense of isolation and rejection.

And it's all for their faith. And this letter is written to encourage them. it calls them to keep on going.

[ 19 : 30 ] It calls them to remain consistent with their confession. It encourages them to endure. And it asks them to live for the eternal.

And at this point the writer uses the parallel of Abraham. And he's telling them you remember Abraham. You remember how he left Ur, how he left his father's land and he left with a promise.

And God's voice spoke to him and he responded to that voice. And he went out because he had a promise of a land. I wonder what Abraham's aspirations were.

I wonder if he thought that he would leave Ur of the Chaldees, he would take this journey and immediately he would have this land and he would be able to work the land and get fruit of the land and be comfortable in his life there.

You and I know that's not what happened to him. He faced discomfort. He was even displaced from the promised land. He had to leave it at one point.

[ 20 : 39 ] He went through trials. He was treated as a stranger and an exile, an alien. He went through all of these different difficulties, year by year, pitching a tent.

no fixed abode for Abraham on the land that was promised to him, facing all kinds of suffering and difficulty. And finally, in verse 17, he offers up Isaac.

That God demands everything from Abraham. Imagine what Abraham faces as he walks up that mound, as he's there with Isaac.

he's invested everything into this son. As far as he's concerned, this is the son of promise. This is the one who's going to have the land.

This is the one who's going to have the children as numerous as the sand on the seashore, the stars in the sky at night. He's invested so much in the son and he has nothing.

[ 21 : 41 ] Moving year by year, facing all of these trials and difficulties. And then he has to put this son on the altar.

I wonder what Abraham thought. I know what I would have thought. Is this it, God? I've left everything for you and still you're taking everything from me.

That he's got nothing. because that's what the picture looks like. The eyes of flesh see nothing.

But the eyes of faith see everything. Abraham sees with the eyes of faith. In verse 19, he believed.

He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead. This is the man of faith. Faith is described for us in verse 1. the assurance of things so far, the conviction of things not seen.

[ 22 : 50 ] Abraham is living by the things that are not seen. He realizes God's promise. He comes here and he doesn't turn back. He could have gone back.

We're told that in verse 15. If they had been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But Abraham left it all behind.

That's not where he belongs. That's not where he invests and identifies himself. He sees beyond. He sees greater than the things that are seen.

This is what faith does. It doesn't give up. And it doesn't send you back. and it gives.

And when God asks, you give because you know God knows better. That's hard, isn't it?

[ 23 : 56 ] But faith sees the unseen. Faith sees and believes in the promise of God. You know it took faith to leave Ur, but it took faith to keep going too.

And so we need the faith to keep on going. That penetrates beyond. we need to believe and to see the great unseen.

In verse 13, they all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Here is a man who is committed to God's will, realizing that there is a reward and it's coming.

And for all your pain and suffering, friend, and all the sacrifices you've endured, you remain committed to God's will because the reward is coming.

[ 25 : 07 ] it's coming. We need patience in life to see the unseen because what faith is is believing in God's word and acting on it.

It's not inactive. We're not supposed to be pedestrian in our faith. We're supposed to do what God calls us to do. And we're supposed to live out our faith in this world and in this life.

Through all the hardships and suffering that we live out our citizenship, saying that we belong somewhere else, saying that we do not hold too tightly to the things of this world.

And that requires our true patience that we trust in God. Take, for example, Abraham. year by year pitching that end.

Year by year going through this land as a stranger, but believing always that he belongs somewhere else, somewhere better.

[ 26 : 24 ] Friend, if you've come to the point in your own life where you are leaning on Christ and trusting in him, you belong somewhere else, somewhere better.

And a time will come where you will fully realize this. And though you need faith in life, you will need faith in death as well. We're told this in verse 13, they all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

When your time comes, and it's going to come, this life is a vapor. It will be over in a moment.

The Bible tells us that our lives are just like the grass in the field. The wind passes over, it's gone. We're away.

All too quickly, it will be over. And maybe for you, when you pass, maybe the world will think very little of you.

[ 27 : 46 ] Maybe it will think that you've attained very little, that you fulfilled very few ambitions, that it doesn't think much of your possessions, or your position.

But the Bible tells us that if we sleep in Christ, we have everything. This is one of the great paradoxes that Paul tells us of in 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 10.

He says, though we have nothing, we possess everything. We have everything. When the person who doesn't have faith passes, he's got nothing. Everything he had was invested in this world, in this life, what he could get his hands on.

And now they're taken all from him. They are buried with him in his grave. He is taken from his possessions forever, and he has nothing.

But when the Christian falls asleep in the Lord, he has everything. He has absolutely everything, the greatest possession of all, entering into the wonder and the glory of God's heaven.

[ 28 : 57 ] And we reminded this here too in verse 16, that they desire a better country, a heavenly world. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. Do you remember how this reminds us of the words of Jesus himself?

If you acknowledge me before men, I will acknowledge you before my Father. This is the great wonder of what God is going to do for us.

He's going to acknowledge us in the glory of heaven itself, that we will be there with him, people such as us, sinners such as we are, finding the realization of our identity and reaching home and the fulfillment of our citizenship.

That's where we belong, not in this world, world, but in the world to come. We should realize this because if we truly believe and live this out, it changes everything.

It changes every day, it changes every relationship, it changes everything we are if we are willing to affirm the gospel in our lives and all its promises and if we are willing to be the people who desire a better country.

[ 30 : 18 ] a heavenly one. This is what the Lord is offering us, a heavenly homeland. Do we have the faith to be able to see what is unseen, that we belong there, that God has got something far better for us and it has to impact our lives and all that we are in our relationship, in our relationships with each other, with the church, with the unbelievers, with our family, with our friends, with our colleagues and neighbors, with all the substance we have, with our money, with our time, with our ambitions.

May this be our great ambition, that we desire a better country, a heavenly one, and may it be ours. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the great wonder of the gospel. We thank you for what Christ does for us. We thank you for what is to be done, and we bless you that though this life is short, the wonder of what heaven is will be forever.

And Lord, how our own minds struggle to fully realize what has been laid up for us. And we will then consider that the suffering of this life is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed.

We bless you and praise you for all that you do, and we thank you that there is a place where there is no more suffering. Forgive us our sins, we pray in Jesus' name.

[ 32 : 19 ] Amen.