

HOME: THE DESTINATION OF A CHRISTIAN PILGRIM (Hebrews 12:18-24)

The little leaguer was playing in his first baseball game ever. In the top of the 2nd inning, he got his first at bat ever in a real game. It was coach pitch. The first pitch was right over the plate. The boy swung his bat with all the might that an 8-year-old boy can muster, but he only hit air. The second pitch ended with a swing and a miss. On the third pitch, the fat part of the bat made flush contact with the ball. He sent a screaming line drive over the head of the centerfielder.

The lad took off like a shot down the first base line. He rounded first. As he was headed to second, he glanced into centerfield to see that the centerfielder was still chasing after the now slow but still rolling ball. He rounded second.

Above the cheers of the crowd, the boy heard the voice of his coach instructing him, “Run home! Go home!”

Hearing that exhortation, the boy bypassed 3rd base, exited the field of play, and to the embarrassment of his parents and the amusement of the crowd, he ran home.

Home! We could say that a vacationer is away from home. A vagrant has no home. A visitor is a guest in someone else’s home. A pilgrim, however, is on his way home. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are pilgrims; we are headed home.

The last several Sundays we have been in Hebrews 13. The author of this letter opens this chapter by comparing the Christian life to a race, a long-distance race in which endurance is our great need.

In vv. 4-11, the author points out that during this race, we will experience the discipline of our heavenly Father proving to us that we are His child and that He loves us. The hardships and difficulties we face will be used by God to grow us more and more into the likeness of His Son, Jesus.

Last week, as we examined vv. 12-17, we saw that God’s will for us is that we finish our race well. Many do not. Many lose heart. The author tells us the things we need to do and the things we need to avoid in order to finish well.

We come today to vv. 18-24. In this passage we get a glimpse of the destination to which we are running. We are not just running to a finish line. We are running to a particular place, a desirable destination. We are running home, our real home, our eternal home.

Some expositors say that today’s text is the climax, the crescendo of this letter. What was written previously builds and builds until we get to this point. Remember, in this letter the author has sought impress upon his readers that this new covenant that Jesus has enacted is better than the old covenant that is passing away. The word *better* is a big and often-used word in Hebrews.

- Jesus is better than the prophets.
- He is better than the angels.
- He is better than Moses.
- He is the High Priest of a better covenant,

based on better promises,
enacted by a better sacrifice,
in a better holy place, a temple not made by
hands.

Here in Hebrews 12:18-24, the author contrasts two mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. More importantly, he contrasts the experience of God's people on those two mountains. He shows what it was like for Moses and the people at Mount Sinai, and he contrasts that with what it is and will be like for us at Mount Zion. Mount Zion is heaven, the home of God, and it is our home, the home to which we are traveling.

Let's read our text. The author tells us two things. He wants us to understand what our home is not and what our home is. Look at the beginning of v. 18 and the beginning of v. 22. Beginning with v. 18, the author lists seven things that our home is not. Then, beginning with v. 22, he tells us seven things that our home is.

Notice What Our Home Is Not

We are told that we have not come to a place that may be touched. After Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into the desert, God led them to a particular mountain. We call that place Mount Sinai. It was on that mountain that God gave Moses the Ten Commandment and the Law.

Mount Sinai was a physical place. Somewhere in this world is the mountain around which the people of God camped and on which Moses climbed to the summit to meet with God. We don't know exactly where Mount Sinai is located. There is a traditional place called in Arabic *Jabal Musa*, which means *Mount Moses*, but we don't know if that's the correct location or not. Some years ago, a man wrote a book and produced a video entitled *The Search for the Real Mount Sinai*. He purports to have found evidence for the existence of Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia rather than the Sinai Peninsula.

It matters little to me and even less to this text as to where Mount Sinai is located. The point is that it exists somewhere. It is a physical place on this earth that can be touched.

Our real home cannot be touched because it's not here, nor can it be located with the GPS on your smart phone. The location of heaven cannot be found on Google Maps.

When I was in Russia several years ago, more than once, I came across monuments to Yuri Gagarin. He was the first person to fly in space. He made one orbit of earth and returned in 1961. He is forever a symbol of pride to the Russian people. In an interview after his amazing feat, he said, "I looked and looked and looked, but I didn't see God."

The fact that Gagarin didn't see God or heaven while he was in the heavens does not prove that both God and heaven do not exist. Just as God is real, heaven is a real place, but it is not a physical place that is accessible to us while we live on this earth.

