

**“I’ll Be Home For Christmas” Second Sunday of Advent December, 10 2017**  
**Hebrews 11:8-16**

**SI:** These four Sundays of December we’re looking at Christ’s Advent through the lens of home. What does it mean to be home for Christmas?

The big idea in all four of these Advent sermons is that Jesus is our home.

He came into this world to make his home with us and in us.

Now he’s preparing a home for us. One day he will come to take us home.

So all the good things about home are found in knowing him and being with him.

**INTRO:** The house across the street from us has been dark for two weeks because our neighbors are in South Africa.

They are immigrants, naturalized US citizens.

But they go to South Africa occasionally because all their family still lives there.

I admire Kevin and Deloris. They came here about three decades ago with three young children, became strangers and aliens by choice to make a new home here.

As Americans, all of us can trace our family lines back to some brave soul who did the same thing—left his or her homeland to become a stranger and alien.

Hebrews 11 says the same thing about our spiritual ancestry.

Abraham is our father in the faith and he left his homeland.

Remember where he was from—the city of Ur in Mesopotamia.

Abraham’s family had lived there for generations. It was home to him.

But the Lord spoke to him and called him to leave home

become a stranger in a foreign country.

The passage we read goes on to say that not just Abraham, but everyone mentioned in the chapter lived by faith and saw themselves as aliens and strangers on earth.

Not just strangers and aliens in another country—but strangers and aliens on earth.

Abraham and all the great men and women of God understood that this world is not their home. It says they were looking for a better country, a heavenly one.

So this is what I want us to meditate on today:

What does it mean as Christians that this world is not our home—that we are strangers and aliens here?

And, the follow-up question, what is our true home—

and how are we to look for it or long for it as Abraham did?

## **MP#1 The world is not our home**

Let's start with this concept that the world is not our home.

What does it mean, as Christians, to be strangers and aliens on earth? God told Abraham to leave his hometown and become a stranger in a foreign country as a living illustration of this spiritual truth.

What if the Lord still did that?

What if at some point in your Christian life the Lord speaks to you and says:

It's time for you to leave Cullman.

Put house on market. I want you to leave in one month.

You say, but Lord, I've lived in Cullman a long time. I'm comfortable here.

I know people here. My kids are happy in school. This is my home.

Lord says, I know, but I want to make your life a living illustration like I did for Abraham. Make you look forward to your true home in heaven.

Ok Lord, is it somewhere else in Alabama?

Is it Huntsville? Is that where you're sending me?

Is it Jasper? Please don't send me to Jasper.

And the Lord says: Indonesia.

Because I want you know you are a stranger and alien on earth.

If the Lord did that, it would probably be a lot easier for us to grasp the spiritual truth that this world is not our home.

Instead he usually lets us stay in the place we've chosen but he gives us his word and his Holy Spirit and expects us to work this out in our own hearts and minds. So even if the Lord allows you to stay in Cullman all your life and put down roots here and make a home here—even so, he wants you to think seriously about what it means to be a stranger and alien.

Then what is it? I think it comes down to two things.

It means that you do not make this world

1. Your ultimate source of identity or
2. Your ultimate source of security.

Don't make the world your ultimate source of identity.

I read a book recently called *Real American*.

It's a memoir written by Julie Lythcott-Haims.

She's a bestselling author, she has degrees from Stanford and Harvard.

Her father was a physician and assistant surgeon general under Carter admin.

He was a black man, an African-American, and her mother was a white woman.

Julie Lythcott-Haims says:

“I am the woolly-haired, medium-brown-skinned offspring typical when Blacks and whites have sex.”

Her memoir is about her decades-long search for identity.

Because of the color of her skin, she never fully identified with white society.

She never felt completely at ease because she knew she was different and she knew other people knew.

Even the well-meaning attempts of her white friends to make her feel included sometimes had the opposite effect.

One girl told her: “I don’t think of you as Black. I think of you as normal.”

She replied: “But I am Black.”

Then she writes: “I knew what Diana meant. I felt very un-Black myself.”

That was her other identity struggle.

