

Homeward Bound

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Date: 09 April 2017

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our minds for a short time now to Hebrews 11, where we're looking at verses 13 to 16 this morning. Hebrews 11 at verse 13, These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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. The purpose of our human life is admirably summed up in the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism.

What is man's chief end? What is the chief purpose of our creation, of our existence? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

That is a summary, briefly but powerfully, of the purpose for which God created us. To glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever.

[1 : 25] And that two-fold purpose includes that we live for God now and that we live with God now and that we live with God now as Christians in heaven.

And that is ultimately the fulfillment of our chief end to glorify Him and to enjoy Him. And that requires faith.

The faith that the Bible speaks of so frequently and that is such a feature of this wonderful chapter that speaks about faith in the example of the various people that are listed there and also in the definition with which the chapter begins.

That faith that was seen in the Bible says, of the previous verses.

And then it goes on afterwards to speak of other examples of faith. And in this summary you have of faith and how these people died in faith.

[2 : 59] It is very much keyed into the fact that they lived by the promises that God had given them. And in the promises that God had given them they found such substance, the things that were promised, that made them look forward beyond this world to eternity.

And the two things we are going to look at from that today are first of all that faith, the faith that is mentioned throughout this chapter and in the Bible, this faith welcomes what God has promised. This faith welcomes what God has promised. And secondly, that this faith anticipates what God has prepared.

It welcomes what he has promised. It welcomes what he has promised and it anticipates what he has prepared because the substance of what he has promised is what he has actually prepared, as mentioned there, the city that he has prepared for the people of faith.

Faith, first of all, faith welcomes what God has promised. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them.

[4 : 12] And by that it means not just the promises themselves, but the things which were promised. They acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. They received these promises and the things which were promised within the promises they received.

And you and I have these promises as they come to us in the Bible, in the Gospel. These promises that are especially about Jesus Christ, about eternal life in him, about life beyond this world, beyond this present life.

These are the things that God promises in the Gospel. The things mentioned in verse 16, the better country, the city that God has prepared for his people.

That's the substance, really, in Jesus Christ of the promises that come to us today in the Gospel. And just like these people in the Old Testament received promises of the New Testament and even beyond that, so we are today in receipt of promises from God.

That's really what the Gospel consists of. God is saying, these are my promises that you can receive and live by when you have the faith that's mentioned in the chapter.

[5 : 28] But it doesn't just say that they received these promises. You notice, they had not received the things promised. They had the promises, but obviously promises mean things that are going to be fulfilled in the future.

So they had not received the things promised in the promises. And yet the things that were promised, they saw them and greeted them from afar.

Now that's interesting that it says, having seen them. Having seen the things these promises promised. Having seen the things God himself was promising to them in the promises.

How do you see things that God promises that are yet in the future? By faith. The faith by which they received the promises was the faith by which they saw the things promised.

And by seeing them, they were as real to them as they lived by faith, as the things of this life were, as they lived their life from day to day.

[6 : 33] That's the thing about faith. Among many other things, it actually enables you in receiving the promises of God and the content of those promises.

It enables you spiritually to see them as they're outlined for you and described in part at least in the Bible. When you find something promised in God's Word in the Bible, that's the substance of the things promised.

And you can take that as being as real to you as anything else is real to you in this life. In the news, just in the last few days, there's been news about a planet called GJ1132b.

Don't ask me how it got that name, but that's the name that scientists or astronomers have given to it. Planet GJ1132b. It's about 1.4 times the size of Earth.

It's about 39 light years away from us, which takes you into billions and billions of miles. But they've discovered that it has an atmosphere of some kind.

[7 : 42] And of course, scientists and astronomers are always looking for signs of life beyond Earth. But what kind of atmosphere it has, they're not sure of yet. But they've seen it, and they've seen the atmosphere through a gigantic telescope situated in Chile that astronomers throughout the world use.

Now, that planet is as real to those astronomers as anything else in this world is that you can see with your naked eye. You cannot see it without this giant telescope.

You can't make out any of that atmosphere without this giant telescope. But it's real to them. And when God says, I have built a city for those people who will come to trust in me and give their lives over to me and trust in Jesus Christ, that city to the faith that accepts that is as real as Stornoway is as you're living in it or coming through it day by day.

They saw the things that were promised. Having seen them, they were real to them. They actually knew that they existed. These things that God promised.

