My Heavenly Home – A Home to Anticipate
November 23, 2025

This morning, on Christ the King Sunday (the last Sunday of the church year), we continue our sermon series on My Heavenly Home. Our focus for this morning is, Heaven is a home to anticipate. Our focus verses are the beautiful words of the Apostle Paul wrote from prison in his letter to the Philippians. (Philippians 1:18b-26) Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. (Revelation 7:12) "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

There's an expression out there, perhaps you've heard it? "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die." Perhaps you've heard songs that express that sentiment. Maybe you've heard people make a similar statement. Perhaps that is your personal point of view. "Sure, I want to go to heaven, but I really don't want to die. And I definitely don't want to go to heaven right now." As you listened to Paul's words in our focus verses for the day, did you get the sense that this was his point of view as well? (21-24) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Paul is a prisoner, and he is not sure he will be released. If he is released, he can continue his work for Christ. If he is martyred, he goes to heaven. If it were up to him, he wouldn't know which to choose. Paul is torn between his love for the Philippians and wanting to serve them, and his profound longing to go to heaven, which is better by far for him. In other words, if he was choosing purely selfishly, Paul would choose to go to heaven. But he wasn't a selfish man; he wanted what was best for the Philippian Christians. And, of course, the decision wasn't his. It was the Lord's. But can there be any doubt over what Paul really longed for?

He wasn't in love with this world, or anything in this world (besides God's people). He wasn't consumed by anything this world had to offer. Rather, he couldn't wait to go to heaven! Heaven was where his heart was. What did Paul write? 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. "If I live," Paul writes, "I am going to live for Christ. I am going to make Jesus the focal point of my life. I am going to serve him to the very best of my ability. But if I die, that's better by far! Because when I die, I am going to heaven to be with Jesus! And that is way better than anything this world has to offer!" Just think about how profound, and how simple, this is. When someone's entire existence is centered on

living for the Lord, then going to heaven where he or she will be with the Lord forever is as good as it gets!

Which begs the question: What are you and I living for? The way we answer this question will dictate the way we feel about heaven. If we are living for our paycheck, or our bank account, or our investments, then dying is loss. If we are living for our occupation, or our education, or our health, or our appearance, then dying is loss. If we are living for our house or property, our car, or boat, or mobile home, or cabin, our wardrobe, our computer, or TV, or any other possession, then dying is a loss to us. If we are living for the Lions, or the Redwings, or the Pistons, or the Tigers, if we are living for bagging a big buck, or netting a trophy fish, if we are living for our next party, or our friends, or our pets, or even our family, then dying is a loss to us. If death is our worst possible nightmare, (not the process of dying, but the separation from earthly things that dying brings), then we are clinging too hard to the things on earth.

Paul writes, For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. How could he write that? Because Paul was living for Christ, and because he recognized that being in heaven with Jesus was far superior to anything on this earth. If we are living for Christ, then dying means going to him. If we are living for Christ, then dying means entering Jesus' presence and being surrounded by his glory and, finally, fully comprehending his love.

A man here in Michigan was known as "Uncle Johnson" and he exemplified living for Christ. He lived to the incredible age of 120. Throughout his life, he was known for his cheerful outlook. One day while working in his garden, he was singing songs of praise to God. His pastor happened to be passing by and he called over the fence, "Uncle Johnson, you seem very happy today." "Yes, I was just thinking," said the old man. "Thinking about what?" asked his pastor. "Oh, I was just thinking that if the crumbs of joy that fall from the Master's table in this world are so good, what will the great loaf in glory be like! "I tell you, sir, there will be enough for everyone, and some to spare up there. And when I think about that I can't help but sing." And Uncle Johnson started singing praise to God right there and then. What a wonderful example of living, and dying, in Christ "Uncle Johnson" was! Uncle Johnson knew that when we are living for Christ, then dying is gain. When we love Christ above all things, then dying is gain because there is nothing better than going to be with Jesus. But if we are not living for Christ, then dying can only be regarded as a loss.

The truth is every one of us is guilty of clinging to the comforts of this world too tightly. Every one of us has our own personal little gods that we can't bear to think about abandoning. Consequently we get hung up on staying in this world for as long as we can. We aren't even thinking about heaven, much less longing for it. We are caught up in anticipating the next great joys that this world might bring us, and as a result we aren't really anticipating heaven's joys at all. We are so busy living for our personal idols, that we often fail to live for Jesus, and we fail to look forward to being with Jesus (the true God!) forever in heaven. This is incredibly sad. Not only are we guilty of idolatry when we are loving earthly things more than the Lord. But we are forgetting what wonderful things our Lord has done for us!

