

**Text: Philippians 3:12-21**

**Theme: There's No Place Like Home**

**Date: October 29, 2006 21B (20A)**

**In the Name of Jesus, Dear Christian Friends,**

Vacations are wonderful, often leading us to say we never wish we had to go back home to the real world. After a while, however, even the nicest vacation may start losing our attention a bit, because our thoughts start to go back to the real world, where we have a lawn to mow or a job to keep up with and our own bed to sleep in. Eventually we most often end up saying, just like Dorothy did in the Wizard of Oz, when she realized that Kansas wasn't so bad!, "There's no place like home."

Life is sometimes like a vacation. There are times when things are really going well, and we may say to ourselves, "It would be great if God could keep me here for a while. I'm really enjoying my life." Or there may be times when we are having the proverbial "rainy day" during a season of our life – times in which the thought of our real home in heaven seems to be extra dear to us. If things are going well for you right now, know that what lies ahead is even better than you can imagine. And if times aren't going so well for you at the moment, know that what lies ahead for you will lead you to forget what is a burden for you now. Whatever your present situation, we all can know that when it comes to heaven, "There's no place like home."

The apostle Paul was a world traveler, not on vacations, but on journeys for his God to spread the gospel of Jesus. Yet, even though these were extremely important and blessed travels, Paul never was totally comfortable with being away from his real home – not his home in a city called Tarsus, but his home in a city called the heavenly Jerusalem. For example, in verse 20, near the end of our lesson for today, Paul says with what seems to be a tone of fervor and emotion, "***But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.***" That's where your and my citizenship is, too, brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's precisely because of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can say today and always, "**There's no place like home.**" God teaches us that he 1) doesn't want us to look back at what we're leaving, rather, 2) he instructs us to look ahead to what we're gaining.

#### **1. Don't look back at what you're leaving**

The first point which comes from God's Word to us today is, "Don't look back at what you're leaving." In verse 13 Paul says, **BROTHERS, I DO NOT CONSIDER MYSELF YET TO HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF IT. BUT ONE THING I DO: FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND AND STRAINING TOWARD WHAT IS AHEAD, I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL...** Paul is using the picture of running a race when he writes these words. When a runner runs a race the way it's meant to be run, he never looks back. He just looks ahead at the goal and concentrates on how he can get there first.

As you and I make our way through life, we also do ourselves no good by looking back. Looking back is only going to distract us or trip us up on our way toward our real home in heaven. What are some of the things in your life that Satan wants you to look back at in order to try to get you to lose your spiritual drive and energy and desire to keep on the path to heaven? There can be all kinds of things that we could mention, but I'm going to mention three things that are "back there" in our lives that the devil wants us to make a big deal out of and end up missing out on the joy of being a child of God. Those three things are 1) the bad things we've done, 2) the good things we've done and 3) the good things of this earth that end up being bad for us.

The good things we've done are our attempts to please God. If we simply are trying to do those things as the natural result of having a life which is owned by the Lord Jesus, then that is great and we won't spend any time looking back at them, because there's nothing special about them. What the devil wants to have happen, however, is that we get tripped up on our walk toward heaven by thinking about how good we really are – and about how good it is that God will get to have us live up by him. This is just plain arrogance, but I don't imagine a day goes by when we don't have to fight tooth and nail to resist the urge to look back at "what a good person I am."

The bad things we've done are our sins, those things that we know are wrong. Again, if we think about them in terms of remembering the importance of the need to stay humble and as the way to appreciate all the more God's grace in sending Jesus, then that's great. But, again, the devil wants us to look back at our sins and weaknesses and failures and situations where nothing goes right in our lives as proofs that God does not love us, should not love us and never will love. In this way, we end up being spiritually humble, as opposed to spiritually arrogant, but it really is a false humility, because it doesn't take God at his Word, when he tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from every sin and that the love of Jesus Christ will never be taken from us.

And the third thing that causes us to look back at what we're leaving is the good things of this earth that can end up being very bad for us, specifically our earthly possessions. It's impossible not to look back at them. They're all around us – and so often there are so many of them. And, again, to think about them with gratitude to God for giving them to us so undeservedly is good. But, you and I both know that Satan is right in our ear every moment trying to get us to worry obsessively about the losses in the stock market or to work obsessively to get more and more and more things of this world, until there's very little left of us to enjoy them.

That's why God comes to us in his love to warn us about this way of looking at life and to encourage us in the proper way of looking at life – and that is to look at what our life will be like in heaven. "Don't look back at what you're leaving," Paul says. But, "Do look

ahead to what you're gaining." In these words Paul speaks about two specific things that we can look forward to gaining in heaven: a perfect life and a perfect body.