And that's one of the unique qualities of the Bible. That you can trust its truthfulness. It's not going to change however our circumstances change from what it's saying to us.

[9 : 05] It's there for you and I to see things spiritually that otherwise you would simply not see. But they didn't just see them. They received them and they saw them.

But they didn't just receive them and see them. They welcomed them. Not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.

From a distance. Just like you see that geographical distance, if you like, between earth and this mystical planet. So these people saw in these promises of God things that were promised that were still far distant from them into the future.

But they saw them, they believed them, and seeing them and believing them, they greeted them, they welcomed them. This is actually a word which literally means to salute somebody.

To pay honor to somebody. To greet, to welcome something or someone that's important. And that's what's said about these people, about this faith.

[10 : 13] Faith welcomes what God has promised. Now there's something for you and me today to really think about and put to ourselves. Am I really seeing for real the things that God promises to me in the Bible?

Am I really seeing into eternity and not just do I believe these things and do I see these things, but am I welcoming them? Am I living for them? Am I living towards the life that God has in this city for those who trust in Him, for those who believe in Him?

Am I living for them? They hailed them, they welcomed them. Those things that were promised. Have you given a welcome today to what God is promising to those who trust in Him?

You have the promises. They're there in the Bible. So many different promises, not only for this life, but for the life to come particularly. You see them there.

But have you welcomed them? Are they precious to you? Are they of substance in your life? Is there something else you'd prefer rather than live by these promises?

[11:30] That's what we're told here. These all died in faith. The faith that received God's promises, that saw the substance of them, and in seeing the substance of them, greeted them, welcomed them.

Because, of course, the substance of all God's promises is Jesus Christ Himself. The person of Jesus is central and foundational to all His promises. Paul says elsewhere, they are, the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

They are sealed to us. They are made sure to us. They are guaranteed to us in Jesus Christ. So when you believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and give your life over to Jesus Christ, you're really, in a sense, giving yourself over to these promises and to the substance of them, and you're welcoming them, and you're saying, Lord, thank you that I have such a thing to live by and to live for as I see what you have promised.

And following on from that, of course, faith welcomes what God has promised by declaring or acknowledging that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

See, when you see into the promises of God for eternity, for eternal life, for the city that is heaven, it's inevitable, it's logical, isn't it, that that faith that sees things in that way and lives in that way will then actually have an opinion about this present world as well.

[12:57] And the opinion it has about this present world as taught by God is that this present world is not lasting, it's not a home for God's people, it's not something that you can build your eternity upon, they confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

The word confessed is probably better than what you have here in the ESV which says they acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles, but the word really literally means they confessed this.

This was something that they actually made known and was known about them. They were confessors of this great fact that they had a homeland that was not in this world.

That's what the Christian life is like. You don't just live for God here, you live so as to be with God eventually. You confess that this world is not your home, you're passing through, you're on a pilgrimage, you're on a journey onwards towards your home.

And as we'll see in a moment, that's itself such a wonderfully comforting thing when you think of how much of this present life and this present world is crammed with pain, with bitter things.

[14:13] Of course, there are good things too, not saying that that's not the case. But there are so many pains, so many disappointments, so many unexpected, tragic events, so many things that really cause us to weep and at times to go on weeping.

And maybe they'll be with us to the end of our course in this life. But the substance of the promises includes that there's a place where all of that is no longer found, where there is no weeping, no sorrow, no pain, no death, no tragedy.

And towards that place we make a confession. We live lives as Christians that say to people, that show to people, by the way we live and by what we say, that our home is elsewhere, that we're looking forward to be with Father and with Jesus Christ our Savior.

We found in the past year, some 30 or so funerals from this congregation. We had one last week of a 97 year old who in fact confessed Jesus Christ as her Savior over most of her life.

She confessed that she was a stranger and a pilgrim in this world. People knew that about her. People knew her life to have that dimension.

[16:02] She had that faith, the faith of this chapter. Faith welcomes what God has promised. Secondly, faith anticipates what God has prepared.

I would say when they acknowledge, they confess that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth for people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. This word seeking

quite often used about seeking God in the Bible.

Here it is used about seeking this homeland and homeland is a very deliberate word on the part of the writer here. Homeland is a word from which we get our English word patriot.

A patriot is somebody who is true to their native land whether it's in time of war or in any other event where they need to stand by their land or their values of their land or whatever it is.

