



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Corinthians 5: 6-10

Spring 2025

"Home With Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning, and thank you Seth...and I say as well, 'Happy Mother's Day!' I don't have a Mother's Day sermon, (and I never do), *[Laughter]*. But I always think, when Mother's Day comes along, of the sermon I preached on Mother's Day, some 20 years ago.

I was teaching through the Book of Revelations; and we came to chapter 17. I had prepared well ahead of time, and I'm sitting there that morning looking at the sermon. I thought, 'Oh no!...This is Mother's Day.' *[Laughter]* Later I made this announcement: "I want you to know this is not a Mother's Day sermon." (The title that morning was, "The Great Harlot.") *[Laughter]* Providence can be humorous; for the LORD planned that from all eternity.

Well, I do have a sermon that applies I think: It's "*Home With Christ*". That's what we study this morning, 'the future', and what our hope is. —And as mothers and fathers we have the hope of reunion with our loved ones someday. So, a great text, 2 Corinthians 5, beginning with verse 6,

⁶Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight— ⁸we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at

home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5: 6-10

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to be with Your people on this day...and on this Mother's Day, a good thing that we celebrate. —And I do pray for all of the mothers that are here...and for the fathers. We thank You for the children You've given us, thank You for the blessing of that and pray that You would bless our children—bless them with faith in Your Son, and bless them with a life that's orderly, and godly, and a blessing to the parents.

We are debtors to mercy alone, Father. We are in need of Your great grace, and we who are here, who have put our faith in Your Son, we have received that, and we thank You for it—and thank You for the life You've given us, the life You've given us in this world, and opportunity to be lights in a dark place.

But we thank You most of all for the great future that You've given us and what Paul speaks of in this text, and in this great chapter of 2 Corinthians 5. We thank You for the future that's ours, and the future that will be, not only with the loved ones...it will not only be a reunion with them but will be with Your Son.

And that's the great blessing. Though we may not see that as 'the great blessing', that is a commentary on ourselves, for we need to know Christ and develop in our relationship with Him. And so to that end, I pray LORD You'd bless our time together—and may that be the case; may we learn more about You and have a greater appreciation for the Person and work of our Savior.

Now Father, we pray for others as well. We pray for those who are sick and need Your mercy. Bless them. We thank You for Your grace and mercy—and we pray that that

will be magnified in our time of study this morning. Build up Your people in the faith, Father; we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Earnest Henry Shackleton was a hero. I'm sure you know his story, and the great events in his life. Books have been written in the past 20 years about it. Documentaries have been shown. In 1914 he led an expedition to explore Antarctica, where his ship, the Endurance, was trapped in ice and crushed, and the crew was marooned. They managed to evacuate to Elephant Island. The island was uninhabited and inhospitable; it was a dead end. But Shackleton was resourceful and brave...he had a plan.

From Elephant Island, he and five others took a small lifeboat 800 miles across dangerous arctic seas to the island of South Georgia. It was a miraculous crossing. Then he and two others, poorly equipped, hiked over mountains to a whaling station, and from there a ship rescued the crew. Shackleton never lost hope—and not one of his crew died. They all went back to England; they all went home.

Now I tell that because that is us. That's the church; we live in a cold, inhospitable place. We live on rough seas; we live on an 'Elephant Island' in this world. But we will all make it home safely. That's our hope.

And Paul is our model. He was a hero; he never lost hope. He faced dangers and difficulties, but began our passage in chapter 5, verse 6, with the words, "Being always of good courage." Now that's a theme that runs through these early chapters of 2 Corinthians. A few verses before, in chapter 4, verse 16, he wrote, "We do not lose heart."; and he began chapter 4 with the same statement, "We do not lose heart." And now we come again to that in our text which begins verse 6 with, "Therefore." So we have to ask, 'What is it there for?' And we find the reason for that in what Paul just wrote: Believers have the hope of the resurrection, and of even escaping death, if we are alive at Christ's return.

Paul hoped for that. We all do. But either way, whether we escape death, or die and enter heaven, we will all get home safely. That's the reason to not lose heart. But also Paul just wrote in verse 5, that God has given to every believer in Jesus Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit, "as a pledge", (vs5), to reassure us of the glorious promises that we have, of the hope that we have—and that it is true. It's real; it's the reality.

In verse 6, Paul made the application. "Therefore", he wrote, 'because of the great hope that we have, and the confidence that the Holy Spirit gives us', Paul was "always of good courage". That "courage" is permanent...it is "always", Paul wrote, because 'the Holy Spirit is permanent'. He is *always* in us to *encourage* us in whatever circumstance we are in. He's our Helper; He is our Comforter; He is our Advocate. He's referred to in these various ways in John chapter 14, verse 16, in John chapter 15, verse 26, and in 1 John chapter 2, verse 1, "...we have an advocate with the Father." He's our teacher, He is our guide, He's our protector—and gives us assurance.

Paul wrote in Romans chapter 8, verse 16, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God..." And here He always gives us hope of the future so that we can persevere in the present.

