

The Longing to Go Home

Bible Verses Mentioned: Hebrews 9:24, Genesis 13, Ezekiel 28, Leviticus 10, Matthew 27:51, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Romans 8, Revelation 21

That's a pastel of kids. You all pray with me. Lord, thank you for this morning. Thank you for the hearts in this room. I pray that You would open the eyes of our heart, that we would see You, Jesus, that we would understand You, Lord, that we would be able to digest the truth of Your gospel more deeply, Lord. We thank You. We pray this in Your holy name. Amen. Have a seat.

Good morning, everybody. Good to see you. We're continuing work. Charlie is not here today, but we're continuing the series we've been doing in the Book of Hebrews. This has been a lot of fun. And I was preparing for our sermon this week, and I was remembering that a lot of the years that I spent in the music business, for you all that don't know, I spent a lot of years as a songwriter and a guitar player up in Nashville.

And it was a wonderful time touring and making records and all of those things. But when you do that for a living, it's a really tricky business. And so you spend a lot of time considering, like, what is the key to success? Like, how do you make this work? Like, the hardest thing to do with a guitar is make a living with it, right? So how do you do that? And what's the secret sauce? And I discovered there's one thing you can be the greatest guitar player, singer, you know, live act, anything.

But if you don't have this one thing, none of it matters. And that one thing is great songs. You gotta have good songs. And I have, like any artist, you can look at any successful artist who's had a sustained career, and you will find that they have a catalog of great songs. Now, you might not like them all, but their audience loves them. So, as a songwriter, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what does it take, what makes a great song. And I boiled it down to about three things.

And here they are. All great songs have this in common, at least one of these three things. They tell a story that you can relate to. It's a song that when you listen to it, it might not be the details, but you're like, "Oh, yeah, that's me. I get it. I feel understood." That's like every eagle song you've ever heard, right? The second thing is they tap into or they express this deep longing of our heart.

This unrequited love, this journey we're on, something that just speaks to the center of our struggle. Don't stop believing. That's me, right? We all get it. Or the third thing is this song speaks to that longing that has already been met, that I found it. Praise God. Celebrate good times. Come on. You get it.

It's true. It's true of all the songs. But why is that true of every song you'll ever listen to? It's because we are creatures of longing. Our hearts, in the words of the Indigo Girls, they're like hungry children pulling at our sleeves. Our hearts are constantly crying out with this sense of longing that we want to feel known.

We want to be made safe. We want to feel validated or loved. And I don't care if you're a man, you're a female, or if you're a woman or wherever you're from. That is true of your heart and it is true of mine. In fact, these longings are so deep, they drive pretty much everything about your life. And the real deep ones, like the longing to live without pain and suffering or things like that, we will forego food or water or even housing to see those longings either met or silenced.

So when we hear songs that we love, it puts its finger right in the middle of those longings. And we feel like in our deep place that we've gone home in some way. Does that resonate with you? You feel like you go home. And that's what I love about the gospel. The gospel, it's like the greatest song ever written. Because what it does is it doesn't set out to try and make those longings go away like some pesky thing that we need to beat our hearts into submission.

It reaches in, it grabs those longings and it holds them up and it says, God says, I did that. I put that in you. And let me show you how we're going to honor it. In the book of Hebrews that we're studying, in this passage we read today, it speaks right to the center of this. And it's not going to make sense at first, but let me explain it.

Hebrews 9:24, "Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." Now to understand how that speaks to our longing and that sort of core place in us, you got to rewind it. You got to rewind a bit. We've got to go back to the beginning. The book of Genesis.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth and he spoke light into being and he cast the stars in the sky. And with a word he carved the rivers and he shot them teeming with fish. And he spoke to animals into being. And at the day six on the crescendo of creation, he speaks humanity into being. His greatest creation, the only thing that he said that was made in His image. What does it mean that we're made in God's image? It means a lot of things. Here's what it doesn't mean.