A patriot, different ways of describing it but it's somebody who has a reference to their homeland, to their native land. And let's say they all, they were confessors that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

[17:10] They are making it clear that they are seeking a homeland. People who say this. Seeking is a seeking that involves diligence.

That's built into the very meaning of the word there. They are seeking a homeland. It's not something that you do casually. It's not something that you do off and on. It's not something you switch on and switch off.

It's something that you do consistently because it really includes in it a sense of lacking or a sense of want. when you're living for a homeland that's somewhere else, you have a sense of want while you're absent from it.

You have a sense of need towards it. And what these people were saying was, my home is not in this world but I have a sense of need towards my home where it is, towards my home in heaven. I have a sense of anticipation. I have a sense of not being satisfied with the things of this world, with the things of this present life because my home is elsewhere and the things of this present life they can never fill my soul the way my homeland is going to fill my soul.

[18:19] Now that of course does not mean that we don't delight in God while we're in this life. That God somehow is short in what He gives us in this life. We're not saying that at all.

The dimension of these verses is not particularly towards this life important though that is. We live for God in this life. But its dimension is towards the next life towards heaven towards that city and therefore they confess that they were strangers and pilgrims.

They made it clear that they are seeking a homeland. Their life as they went about it in this world was a life that made it clear they were seeking. They were diligently looking forward to this homeland with a sense of want while they were absent from it.

Isn't it interesting? how often you hear about people who were born and brought up in the island or in the islands let's just say in the island here when they're on the mainland and even for a time of holiday they'll tell you well I'm going home for a couple of weeks.

Their home is actually somewhere else maybe Glasgow Edinburgh wherever it is on the mainland maybe south of that wherever wherever it is in the world but they really associate even on holiday going to Lewis going to Stornow as going home.

[19:42] That's their native land. That's the land that they were born in the land they were brought up in therefore they have every right to say that's my homeland. That's where I belong to. That's where my roots are.

That's what I'm associated with. And even more so it's true of these people of faith. You ask them where are your roots? What is the place that characterizes your life as where you belong to? And they will say it's not in this world. It's not where I was born and brought up literally physically my homeland is in heaven.

my homeland is where my saviour is. That's what I'm anticipating. That's why my faith is directed toward it.

Do you feel at home in this world? I'm not asking do you actually have comfort from God? Do you know God as accompanying you?

[20:52] None of that. I'm asking do you feel at home in this world? Do you have something better to look forward to than you presently have? Is your life in this world lived just for this world?

Or is there something better, something more, something higher than that? Are your aspirations, are your daily thoughts, is your attitude, are your activities, are they directed towards living with God in eternity?

as well as pleasing God in this life? What is your native land? What land do you belong to? Where is your name written? Which citizen's role does your name appear on?

This world or God's list in heaven? So they're seeking a homeland. Those who speak thus make it clear. You see, they're saying as well, they make it clear.

It just fits in with the confession that they were making. But then it goes on to turn the thoughts a little bit in verse 15. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

[22 : 04] But as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one. Now this is obviously language that's taking account of the people of Israel and their journey through the wilderness and how they left the land of Egypt and under Moses and under God's direction traveled through the wilderness towards the land that God had promised them.

That that was their earthly inheritance. Though we know from this chapter that they were looking beyond that as well. Indeed, from these verses they were looking towards the city that God had prepared of which Canaan was really just a picture or a type.

But if they'd been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. And the word return is interesting because it means to bend backwards.

And when you look at the history of the people of Israel, that's sometimes what they did. In fact, they weren't very long out of Egypt when they began yearning and hankering for the things that they had left behind in Egypt.

And God rebuked them. Because God had delivered them from that. And had promised them a much better land. And you and I are going to meet with temptations to go back.

[23 : 25] To take up the things of the world again and live by them. That's why you have such an emphasis in chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews about the people of Israel who neglected the warnings that God had given them.

Who did not enter into the rest of the land of Canaan. Because they died in the wilderness. Why did they die in the wilderness? It tells us because they did not believe God.

They did not actually welcome the promises. And that's why we have them there as an example. And we have opportunities as Christians to return.

And we have our own hearts will take us into backsliding without really much external influence if we just let them have their own way.

We will bend back towards where we left, where God took us from. Just as surely as Israel did. There are so many temptations.

[24 : 32] And what this is really saying is if their thoughts, if their mind had been really set on the place that they had left, then they would have found a way to go back to it.