There are six more things that the author of Hebrews writes about Mount Sinai that are not true about our home, Mount Zion. Our home is not a place of:

- Fire
- Darkness

- Gloom
- Storms
- Scary Sounds (blaring trumpets and the thundering voice of God)
- Frightful feelings

Listen to what we read in Exodus 20:18-19.

¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid^[a] and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

You and I have never experienced a Mount Sinai like Moses and the children of Israel did, but we’ve all experienced our own Mount Sinai—one that is all too physical and all too frightening. This world can be a scary, uncomfortable place. It is filled with scary characters, scary creatures, and scary weather. All you have to do is read the front page of the newspaper and watch the first few minutes of the evening news—wars, famine, natural disasters, crime. It’s scary out there.

Paul David Tripp is a well-known, Christian author and speaker. He argues that living on the earth is somewhat comparable to dwelling in tents. He wrote:

Most of us have no pilgrim experience; so, perhaps, the closest thing in our experience to the journey of a pilgrim is rustic camping. I am persuaded that the whole purpose of camping is to make a person long for home! On that first day in the woods, putting up the tent is exciting, but three days later your tent has unpleasant odors you can’t explain. You love the taste of food cooked over an open flame, but three days later you are tired of foraging for wood and irritated by how fast it burns. You were excited at the prospect of catching your dinner from the stream running past your campsite, which is reported to be teeming with trout, but all you have snagged are the roots on the bottom.

You’re now four days in and your back hurts, there seems to be no more felled wood to forage, and you’re tired of keeping the fire going anyway.

You look into what was once an ice-and-food-filled cooler to see the family-sized steaks you have reserved floating gray and oozing in a pool of blood-stained water. Suddenly you begin to think fondly of home . . . You stand there hoping that someone will break the silence and say, “Why don’t we go home?” Your four days in the wilderness have accomplished their mission. They have prepared you to appreciate home!

Tripp adds: “Our world isn’t a very good amusement park. No, it’s a broken place groaning for redemption. Here is meant to make us long for forever. Here is meant to prepare us for eternity.”

We could summarize Hebrews 12:18-21 by saying simply, “Heaven is not a frightful place.” Being in heaven is not scary. For me, it is not a terrifying experience to go home, but unfortunately, I have met children who were abused at home. For them, home was not

a safe place. They didn't want to go home. For them, going home was frightening because they were afraid of what was awaiting them.

That is not true of our heavenly home. It is a place of peace, comfort, warmth, and love because our loving, Father is there, and He is waiting to receive us with welcome arms.

Is that a home to which you want to go? According to the NT, there is only one way to get there. Despite what you may have heard, there are not many roads to God. There is only one. There is not a Muslim way to heaven, and a Buddhist way to heaven, and a Mormon way to heaven, and a Protestant way to heaven, and a Catholic way to heaven. There is just one way to heaven.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He is not a way; He is **the** way. He is not a truth; He is **the** truth. He is not one life among many; He is **the** life. The only avenue to get to God is through Jesus.

I used to live on Monkey Island in northeastern OK. There is only one bridge onto Monkey Island and only one highway, Highway 125. If you are coming by car, truck, or motorcycle, there is only one way. That, however, is not the only way onto Monkey Island. There is an airport. You can come by plane. There are hundreds of boat docks. You can come by boat. Actually, there are numerous ways to get to the island.

That is not the case with heaven. You can't get there unless you go through Jesus. You can't go over Him, under Him, or around Him. You have to go through Him. You do that by placing your faith and trust in Jesus as Savior & Lord.

Have you done that? If you have, heaven is your home. Our text tells us what our home is not. It tells us more.

Consider What Our Home Is

Look again at vv. 22-24. These verses tell us seven things that heaven is. Let's do a quick rundown of those seven truths about heaven, our home.

1. Our Home Is a City Where God Resides.

Mount Zion is said to be "the city of the living God." It is also said to be "the heavenly Jerusalem." There is an earthly Jerusalem. It is both an ancient and a modern city. The seat of Israel's government today is in Jerusalem. That is where the Prime Minister lives. That is where the Knesset, the Israel's parliament, meets.

Heavenly Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the city of the living God is where God's throne is found. God rules both the universe and His city. In His city, there is no crime problem. There is no illegal drug use. There is no air or noise pollution. There is no homelessness. It is a city of beauty, peace, culture, and love because it is God's city.

2. Our Home Is Where the Angels Serve God Joyously.

The NLT renders the last of v. 22 to read, "and to thousands of angels in joyful

assembly.” Scripture records numerous occasions when people met angels here on earth. It seems that whenever that happened, the angel would say, “Do not be afraid.” Have you ever wondered why they say that?