## **2. Do look ahead to what you're gaining.**

**First the perfect life...** It seems that Paul was writing this section to comfort the Philippians in connection with some people who must have been saying that it was possible to be perfect, or awfully close to it, on this earth. As he points to himself, Paul assures the Philippians that there was no way they could be perfect in this life, and that they didn't need to worry about that, as long as they knew that the perfection God did demand of them had been accomplished for them by someone else – Jesus – and that it had been given to them through the work of someone else – the Holy Spirit. In the opening verse he says, **NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED ALL THIS, OR HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE PERFECT, BUT I PRESS ON TO TAKE HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST JESUS TOOK HOLD OF ME.**

**There are people who still say things like that today.** Just yesterday, for example, I saw a blatant example while watching a quick excerpt of television preacher telling people that by "keeping the tithe" they would assure themselves entry into the kingdom of God. We do want to be faithful and generous and to find great joy in offering our monies to the Lord, knowing that they belong to him and are used by him to get the message of Jesus out, but it is a sinful burdening of someone's conscience to make our human efforts to please God the reason for our salvation. It's just the opposite. The reason for our salvation is the divine effort of God's Son to make us one with God and, as a result of that, desirous and able to want to serve God in every way we can, including in how we manage our money and give our offering to his glory.

**Still, as Paul makes clear, even though there is no work necessary on our part to get our sins forgiven, there is a great deal of work** and stress and straining on our part needed to carry out our everyday Christian life. It's a constant struggle to fight off the devil's temptation and to seek God's comfort and power to go on day by day. Paul refers to it in verse 13 as **STRAINING TOWARD WHAT IS AHEAD.**

**Part of that straining in this imperfect life is also dealing with the reality of false teachers like these perfectionists** – and so many others that are all around us. Even though it sometimes surprises us to realize that there will be false teachers in Christ's church, still we need to be very aware of their reality and to realize that any time someone says something against God's Word, they are showing, as Paul says in verse 19, that **THEIR GOD IS THEIR STOMACH.** That means they are relying on their earthly, physical way of looking at things to get in the way of God's way of looking at things. And any human way of looking at the will of God will only lead to problems – and, yes, even destruction, if we are led to look away from Jesus for the salvation God has won for us through him.

**We, too, are constantly tempted to make our stomachs our god, as we think about the things of God,** and that's yet another reason why we can't wait to be in our real home of heaven. Because whether it's our falling into sin because we want to, or whether it's our falling into sin, even when we don't want to, or whether it's all the disappointments and deaths and difficulties that we go through while we look through the clouds to the glory ahead of us, we have reason after reason to say, "Dear Lord, there's no place like home, because our home of heaven is where we really belong." Yes, our life-long spiritual struggle will all be worth it in the end for everyone who takes God on his own terms, because in the end we will be with our perfect Savior in the perfect life of heaven: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

**And now the perfect body...** We are often humbled when we think about how our bodies may not be able to do what they once could, or we get frustrated by not being able to do what we hope we can in the future. There may be things about our bodies that we do not like or wish we could change. But whether we are being too hard on ourselves or on God, or whether we simply are going through the normal changes of life, Paul ends his words with almost a "frosting on the cake" type of statement at the end, reminding us in verse 21 that on that last day when we get taken to our home in heaven, our Lord Jesus **WILL TRANSFORM OUR LOWLY BODIES SO THAT THEY WILL BE LIKE HIS GLORIOUS BODY.** We will never again get the flu. We will never again have to worry about getting sick from mosquito bites and deer meat. We will never again have to worry about facing a surgery or recuperating from an injury or crying in front of a coffin. We will be in the place where bodies have been made perfect by the command of Jesus, who, when he reunites our bodies with our souls, will make it possible for us to live in a way we can only now try to imagine, but in a way which keeps us looking ahead to what we will be gaining, when we get to our real home.

**If you at this time are enjoying the great things in your life,** enjoy them and give your great God great thanks, remembering that it will be even greater when you get to your real home. And if you at this time are not enjoying the things of your life, don't lose heart or become discouraged that you are forever destined to mediocrity or depression. In your real home you won't even remember what right now it may seem like you can never forget. For all of us, don't look back at what you're leaving. Rather, do look ahead to what you're gaining. Because, unlike Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, it isn't part of a fairy tale story to be able to say, "There's no place like home!" In the world of God, there really isn't. Amen.