Now, that's something supernatural. You hear me say that a lot, I know, that we live a supernatural life—but we do. It distinguishes us from the men of this world, (not that they don't have a supernatural work of God with them as well). We know it though...they don't.

Heroes who show great courage against overwhelming odds on battle fields and on Antarctic seas sometimes succeed in what they do. They're often men of character, men of courage. But always, while they may not realize it and may think that they have done it in their own strength and ability, *always* they are blessed by the providence of God as well. His hidden hand is on them providentially. And it's certainly on us in more than just a providential way, but in a show of grace and love for us.

And Paul knew that. Paul knew that the source of his confidence, the source of his courage and never fading hope...it is the Lord; it's the Holy Spirit. But in addition to that, in addition to the ever present ministry of the Holy Spirit within him, (and within

us), Paul also spoke of 'knowledge'; "...being always of good courage and **knowing**..." (vs6).

What he, and we, 'know' is explained here and in verse 8, that while we are in the body, Paul says, "...at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord....". But when, 'we will be absent from this body, then we will be at home with the Lord.' (vs8).

So we are presently, "at home in the body", (vs6)...but our home here in this world, is what Paul has described earlier, as 'a tent'. That's how he described it in verse 1, as we looked at that last week. Now that's not bad. It's a real home, a home that God has given us. And in it God blesses us in many ways. He blesses you now. He is blessing you continually. —He blesses you with every breath of life that you take.

So He blesses us, and it is a home...but it's a home like the one that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lived in—it's a temporary home; it's not a lasting home. It's a kind of home that a traveler lives in—a pilgrim, or a soldier, traveling from place to place, living in tents, as those armies did until they reached their destination.

So we cherish the body as our home, and we care for it because it's a gift of God, but we know it is temporary, (at least in this present condition). It's like that of a tent. We are like 'tent dwellers', a person who is traveling through a foreign land; we are pilgrims in this world.

And it is that way for all of us who are of faith, faith in Christ. Those who have put their faith in Him, we're pilgrims in this world. Our real home is with the Lord...when we will be in His presence. He's with us now, and He promises to always be with us. In fact the great statement that ends the Book of Matthew, (28:20), is, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He's with us now.

And He is with us now through the Holy Spirit. Now that's John chapter 14, verse 23. But in the future, when we leave this body, we will see Him face to face, and then we will be at home with the Lord. 1 Corinthians 13, verse 12; "For now we see in a

glass darkly, but then face to face." Now that's a great thought...it's a great thought—it's our hope.

But how do we know it? How do we know it? After all, these bodies and this world in which we live, are the only home that we've ever known. We've never been to heaven. We have not even seen heaven. How do we know that that's true? How do we know that all these promises, which warm our hearts, (and should), and encourage us, are true?

So how do we think of ourselves, as I'm suggesting in this text, that we are, as it were, living abroad in a foreign land, as pilgrims, living out that way in the world in which we know so well?...So how can we think of heaven as our real home?

And the answer is given to us in verse 7. It's simple, we know it by faith; "...for we walk by faith, not by sight..." (vs7). That's how we live in this world: 'Not according to the things that we see.' That's what we want; but that's not how the Lord God has arranged things. We live by faith in His Word. We don't live by a philosophy of materialism; we live by faith in things not seen.

They are real; the promises of God are true:

Heaven exists,

The resurrection to come will happen,

The kingdom to come, and then the eternal state will all happen.

We will have for all eternity, (as Paul has said earlier, in 2Cor 4:17), "an *eternal* weight of glory". That is certain.

How do we know that? God has sovereignly revealed it to us in the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit has opened our eyes to it and we believed it. And, 'we believe it'...that's the life of faith.

And what is faith? "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11, verse 1. That's not the total, complete definition of

faith; that's looking to the future. Paul, when he uses 'faith' looks to the past—faith in Christ and what He's done. But the author of Hebrews gives us a definition that fits very well with what we're studying: We look to the future with hope and conviction, even though we don't see these things. But the day is coming when we will. "The day is coming..." as the ancient preacher Ambrose said, "...when faith will vanish into sight; and then we will see Christ face to face. We will be with Him, then, and for all eternity."

And that's what we look forward to. That's what we should look forward to; and that's what Paul said in the next verse. 'We prefer rather than being in this body' "...to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (vs8).

Now Paul said earlier, in verses 3 and 4, that he preferred to be 'clothed upon'; that was our lesson last week. He preferred that, to being "naked"—meaning, 'To have his resurrection body is better than to be in that disembodied soul, and have that disembodied soul in heaven.' That was his preference: It was to be alive at the Lord's return, and escape death by experiencing the immediate transformation and glorification of the body.

But he didn't fear death. He didn't dread death; in fact he welcomed death and departing this life in order to be with Christ. That was far better than living in this 'tent'. Paul's chief desire was to be with the Lord.