We were filthy with sin and Jesus washed us. We needed forgiveness and Jesus won it for us. We were on death row and Jesus pardoned us. We were headed for hell and Jesus

rerouted us to heaven. We were lost and he found us. We were in despair and he gave us hope. We were joyless and he gave us reason to rejoice. We deserved to die and he died for us. We were children of Satan and Jesus made us children of God. Jesus recognized our salvation was unachievable, unreachable, unattainable by sinners like you and me, so Jesus came to earth and lived and died and rose back to life for us. What incredible, unimaginable, amazing grace, that the Lord himself should die for us so that we could be with him forever in heaven! And as we reflect upon this wonder, that God would love us so much. That God would go to such great lengths to save us. That God would allow us even want us to be with him in heaven. It makes salvation that much more astonishing.

Brothers and sisters, heaven will be a culmination of God's grace. When we get to heaven we will experience the fullness of God's goodness to us. All of God's blessings will come together completely at that time. We will finally, fully comprehend how much we deserved hell. And we will finally, fully comprehend how wonderful heaven is. And we will finally, fully comprehend how far-reaching God's grace is that we who deserved to go to hell are in heaven instead because of Jesus.

In past weeks, we have discussed our "Heavenly Home" in our Sunday sermons. We talked about how heaven is a real place, as real as this world, only much better. We discussed how heaven is a new start, a place where sin, suffering and death will no longer affect us. We marveled at how God gives us heaven solely because of his grace, through the faith in Jesus that God himself gives us. We talked about how Jesus has prepared a place there in heaven for even you and me, horrible sinners that we are. Each week we have focused on how death is actually a blessing because it is our doorway to eternal life in heaven with Jesus. All of these aspects of heaven are incredible enough. Take any single one of these points and heaven is already beyond wonderful. But take all these aspects of heaven together and we begin to understand that heaven is everything that earth is not. Heaven is everything that we could ever desire and far, far more, and far, far better. Heaven isn't a home to try to avoid. Rather, heaven is a home to eagerly anticipate.

A shipment of sheep had been sent from Scotland to Australia. The ship carrying them not only contained the sheep, but also a supply of hay for their food. Just before reaching Australia, the sheep suddenly refused to eat. At the same time a dense fog covered the waters and for two days the ship had to halt its progress. Meanwhile the sheep paid no attention to their food. The owner was afraid that he was about to lose them. Then the fog lifted and before them were the green fields of Australia. The sheep had smelled the succulent pasture in the nearby land and it made them lose all appetite for the dried hay. And so it should be for us. The pastures of this earthly life lose their appeal when compared with the green fields on the heavenly shore. Our hearts should be longing to reach the rich blessings of that heavenly land.

This point was driven home to me in remarkable fashion a number of years ago. I had traveled from Washington state to Martin Luther College in Minnesota, our pastor/teacher training college, to be with my son, Craig, at his senior year home-coming and Parents' Night for the MLC football team. My sons, Christian and Caleb, were also attending MLC at that time, so I could see them all. The next morning there was a special worship service in the beautiful Church of Christ on Martin Luther College's campus. At that service was nearly the entire MLC student body of 700, as well as the college's

faculty. Plus there were multiple visitors for Homecoming weekend, other parents like me and many alumni, and WELS members from the area. This church is gorgeous, and it's huge, and still the chapel's acoustics are incredible. The chapel also holds one of the largest pipe organs in the nation. And incorporated into the service were brass, and timpani, and 3 student choirs of hundreds of MLC students. And as that service concluded with the singing of the hymn, "Father, God of Grace, You Knew Us" from the hymnal supplement, accompanied by all these instruments and sung by all these people, the tears were streaming down my face because I realized that this was just a tiny, tiny glimpse of what heaven will be like someday. There were loved ones there with me and strangers and Jesus too. And I was worshiping God with all these people in unity. As a sinner, I had no right to be there in God's house, but I was forgiven because of Jesus' atonement. It was a new start, and it was very real, and it was beyond wonderful. And if this little glimpse of heaven was so wonderful, what will the real heaven be like? I can tell you this, it will be wonderful beyond comprehension.

To be with Jesus, and to see him, Christ the King, on his glorious throne surrounded by the angels and the believers, there is simply nothing that is better than that! Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, heaven is something to be eagerly anticipated. As the 2001 Christian contemporary song of the year, sung by Mercy Me, states so beautifully about being in heaven with the Lord. I can only imagine – what it will be like – when I walk by Your side. I can only imagine – what my eyes will see – when Your face is before me I can only imagine. I can only imagine. 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. I can only imagine when that day comes, and I find myself standing in the Son. I can only imagine, when all I will do is forever worship you. I can only imagine. I can only imagine. (By the way, we sang this beautiful song at one of our Evenings of Encouragement!)

So in the meantime, as long as the Lord keeps us in this world, may we live completely for Jesus Christ the King. Serving him, and loving him, and giving to him, and worshiping him, and imagining how wonderful it will be to be with him forever and ever one day. And all the while with the attitude of Paul; For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. And may our attitude and words be these: "I'll live for you, Jesus, as long as you keep me here, but I want to go to heaven. I can't wait to go to heaven. In fact, I'm ready to go today!"