Because of her father’s professional career, she grew up in all-white communities, and the high educational level of her family and their economic status also and the effect of separating her from Black culture and experience in America.

She tells how when she went away to college, to Stanford, she was so excited to finally get to know other black people her age and find a community where she would identify and feel at ease.

But when she tried to go to the African-American student union she felt completely estranged and self-conscious.

Because she was not at home in either white or black society she felt like a stranger and alien in America. That led to self-hatred that harmed her in many ways.

Where do most people find their ultimate identity? In some structure of this world.

Whether it is race or tribe or nationality or politics or individual accomplishments. What her memoir demonstrates is how arbitrary and impersonal those are.

I kept hoping as I was reading that she would come to that realization and look for an identity above this world, an identity in God her Creator.

And that her feeling of being a stranger and alien would be redeemed by Christ.

But she didn’t know anywhere else to look beyond this world.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, he is to be your ultimate identity.

It can’t be any of these other things.

It’s got to be Jesus above your national identity as an American.

Jesus above your political identity, your racial identity, your educational identity, your economic identity, your family identity.

Just one specific. We all know how politically charged American life has become.

Everything is political—Facebook, even football.

If identity in Christ, politics, political disagreements shouldn't disturb your peace.  
Shouldn't enrage you. Shouldn't threaten. Shouldn't cause to disdain people.  
If anything bothers you that much, probably a source of identity.  
I'm not saying don't hold political views or that should be apathetic—certainly not.  
But don't you find your ultimate identity in that. You're a stranger and alien

So don't find your ultimate identity here and don't find your ultimate security here.  
I realize these two things—identity and security are intertwined.  
But by security I mean the way we try to plan and arrange our lives to  
deal with all the possible contingencies.

There was probably no better place to live in all the world during Abraham's  
time than the great cities Mesopotamia, except maybe Egypt.  
It was civilized, comfortable, prosperous.  
But Abraham's ultimate security was not there.

So when God called him to leave and Abraham asked where—  
he wasn't bothered when God said: I'll show you later, just go.  
Because he knew that there is no ultimate security in our own plans.  
We aren't omniscient. We don't know what's going to happen.  
Not that there is anything wrong with planning for the future and wanting  
a peaceful, secure, comfortable life for yourself and family.  
Of course we don't live without plans, without saving, without insurance.  
Of course we often make decisions that take into account happiness.  
But don't set your heart on those plans.

For one thing, we live in a fallen world. Circumstances are bound to come that will  
mess up your plans. If they are your security, will shake you to the core.  
Positively, God telling you to go, to get out, to make some change—  
but you are so concerned about knowing the future first, that your fear paralyzes.

But, if you start by asking: Is Jesus Christ with me? Yes.  
Has he called me? Yes. Can I trust him even if I have no idea what future holds?  
And you can start to develop a confidence that rises above your circumstances.

“Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.”

“Whoever loses his life will find it.” “His lovingkindness better than life.”

World not your home: Not source of ultimate identity or security.

## **MP#2 Looking for your true home**

Leads us to the positive side of equation—looking for your true home.

Passage says Abraham

“made his home in the Promised Land” and it says he  
“was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.”  
Later, speaking of all the men and women of faith mentioned in the chapter  
“they saw and welcomed God’s promises from a distance.”  
“they are looking for country of their own”  
“they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.”

So this is obviously referring to heaven as our true home.

Abraham was looking forward to it.

All great saints of old were looking for it, it actually says they were longing for it.

Do you look for and long for heaven? What does that even mean?

I’ve used this illustration before, but humor me.

Suppose this afternoon you get a phone call from your rich uncle.

He’s a life-long bachelor and you are his favorite niece or nephew.

Uncle says: I’ve been thinking.

I don’t want to wait till I die to give you what I have planned.

I want you to get it while I’m still alive so I can see you enjoy it.

I’ve got to make some financial arrangements and finish some things,

but in about a year—Let’s just put a date on it, let’s say December 1, 2018,

I’m going to give you the bulk of my estate. It’s about \$10 million.

I wanted you to know ahead of time so it wouldn’t catch you off guard,

and you could start to make plans. I’ll be in touch. Merry Christmas.