In the famous movie, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Jimmy Stewart’s character meets Clarence, his guardian angel. Do you remember what Clarence looked like? Clarence had no need to say, “Do not be afraid.” It would be more appropriate for him to say, “Do not laugh.”

I believe angels are tall, shining, powerful figures. In heaven, however, we will not fear them. We will join them in the worship of our Creator and our Savior.

3. Our Home Is Where God’s People are Gathered.

Look at the beginning of v. 23. In the Jewish culture, being first-born was a big deal. The first-born sons were a favored class. In God’s family, all of His children are first-born sons and daughters. There are no second-class citizens in the city of God. We are all brothers and sisters with equal standing before God.

Have you ever had neighbors that weren’t very good neighbors? Maybe they didn’t mow their lawn often enough. Maybe they made too much noise at night. Maybe they parked their boat on the front lawn. If you never had bad neighbors, maybe you were the bad neighbor that everybody else talked about.

Wherever you live in heaven, you will live next to family because the only humans in heaven are God’s children, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

4. Our Home Is Where God, the Judge, Presides.

God not only resides in heaven, but He presides there as well. He is the judge of all the earth. No one lives outside of His jurisdiction. According to 1 Peter 4:5, God is ready to judge the living and the dead. And we read in Revelation 20:12 that the great and the small will stand before God on the Day of Judgment.

Here on earth, we have an appeal process because it is possible for mistakes to be made, for a miscarriage of justice to occur. That will never happen whenever God presides. We find the question asked in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” The obvious answer is, “Yes.” God will always judge justly.

5. Our Home Is Where God’s People are Made Perfect.

The last part of v. 23 reads, “and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” There are no problem people in heaven. There is no one there with a bad temper. There is not one there you can’t trust. There is not one there who is going to gossip about you or lie about you or stab you in the back. Everyone there will be made perfect, including you. That habitual sin that has your number will be gone. Those unkind words that seem to just pop out whenever you let down your guard, they will have vanished, too. Those sinful thoughts you have unsuccessfully tried to overcome, they will harass you no longer.

Praise God, your salvation and that of all believers will be complete. Can you imagine

living in a city or a neighborhood or in church or in a family where no one sinned ever. No selfish deeds, no hurtful words, no unkind acts need be feared because none will ever be done again, ever.

6. Our Home Is Where We Will Meet Jesus.

You met Jesus savingly when the Spirit of God enabled you to trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. That is when you became a participant in the New Covenant that Jesus established. You have encountered Jesus in the pages of the Bible. You have conversed with Him in prayer. In heaven, you will meet Jesus physically and literally. You will see Him face to face.

As I contemplate what it will be like to meet Jesus, I think of the lyrics to MercyMe's song, "I Can Only Imagine."

I can only imagine
What it will be like
When I walk by Your side
I can only imagine
What my eyes would see
When Your face is before me
I can only imagine
Yeah

Surrounded by Your glory
What will my heart feel?
Will I dance for You Jesus
Or in awe of You be still?
Will I stand in Your presence
Or to my knees, will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah?
Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine
I can only imagine

7. Our Home Is Where the Blood of Jesus Speaks a Welcoming Word.

Look at the concluding words of v. 24. Here, the author of Hebrews contrasts the blood of Jesus with the blood of Abel. The author referenced the faith of Abel back in chapter 11. We have to go to Genesis 4 to read about Abel's blood. In that chapter, God said to Cain, the one who killed his brother, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (4:10).

The innocent blood of Abel cried out to God asking Him for vengeance and for just judgment. The blood of Christ calls out to us to receive what Jesus did for us. "Receive forgiveness. Receive peace with God. Receive new life and eternal life." Jesus' blood speaks a better word. It speaks welcome and acceptance.

I don't know how many times as a pastor and a chaplain I have sat with a person who was dying. They were tired. They were sick. They said to me, "I want to go home," and they weren't taking about their physical address here.

The truth is that all of us are dying. We are simply at various stages. Do you long to go home. On the last page of the Bible, the last chapter of Revelation, the apostle John prayed a prayer. He prayed, "Come, Lord Jesus." When Jesus comes, He will take us to be with Him where He is, and wherever He is will be home.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus and what He accomplished on our behalf, one day you will hear the voice of God, your coach. Above the noise of the world, you will hear Him call out, "Come home."

My encouragement to you is, "Keep running." Eventually, you will crest the last hill. You will make that turn around the last bend. And there stretched before you will that glorious city. And you will hear the voice of the Father saying to you, "Welcome home." So, keep running.