

Only Way is Forward

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 11. We read at verse 14 there, 14 to 16.

! Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Now we all know that we live in a very beautiful world. And there are many times that we stop and we take note of wonderful things that happen.

Sometimes we are aware of the beauty. Sometimes we see beautiful sunsets. Sometimes we can be driving along and we don't have to go anywhere further than our own island to admire some of the beauties of creation.

And we're able to say, well it is, it's a wonderful world. And we enjoy many things. There are many exciting times, many inspirational times, many wonderful times that we have enjoyed throughout different experiences, different situations and such like.

[1 : 2 5] And yet our text shows us that the people that the apostle is talking about are people who were looking for another country.

The country, this world, was a world that didn't satisfy them. They were looking for someone better. And while they had, there's no doubt about it, many blessings and many favors, this world did not ultimately satisfy.

The way that this world was going, the way that, or what this world lived for, was not ultimately what they lived for. They were looking for something else. And if you're a Christian here tonight, you can identify with what these patriarchs of old were like.

Because you can understand a wee bit of these things. You see, the apostle has been writing about these patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And although they had been promised the land of Canaan, they were told, remember how it was promised to first to Abraham and then to Isaac, promised to Abraham and his descendants, promised to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

And yet all the time, throughout their lifetime, they lived in that land as pilgrims and strangers. They weren't able to actually call it their own land.

[2 : 4 8] That was something that was to come later on. And all the time they lived, they were, as we say, living like pilgrims and strangers. There's a great example of that. Remember when Sarah, Abraham's beloved wife, died.

Abraham didn't even own a stone of that land. None of that land. Although God said, this is your land. Remember, he couldn't just go and bury Sarah.

He had to buy a plot of land in order for him to bury his wife. Didn't own any of it. And yet God had promised him, this is all going to be your land.

And the amazing thing is that there was no disappointment in the life of, in the whole lifetime of Abraham regarding this promise. Because he was seeing, yes, that God would fulfill exactly what he said.

But he was also looking way beyond. Because he was seeing the heavenly city that he was traveling to. And we read there that it's the heavenly one who's builder and maker is God.

[4 : 02] So in Abraham's life, in Isaac's life, in Jacob's life, there was a refusal to look back. And all the time there was this progression, this moving forward, looking ahead.

And that is the way the believer goes in life as well. We don't spend our life looking back. We spend our life looking forward. It's all ahead. You see, Abraham, way back, had been a very wealthy man.

And he lived, he had an inheritance in Ur of the Chaldees. That was his place. And you remember how God came to him and called him out. And God called Abraham to leave everything.

He had to leave his homeland, his inheritance. He had to leave everything. And God said, I'm going to take you out from here. He called him out, and I'm going to show you a land that will become your land, which will belong to you and to all your descendants.

And he promised Abraham a great future and that he would be the father of many. And, of course, Abraham spiritually is the father of the faithful. And, of course, also of, you could say, of the whole Jewish race.

[5 : 14] And, in fact, we could almost, we could say of the Arabic race as well, because that's where we know of Isaac and Ishmael.

There was this division that took place there. And at no time do we find Abraham along the years saying, oh, I wish I hadn't left her. I was far better off than her.

I had everything going for me. Life was easy. It was straightforward. I had a settled place every day. I was in the same place, and life was easy.

But now here I am every day, every year. I'm on the move. I'm moving. And there's nowhere in this whole place that I can say, well, this is home.

This is me settled here forever. But Abraham, he's not thinking along these lines. That didn't occupy his thinking.

[6 : 10] The past was past. Out of the Chaldees, as far as he was concerned, was the city of destruction, like in Pilgrim's Progress. It was the place he had been delivered from.

God had called him out. And even though Lot, remember how Lot went to Sodom, Abraham would have nothing to do. Although he prayed for Lot and Sodom, Abraham would have nothing to do with Sodom.

Remember when Lot and his wife and some of the family were delivered from Sodom. It tells us that Lot's wife looked back. Although she was taken out of Sodom, Sodom wasn't taken out of her.

Sodom was deep in her heart. And she was looking back longingly, fondly. That's my place. These are my people. And remember, she perished. Because she was not like Lot, who looked ahead.

Not like Abraham, who looked ahead. And the looking back is fatal. We find it exemplified in the rich young ruler who came to Jesus.

[7 : 15] A very, very promising young man. And he looked the kind of person that this is going to be a great follower of Jesus. And Jesus acknowledged this was a lovely young man.

And yet when Jesus spelled out the cost involved in following Jesus, the cost of being a Christian, that man went away sorrowful.