And if your mind today is set upon the things of this world as a Christian, as a confessing Christian, as somebody who has this confession of faith, what it's saying to you is if you really have a mind for the things of this world, if that's how your mind is directed, if that's where you're really focused, then you'll find a way to go back there.

But they actually desire a better country. That's why they didn't go back, these people of faith.

Remember the question we saw in the studies on Peter's life in John chapter 6 where we're told that many disciples, and we've noticed the word that was used there, disciples, followers of Jesus outwardly, many of his disciples when they heard his teaching about himself and about his death and about them having to partake of his flesh and of his blood, they turned back, they walked no more with him, and then Jesus turned to the twelve disciples, including Peter, and said, do you also want to go away?

And of course we looked at Peter's response to that, Lord, to whom shall we go? You, you alone, have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Christ, the Holy One of God.

There was their opportunity to join the rest as they went away from Jesus, and you and I face these opportunities on a daily basis, and you have that question addressing you, and I have it addressing me as you face these situations.

[26 : 28] Do you want to do that as well? Will you join the deserters? Will you join those who have gone back to the world? Well, let's see what they say.

People who speak thus make it clear they are seeking a homeland, and if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return, but as it is, they desire a better country.

Now, that really expands in a way on what the word seek or seeking is saying. They desire a better country. Instead of going back, instead of giving in to the temptation, instead of backsliding away from God, they desire a better country, and you see, it's not just there for an intellectual thing, an

intellectual seeking, a use of the mind, that is absolutely part of it.

Seeking in earnest, seeking in a way that really applies yourself seriously to looking forward to what God has provided, to the substance of the promises, but it's not just an intellectual thing, it's also a desire, it's a thing of your emotion and of your soul, really deep in your soul.

It's saying, that's what faith actually includes. There is a desire in faith, or along with faith. It doesn't just calculate things in a mathematical way, and say, yes, this is what God is saying, yes, this is what I must accept, yes, this is what I must now do.

[27 : 58] There's an inward compulsion there. There's an inward desire that says, no, I refuse the things that Satan is offering me, or this world is offering me.

That's not the basis of my life. That's not how I build for eternity. My desire is for a better country, a heavenly one.

desire. And desire is a word which also has a specific meaning to it. It means literally to stretch forward for something.

It has that stretching out, if you like, of your soul, because this is a matter of the soul. It's a stretching forward of the soul towards the things that God has promised.

Or if you like, to put it in Paul's words in Philippians 3, where he's giving his testimony there, where he's saying, he does not yet consider himself to be perfect, or have already achieved that for which Christ took a hold of him.

[28 : 58] But what does he do? Well, he says, forgetting those things which are behind. And he doesn't mean forgetting them altogether. He means no longer living by them, or for them.

I press towards the mark for the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. What he means by that is picturing the athlete as you see an athlete coming to stretch towards the finishing tape when he's just, or she is just, coming to the end of the race.

You don't find them leaning backwards. They stretch forward, just trying as far as possible to be the first across that tape. And that's what faith does.

Faith leans forwards. Faith stretches out towards those things that God has spoken of and given us in his promises.

They desire, they stretch out towards a better country. Of course, that's not always very true of us in our own consciousness, is it?

[30 : 05] I can't confess every day that I'm conscious of my soul really stretching out full 100% towards the things that God has promised.

There'll be times of decline, times of not really being as actively involved spiritually in those things as we should be. But nevertheless, this is really the characteristic of faith, that it stretches forward, that it reaches out to those things which God has promised, which are in eternity located in heaven especially.

because they desire a better country. Aren't you glad today that this is true?

That when you look at everything that's happening in this world or even in your own life, when you take account of everything that is from the time of your birth to whenever your death will be, aren't you glad there's a better place than this world?

A better country. A country that's characterized by better things, by conditions far superior, indescribably better than you have in this life.

[31 : 24] They desire a better country. A better country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city.

Have you ever felt ashamed if you promised something and then you weren't able to fulfill it or forgot to fulfill it? Maybe it's sending somebody a letter or phone call or card or something and then you realize some days or maybe even weeks later, I didn't do that.

I promised myself I would do it. Maybe you even said to the person, I promise I'll do this to you, I'll send you, I'll keep in touch with you, whatever, and you didn't do it and you feel ashamed, don't you?