It doesn't mean you look like God. It doesn't mean God had fingers and toes. It also doesn't mean that you reason like God or you have feelings, because God has feelings. My dog has feelings. What it means is that you have been set apart. You are a unique creation. To be as image-bearer, it is a status. It's a role we play.

That we are God, He set us in motion as co-creators, as His vice regents to move in this world and to build something beautiful out of the rawness of this creation, to honor Him. And that call was so important to God that He created a special place for them to do this. And it was called Eden.

Now, Eden was our home base, and it was a garden, that's what we think of it, but it was so much more than that. We think of Eden as Adam and Eve kind of walking around without clothes on in this sort of amniotic, like floating state. It wasn't like that. They had a deep sense of purpose and a deep sense of meaning. Eden was this place that was lush. It had trees of every sort and fruit and springs that came out of the ground.

It said that the tree of life was there, that people would eat and they would be sustained forever. That gold was in the ground, that flowed from the river from someplace called havila and onyx. And Ezekiel 28 tells us that Eden was on a mountain. Do you ever think of that? I never pictured Eden on a mountain so I stumbled over that. It was on a mountain and that little detail is significant because here's why. Back in those cultures, all the gods in the Sumerian cultures, they would all reside on mountains.

And the reason they resided on mountains was it was the way that they separated themselves from humanity. They didn't want anything to do with us. But in the gospel story, Eden is a holy place. It's a thin place. It's where heaven and earth overlapped. It's where the cosmic realm, it's where the divine realm and humanity came together in this holy place, a throne room of creation for God. It's where God walked with Adam in the cool of the day.

And you see heavenly beings like Cherubim, which, you know, what is that? It was a guardian angel for the throne room of God when he walked into the garden. And the first man and the first woman, they had purpose. They had meaning. They stood before the image of the thing in which they were created and they looked at them and they're like, "Yes, I am home." Well, things are great, but you know the story. Sin enters the world.

They eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and sin enters, and God tells them that they have to leave their garden. They have to leave this place. And he takes a cherubim and he puts this cherubim, the throne room guardian, and he puts it at the gate with a flaming sword, and he says, "You can't go back in here." Now, a little side note, I used to always think of that as a punishment. But when you read the Scripture, what it says, it wasn't a punishment.

What God says is, "We can't have you come in here in this fallen state as a sinful people because you will eat of the tree of life and you will live forever like that. And I can't bear that you would live forever in this fallen state." So it was a mercy. You didn't know that, did you? It's a good one. So then they leave the garden and we go back to our original question. What does this have to do with the longings of our hearts?

The longings we experience. Those are echoes of Eden. They are echoes of our hearts crying to go back home. Take me to where I know my purpose. Tell me what I mean. I long to not suffer. I long to live in a world where children don't get sick, where cancer is not real, where people don't get dementia. I want to walk with God in the cool of the day.

That longing is so real. It's such a part of our operating system. We don't see it all the time. It's such a part of us, we don't even notice it. It drives everything about our lives. And because we don't have Eden, we'll take that longing and we will wrap it around the things of our lives. We will wrap it around jobs. We will wrap it around marriages. We will wrap it around an election, won't we?

But I got news for you. I don't care if you stepped into that voting booth and you voted for him or you voted for her. It doesn't matter if your guy won or you look forward to winning another day. That won't bring the resolution. We wrap our longings around these things and we think, "Oh, will you please bring Eden now?" Untangle the tangled knot of this world.

Nothing can do that. Nothing can do that. As C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." So here's my question. If we were made for that world, if we were made for Eden, why didn't God just let us back in?

And hear this, God's plan was never to keep humanity out of Eden. His plan and has always been and has manifested in Jesus is how did He get them back in? How does God move them back in? Because we're not the only ones with a deep longing in our heart. God has a deep longing in His heart. A deep longing in His heart for you, for me to be with us.

And years later, when God took Israel and He leads them out of Egypt, and He's walking across the desert with them. He wants to be with them so badly. He gives Israel this tabernacle, this tent of meeting, which would later become the temple. We've talked about this for a few weeks now. At the center of this temple, remember it was the Holy of Holies. It's where God's presence dwelled.