You hang up the phone and tell your spouse—You aren’t going to believe this.

That was Uncle Joe and in one year he’s giving us \$10 million.

Over the course of the next year, would you think about uncle’s promise often?

Would it color your view of life?

When your work was hard you would think about it.

You might say to yourself, I’m quitting this job in a year.

Or you might say, I don’t mind the pressure at work any more because  
my livelihood doesn’t depend on it. I actually enjoy my work more than ever.

When you got an unexpected expense that wrecked budget, it wouldn’t throw you.

You would say: I can’t afford that now but I’m not worried.

I’ll do what I have to do and know that in a year, everything taken care of.

When you saw people in financial need, you would start to think—

Won’t it be fun to help them without them even knowing. Have to figure out.

When you looked at your children and thought about their future, you would be  
thinking hard about how best to make this wealth a blessing and not a curse.

For that whole year you would feel rich, even though you weren't yet.  
The promise of your inheritance would color your outlook on life.

I'm sure you can see where I am going with this.

In the Bible, heaven is the goal to which everything points.

Christ came into this world and suffered and died so we could go to heaven.

When he comes again in glory it will be to take us to heaven.

Living with Christ and communion with the Father and Holy Spirit in heaven is the great object of our salvation.

Before he left, Jesus said,

"I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am you may be also."

That sounds like Hebrews 11.

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

Heaven is not an afterthought in the Bible. It's the grand purpose and climax.

Without heaven, the whole meaning of life for Christians crumbles.

If there is no resurrection and heaven, the Bible says, we are to be pitied.

But what is heaven?

Have you noticed when the Bible talks about it, it only gives us tantalizing hints?

This passage refers to it as a city with foundations, architect and builder God.

Which must mean it will be a place of awe and grandeur and beauty.

Revelation also describes heaven as a city, says glory and honor of nations will

be brought into that city. Which must mean that somehow the best of everything mankind has produced will somehow be brought in.

The best music, best technology, best architecture, best sports, best ideas—  
all that is really good and excellent will be there.

Last Sunday's Advent reading, Isaiah 11, Avery read it:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Tantalizing. Animals in heaven living in peace with each other.

But it's a hint of something greater, the nations at peace because following Christ.

Are there going to be nations in heaven?

And the prophets speak of mountains running with new wine,  
and harvests so continuous that sowers stepping on heels of reapers,

and nature so beautiful that trees are singing and mountains are dancing.  
Heaven is described as multitudes singing, cheering, chanting—  
so loud it's like the sound of many waters—louder than any football stadium.

It's described as a wedding feast. When Adrienne got married this summer and so many of you gathered with us at the reception, it did feel heavenly to me.  
Heaven is described as no death or sorrow or pain—and where God himself will wipe away every tear from your eye.  
It's described as a shepherd taking a little lamb in his arms and cuddling it close to his chest.

This is limited human language hinting at the grand, full, and happy life.  
The Apostle Paul says:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared  
And it is God's will that you live every day with the prospect of heaven.

That you often have happy thoughts and plans about what God has in store.  
Because if you do, it will color your life now.

It will make you into a certain kind of person.

Hebrews 11 tells us that men and women of faith were looking for the heavenly country, city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.  
The end of the chapter said that hope is how they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, shut lions mouths, and that is how some faced jeers and flogging, were chained, stoned, put to death.  
The promise of heaven, the vivid sanctified imagination animated them.

### **Longing for heaven will make you patient.**

Because heaven will make up for all the disappointments of life in this world.

### **Longing for heaven will make you joyful.**

By God's grace, there are still good things in this fallen world.

All the good things we enjoy are foretastes and anticipations of heaven.

### **Longing for heaven will make you unafraid.**

If you know that Jesus himself will wipe away your tears with his scarred hands, then you can have courage to press on until that time comes.

This world is not your home—

Don't look for your ultimate identity or your ultimate security in the structures and systems and plans of this life. Your identity is Jesus. Your security is Jesus.

Heaven is your home. When you are impatient, sad, or fearful—  
Remember what Jesus said: That he's preparing a place for you,

and that God is not ashamed to be called your God, preparing a city for you.