You really feel ashamed that you haven't kept your promise. But you see, this is saying the opposite. God is not ashamed to be called their God. Why is he not ashamed to be called their God?

Because he has prepared for them a city. God's promises don't come with small print. God's guarantee is not hidden away somewhere where you really have a problem finding it and then when you discover it, you find that the guarantee isn't really worth what it's written on.

[32 : 36] It's not like that with God. He's not ashamed to be called their God. He's not going to be short of his promises. He's neither unable to fulfill them nor is he unfaithful to forgive them, to fulfill them.

All the promises of God are absolutely secure and guaranteed and trustworthy. You can take them as they are.

There is no hidden agenda, no hidden small print. It's just as you read it as you see it. as you welcome it. And you notice it's not the future tense.

He's not saying God is not ashamed to be called their God for he is going to prepare for them a city. It says he has prepared for them a city. That's why he's not ashamed to be called their God.

They know they can depend upon him. He takes them as his people because he has already prepared for them a city that they're going to inhabit, that they're going to be citizens of forevermore.

[33 : 46] it's ready to move into. Just like you find sometimes with a show house or whatever that you find in a housing complex that's been built.

The show house is there just to show you what the houses are going to be like when they're all finished. and the show house very often has all the stuff already in it, furniture, everything. It's got the highest spec. When you buy it you're usually told it's in condition ready to move into. Well that's particularly through of this city. Nothing needs to be adjusted, nothing needs to be added to it, nothing needs to be taken away from it.

It's all absolutely perfect. perfect. Jesus said in chapter 14 of John don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God believe also in me. I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself so that where I am there you may be also.

[35 : 00] There's the promise. There's the fact of it. There's the truth of it. But it's already prepared. Jesus already entered into that city. He's waiting for his people when they come to occupy it and it's ready for them.

It's reserved there. It has their mark on it. Paul again in Philippians 3 speaks about the difference between those who are living for this world and it's a very telling description that he gives a very dramatic and a very solemn one where he talks about those who are living for this world in these terms.

He said many walk of whom I've told you often and now tell you even as tears they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly and they glory in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things. They don't live by the promises of God but our citizenship or place of citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

God is not ashamed to be called our God. He has prepared a city for his people and you know that's part of the rationale if you like of going out to Jesus and accepting him and embracing him as our saviour as you find in chapter 13.

[36 : 35] Going back to when Jesus was crucified outside the walls the city of Jerusalem which here in chapter 13 is associated with the people that wanted him to be put away and be put outside and be condemned and of course that goes back to the Old Testament as well where the sacrifice of atonement where the animals were burned as it says in Hebrews 13 where the bodies of those animals were burned outside of the camp.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate outside the camp in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go outside the camp to him bearing his reproach being willing to suffer shame for him.

Why? for here we have no lasting city but we are seeking the city which is to come. Have you gone out to Jesus from this world in the sense of its values and its offerings even of a home for you?

Have you left that way of looking at life behind and gone out to Jesus where he is on the cross and accepted that as the basis of your future as well as your present life?

faith welcomes what God has promised faith anticipates what God has prepared.

[38 : 27] Let's pray. Lord our God we thank you for the privilege of serving you in this world help us we pray to see the importance of that and of that dimension to our thoughts and our actions as we seek to bring praise and glory to you while we live here.

we thank you for all that is true of the world to come for your people and for the way that even in this life they look forward to living with you in eternity.

We give thanks that through faith you make these things so real to us and that we live in accordance with the promises that you have given us in regard to our eternity.

Lord our God we pray that each of us here today may have that faith that rests upon Jesus Christ that looks forward to being with you in eternity and that is indeed the faith that we find described so often in your word here as we pray for Jesus' sake Amen.

Let's conclude now from the same psalm Psalm 16 that we had previously Psalm 16 the last few verses of the Psalm verses 7 to 11 that's on page 17 I'll praise the Lord my God whose counsel guides my choice and even in the night my heart recalls instruction's voice we're singing to the tune Carlisle verses 7 to 11 on page 17 I'll praise the Lord my God I'll praise the Lord my God whose counsel guides my choice and even in the night my heart he calls instructions instructions voice before me constantly

[40 : 49] I said the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown and therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul in death to stay or will you leave your holy one to see the tomb's decay you have made known to me the path of life divine this shall

I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine I'll go to this side door here this morning now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always Amen