As I described it a couple of weeks ago, it was a nuclear reactor of God's holiness that no man could approach and live. It was too powerful. But I want you to listen to this description of the Holy of Holies, and I want you to listen to it in light of what we just talked about. It was separated by this fine linen curtain, 60 feet high and 30 feet wide, four inches thick. And embroidered on that curtain was what?

A cherubim, a guardian angel. Sound familiar? And blue and purple and scarlet yarn, the color of flowers. And inside it continued, we see palm tree designs. And there are open flowers carved into the furniture and bronze pillars with lilies at the top. And the menorah candles with its seven branches coming off of the trunk is a picture of the tree of life.

God designed the Holy of Holies. It's a picture of Eden. This nuclear reactor of God's holiness. It's where heaven and earth would overlap. Where the ark of the covenant, where God's presence would dwell. It was covered in gold with more cherubim hovering over it in the shadow of their wings. And this was here a place where, once again, God could meet with humanity and walk with Him in the cool of the day, kind of.

Because remember, as we talked about, only one person could go in once a year after going through this elaborate, ornate sacrifice and cleansing themselves. Remember, His plan was how do we get us back in? And years later, when He died, Jesus died on the cross. And He stepped from the tomb. It says that Jesus entered the sanctuary, the passage we just read.

Jesus, not a replica made by human hands. Not some tabernacle in the desert. Jesus stands before the throne of God on our behalf, and by His Holy Spirit, we are transformed, and we are given a spiritual DNA where we gained access. And by Him standing before the throne, two things happen here. Christ's death and resurrection, it gives us both a taste of Eden, and it gives us a promise of Eden.

Jesus died on the cross, not just so He could re-enter the home, but so that we could, that we get to go back home and the Holy Spirit gives us this taste through when we worship, when we come to church, when we pray, when we read His Word, but most powerfully, when we come to the communion table. That is what we are saying. We lift our hearts to the Lord. This is a thin place.

It's a place where heaven and earth overlap. When we come and we take the bread, and we take the wine, and we enter in by faith. We don't pull God down. God transforms us before the throne. Into the holies of holies. We go past the cherubim and his flaming sword, and we go before our Father in heaven next to our brother Jesus. It's powerful. Why does that matter? First, let me tell you this. It's a testimony that the longing of your heart is not in vain.

It's not futility. God put that there. Those things are in you, not because, oh, you just need to get them to be quiet, because God wants to lift them out and He wants to honor them. You're not crazy. Maybe a little, but not really. Those things in your life, they sit like a burr under your saddle for a reason because you're not home yet. And if you let communion be more than just a ritual, let it be an actual communion.

We get to taste that thing which waits for us, that thing which is present. We get to taste the already and the not yet. Do you not understand it? That's okay. C.S. Lewis said it's take and eat, not take and understand. This also matters because our Scripture says, and I'll wrap up with this, that Jesus is going to appear a second time. That it's not going to be like this forever, that He's going to come and He's going to meet our longing and He's going to save those. And what does it say?

And again, I want you to listen to this verse through the lens of what we just talked about with Eden. Revelation 21, it says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, the holy city, Jerusalem, and it's coming down, it's descending, and God's

dwelling place is now among the people. And He will wipe away every tear. There will be no more death. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain. And the angels showed John on each side of the river stood the tree of life.

Eden, home, the place for which we were created. That holy city, when God made Adam in His image, that was the holy city Adam was supposed to have built. But He failed, and we failed. But Jesus did not. He did not. And Jesus, just as Jesus came to us, He will bring His holy city down.

And this will be our Eden. Except this time, the entirety of creation will celebrate in this place, and it cannot be marred by sin. And God is so excited for us to experience this. He will give us a taste of this today as we come by faith. So let's prepare our hearts. Let's prepare our hearts in prayer to come in faith, to taste of this truth, and we will step into the greatest song that has ever been written. Amen.