Because he couldn't give up his idols, his wealth. This was his actual God. Not that money is wrong. But if our focus is in any way of the Lord onto it, then it is wrong.

And he went away sorrowful. And you see, the devil is always trying to make us look back. And maybe tonight you might be here as a Christian. And that's what he's trying to make you do right now. Making you look back.

And remembering it when, before you became a Christian. Remember, it was a lot easier. Didn't have the hassles you have now. Didn't have the struggles and battles that you have now. And the devil is great at getting hold.

[8 : 22] Once he gets out of mind going in a certain way, he goes for it. But always remember this, the devil is a liar. Satan is a liar. And he's been a liar from the beginning. So you see these, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they were men that looked ahead.

The past was in the past. And they were looking forward. Because they had discovered, like you have discovered, that this world does not ultimately satisfy.

This world cannot give deep-rooted satisfaction. It's like chasing the wind. You cannot catch it. You can have moments here and there. You can have fleeting times. But you don't get anything that the world can give that goes right down deep and satisfies the deepest parts of our being.

It doesn't happen. And this world is a place where we do become weary. And you see, once we've tasted who Jesus is, once we have come to taste that the Lord is good, we have come to find what we know we were looking for.

This is what I've been looking for. Because in Christ there is a meaning and a purpose and a satisfaction to life. But you're absolutely persuaded that this is the right way.

[9 : 46] You know that there is no other way. As Jesus said to the disciples, will you also go away? And Peter said, well, to whom else can we go? We've been elsewhere.

You've got the words of eternal life. And the Christian will say, you'll say that tonight as well. Where else can I go? I've been there. That's why I'm here now.

Because Jesus has the words of eternal life. And this world, while it cannot give us deep-rooted and meaningful satisfaction, it's also a world of sorrow.

Sorrows are always round some corner. There's always some hidden grief that comes on us in a way. And we long for the day when sorrows and griefs will be no more.

We long to be in that place where God will wipe away all tears. What a wonderful prospect. But that will never be the case in this world. And again, this world is a place of sin.

[10 : 49] We know it all too well within ourselves. And sin not only affects our own lives, but it affects the whole of society. Society is crippled because of sin.

It's a great plague. And we again long for a world where there will be no more sin. No more sin personally. No more sin in the environment.

Not a cloud of sin to stain anything. And so that's part of why we're looking ahead. Again, so often in this world as Christians, we feel, don't we?

We feel inadequate and worthless in our service. Sometimes we feel that what we're doing, oh, we often say, I wish I could do it better. I wish in some way that I was a far better Christian.

What I try to do, I can't do it properly. I just, I seem to make a mess of everything I try to do. You know, when we get to glory, our service will be perfect. There will be no imperfect service in glory.

[11 : 52] Isn't that wonderful? There will never be a wrong motive. You know, people can do very good things with wrong motives. There'll be no wrong motive in glory. There'll be no sense of unworthiness or any of these things.

No stain of pride. Again, there can be pride in what we do. Trying to take some honor to ourselves. There'll be none of that ever in glory. So the Christian is somebody who longs for the heavenly country.

And this desire for the better country, the heavenly one, is a desire that I would say is unique to the Christian.

Because, you see, only the person who has come to faith really desires the heaven that's spoken about in Scripture.

And the reason I say that is because if you ask a lot of people, just generally, what do you hope for when you die?

[12 : 56] A lot of people say, oh, I'd like to go to heaven. But heaven, as far as they're concerned, is some kind of hazy idea. And heaven is simply a better alternative to hell.

And that's basically what it is. They have this idea of some dreamy place, a way up, and everything will be good. But what we've got to remember is that that's not the heaven that the Bible shows us.

And I think if a lot of people were honest, they would say, I would actually like, if possible, to stay in this world forever. Remember when I was preaching there last Sunday, how there was a...

It would have been inevitable if Adam and Eve had not taken off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and had eventually reached to the tree of life and taken it, then they would have lived forever.

That is why God put the angel with the flaming sword guarding the tree of life. Because once they fell, it was in order that the Lord tells us that.

[14 : 07] Lest they get to the tree of life and live. It would be the worst catastrophe ever if we were to live forever in a fallen state in this world. And so the thing is that the non-Christian, not saying all non-Christians, but the majority of non-Christians would rather that they could live forever and ever and ever in this world.

And heaven is simply a better alternative than hell, knowing that there will come a time when we have to leave this world.

But the thing is that when you analyse what heaven is, heaven is being in the immediate presence of Christ.

It's where all Christ's people come together to be with him, where he will be at the centre, where he will be shepherding us. Just as he shepherded his people while he was here in this world, he will shepherd his people throughout the endless ages of eternity.

And he will be receiving their undying praise and honour forever. And the Christian longs for that. The non-Christian, the person who doesn't want Christ, can't really long for that.

[15 : 31] It's logical. If they don't want Christ here, if they say, I don't want Jesus as my Lord, as my King, then it's almost inevitable that you couldn't bear being in his immediate presence forever and ever.

That's the actual logic. I think you will know a lot of where you are by answering, thinking of yourself as you come to leave this world.

What is it that you would really like? Is it to be taken into the presence of Christ? Or would you prefer that it went into a state of nothingness?

That that would be the end? Some people believe that when you die, you die, and that's the end of everything, which we know is not true. Ask yourself that.

Answer that honestly. And if you can say, my desire is to be in the immediate presence of Christ, then I would say that the Lord is in your heart, or certainly the Lord is working in your heart.

[16 : 41] And you see, there's a real desire. Now, of course, it's inevitable that we always have a fear of death, of what it will entail. What will it involve for me?

When I come to die, how will I die? We have no idea. For some people, it can be a very long, drawn-out, difficult process. For some people, it's immediate. We don't know. The Lord in his mercy has hidden these things from us.

But there is, it's called the last enemy, death. But in a sense, the Christian never dies. Jesus said that with regard to the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me shall never die.

We shall never taste what death really is. The moment we breathe our last in this world, we're ushered straight into the presence of the Lord.

So that's the beauty of it. Yes, we may fear the process, but we look forward to what follows straight on.

[17 : 41] And if that desire is in your heart, if you have the desire for heaven, for being with Christ, that desire is not natural.

It's not your own desire. It's put in your heart by God's Spirit. And when the Spirit puts a desire in your heart, it's not to play games with you. It's to fulfill.

The Spirit will never put a desire in your heart and then say, I'm not going to give you what you desire. The desire that is placed there by the Spirit is a desire that will be fulfilled in due time.

And you know, the wonderful thing is, however great your desire is for the day when you long to be in the company and the presence of Christ and when you will resemble him, which is one of the most extraordinary expressions in Scripture, it tells us we shall be like him.

We shall see him as he is and we shall be like him. It's nothing like the desire that the Lord Jesus Christ has for you to come home. I don't think we think sufficiently of what the Bible tells us.

[18 : 52] Remember in the high priestly prayer before Jesus died on the cross, he said, In the heart of Jesus, there is a longing for the day when you, as a Christian, will come home to be with himself.

You must always remember that. However great our desire is, it's nowhere near the desire that Jesus has for you to come home. And he has said, I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and I will take you, I will receive you to be with myself.

And in the meantime, he's preparing us for the place that he has prepared. And then it tells us here that they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. You know, that's quite an extraordinary statement. God is not ashamed to be called your God.

If you're a Christian tonight, God's not ashamed to be called your God. And when you think, when I think of my life, of how often we've let the Lord down, how often we've failed him, how often we've backslidden, how seldom sometimes we speak to him, to call him.

[20 : 18] You know, if you had a friend in this world who never ever got in touch with you, if you were a member of your family and they never ever, you were waiting every day, every night for a phone or a message or something, never got in touch, it was really, it'd be heartbreaking, wouldn't it?

I often wonder how it is for the Lord when we're silent, when we don't go to him, when we forget about him, when we don't think about him. Sometimes at the end of a very rushed day, we might say, oh, you know, I haven't really been thinking about the Lord today.

He's waiting for us, waiting for us to come to him. Yet despite all that, despite all our failings, our backslidings, our wrongdoing, how often we get it wrong, he's still not ashamed to be called your God.

I find that quite an extraordinary statement, that this is what the Lord of glory is actually saying. And he's not ashamed because he will receive never-ending praise and glory because of what his son, Jesus Christ, has done in your life.

And he looks on you through his son and he takes great delight. Even in his world, you're precious to him. Remember, in this world, you are his inheritance.

[21 : 45] out of everything else in this whole wide world, God is only going to take one thing, his inheritance at his people. You? Isn't that a wonderful thought? And so you're precious to him.

He's not ashamed to be called your God. And he's not ashamed of those who have not been ashamed. It tells us that, that God will not be ashamed of those who have not been ashamed of him in this world.

You see, we're told not only to believe but to confess. It's a great thing. It's a great opportunity we have to confess Christ, to own him as our Lord and our God.

And the Lord will never be ashamed of anybody who stands up for him, who witnesses for him, who acknowledges the Lord as their Lord. Sadly, the reverse is true.

God says that he will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him. Isn't that an awful prospect, an awful thought? And then we see finally what it says, for he has prepared for them a city.

[22 : 59] Two very brief things in that. The city is the very opposite of the wilderness, the desert place. The desert place, the wilderness, which we sang about in Psalm 107, is a place of restlessness.

The place there's nowhere to settle down. There's no rest. You're always wandering. No place to call home. But the city is different.

When people built a city, it was there to be, it was the permanent place. It was a place, this is where I'm going to be forever in this world. And so cities were built.

It was a place of permanence. And that's what heaven is. It's a place of permanence. This world, there is nothing permanent. In glory there is.

And although it is here called a city, it is also called our home, our heavenly home. You know, there's no, we often say it, there's no place like home.

[23 : 57] Particularly, you know, if you've been away somewhere or you've been on a hard day, you're kind of, you're tired physically, you're tired mentally, you come into your own house and you flop down and you say, oh, it's good to be home.

We often say that, haven't we? Oh man, there's no place like home. It's great to get home. Well, we're all going to say that when we get to heaven. Oh, there's no place like home.

In this world, we have to go back out. Next day, again we go, or maybe again later that evening. But in glory, there's no more going back out. It is there the place of permanence, of satisfaction, of joy, of peace, of togetherness.

It's a wonderful, wonderful thought. So the city is a place of permanence. The city is also, it implies a great crowd. You look at the desert and there's a tent here, a tent there, or maybe a few tents gathered there, but it's kind of more the place of isolation, loneliness.

Heaven is the very opposite. There's a huge crowd. We're going to sing in Psalm 72 in a few minutes. The city shall be flourishing, the citizens abound in number like unto the grass that grows upon the ground.

[25 : 13] You go up to Goatill Park and try and count all the blades of grass there, or to the castle green. Imagine trying to count every blade of grass there. You'd give up.

It's innumerable. Well, that's what it's talking about, the number and glory. And you know, amongst all that number, often in huge crowds, people can feel isolated and lonely and alone and shy and embarrassed.

That'll never be the case in glory. It'll be all together, all with one voice. There'll be no disagreements, no fallouts. Everybody together in unity.

Nobody feeling awkward, nobody feeling lonely, nobody feeling shy, nobody feeling unworthy. all together, forever, singing praise to the Lord.

It's a wonderful prospect. And no wonder the Christian is somebody who's not looking back, but is looking ahead. Are you looking ahead tonight?

[26 : 16] Is that where your focus is? Because every day is taking us closer and closer to the end in this world. Do you find that your thoughts are drifting maybe more and more to what lies ahead?

Or do you live in the past? Now I know there are certain things that with regard to people and memories, don't get me wrong, which will take our mind to the past and there's nothing wrong with that.

That's right, it's a natural thing we do. But with regard to where we're going, where our identity is, do you find that it's been drawn heavenwards? Are you living purely for this world?

Well remember Jesus says the world is going to give you nothing and whatever the world gives you it's going to take it back. What Jesus gives you is permanent, it's forever. And Jesus is saying tonight, I am the door, I'm the door to heaven, I'm the way.

If you've never asked him into your heart before, do so before you leave here. Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us and we give thanks of what you set out before us in your word.

[27 : 28] We give thanks, Lord, for the great examples that these people in the past were to us. Your word tells us that their lives are recorded there as examples for us.

So many spiritual truths and spiritual lessons to be gleaned from it. We pray, Lord, that you will help us, take us all home safely, do us good, grant us your grace, your help, and your strength.

Have mercy upon us, we pray, cleansing us from our every sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We're going to conclude our service singing to God's praise in Psalm 72, the psalm we just quoted from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 72, verses 16 to 19.

Psalm 72, verses 16 to the end, from the middle, it's the middle of verse 16, the last four stanzas. The city shall be flourishing, her citizens abound in number shall, like to the grass that grows upon the ground.

His name forever shall endure, last like the sun it shall. Men shall be blessed in him, and blessed all nations shall him call. Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel, for he alone doth wondrous works, and glory that excel.

[28 : 51] Blessed be his glorious name to all eternity, the whole earth. Let his glory fill. Amen. So let it be. Page 314, Psalm 72, from the Scottish Psalter, middle of verse 16, the tune is Effingham.

This is the city shall be flourishing, our citizens of Tammy!

Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! Tammy! But like the sun is young, then shall we rest in the rest, all nations shall therefore.

Now rest in me, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, O days I am.

For ye alone, the wondrous world, in glory God's best.

[30 : 50] Blessed be his glorious name to all eternity.

The whole earth, the glory of God, and in so let it be.

Now may the greatest mercy and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.