At the same time, he had a longing to remain here for the sake of the church and for the great privilege of living for Christ and carrying the Gospel out to unevangelized lands. In fact, when he's writing to the Romans, (which is not long before he went to Jerusalem and was arrested and put in prison in Caesarea), but when he wrote to the Romans, one of the last things he expresses is his desire to go on to Spain. He was always thinking of that, and desiring that.

And he expressed the conflict that he felt about being here or being with the Lord, in Philippians chapter 1, verses 21 through 23, where he wrote, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (vs21); "...to live on...", meant the opportunity of "fruitful labor". (vs22). 'To die', meant to, "...depart and be with Christ." (vs23). And he said, "...I am hard pressed from both *directions*." (vs23).

This is the great dilemma that Paul faced: 'To be there or to be here.:'; and he wrote, 'If the choice were his, he would have chosen to stay for their sake.' ...(not for his, but for their sake). (Phl 1:24).

So he continued to build up these believers in Macedonia, whom he loved so much; but he recognized that 'to depart and be with Christ', he said, "...was very much better." (vs23b). That's the goal, going home, being with Him.

So Paul didn't court death; he didn't have a death wish. And he wasn't weary or dreary about life. He loved his life, and he lived it well. He considered his life to be a great blessing...opportunity to serve the Lord God. But his greatest desire was not to be here...it was to be there. And so he told the Corinthians that the Christian preference is to be in heaven; it is to, "...be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." (vs8b).

Now that tells us a lot about what happens at death and after. To be absent from the body doesn't mean to be in purgatory. There's nothing in the Bible about purgatory. If that were true, if that were something that we had to look forward to, or that we would face in the future, Paul would not have been anxious, or have been eager, to leave this body to go there...No! —And it doesn't mean to be slumbering in a kind of '*soul sleep*'.

At death we are, "at home with the Lord." (vs8b). The preposition with also has the sense of '*toward*'. It has the idea of '*communion*'. So, at the moment of death we are '*toward*', or, '*face to face*' with Christ...in *fellowship* with Him.

In fact, this is the same word, the same preposition, that's used in John chapter 1, verse 1.; "...and the Word was with God..." The eternal Son of God was *with* the eternal Father. '*Face to face*' is the idea...in eternal fellowship and communion. And this is what He left in order to offer us His life and His self as a sacrifice for us.

And now, we have that kind of fellowship with Christ; and it is something that is present *now*—but then it will be immediate. 'Absent from the body, present with the Lord'...no long journey through the heavens.

That was the belief of the Gnostics; they believed that when you die you have to pass through all these 'demigods', (who are the planets), 'to get to the light'. And they had, 'the formulas', to get us past all of that.

There's none of that—there's no travel in that way. We don't go down, 'on a journey through some tunnel', (which there's, 'a light at the end', that you sometimes hear about). No, you read this and it's clear...'It is instant transfer from the shadows to the light.' Instant! But again—we know this, and we have this hope, 'by faith, not by sight.'

We don't know what heaven is like. We have a sense of it, and impressions of it; the Word of God gives us that—and they're glorious impressions. But I would say and submit to you, 'They don't compare to what is to come!' 'Words don't express the great truth of it...they can't', and Paul expresses that later in chapter 12. So we have an idea, but it's a very faint idea.

And the world, of course, has no idea at all. Its caricature of heaven is, 'Ghostly figures sitting on clouds, strumming harps.' It's foolish...foolish! We know what it is not... and we know that it is glorious and full of activity. I like C. S. Lewis' description of heaven that he gave in his last book in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series. They're children's stories, but they're profound. When some children of the story die, they are told that, 'They were beginning chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before. Now, we may not know much about, 'The very real place and experience.' ...How can we? We live, "among the shadows", as Lewis put it...but we know that it is true.

But the thing that will make heaven paradise is not the place itself, but the Person in it. Paul wanted to be "at home with the Lord." ...that's the essence of it.

In John 14, verses 1, 2, 3, Jesus told the disciples that 'He was going away'. 'He was going to the cross.' Now, that hit them like a ton of bricks. They were troubled, so He begins that chapter, "Let not your heart be troubled." (vs1).

Why was it troubled?—because they didn't understand that; they didn't know that. They should have. You read through the synoptic gospels; Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and there are three various occasions before this one where He told them, 'He would be given over to the Gentiles; He would be crucified, but He would rise on the third day.' And in chapter 12 of John, His body is anointed by Mary with perfume—and He explained the meaning of it, (after Judas stirred up the disciples to complain, 'Why wasn't this sold, and the money given to the poor?'(vs5)), 'Because she was anointing Me for my burial.' (vs7)... And they still didn't get it—they were slow learners.

So here, (*in chapter 14*), He tells them, 'Don't be troubled by the fact that I'm leaving, that I'm going to be betrayed, that I'm going to the cross; I have to go to the cross in order to prepare a place for you', (to prepare a place for them in His Father's house), "...that where I am, *there* you may be also." (vs3b).

"Where I am." They were going to, 'miss Him terribly', they were thinking. They didn't know what to do. He said, 'We're going to be together again'... and that's the essence of heaven and the world to come.

No doubt the Father's house is glorious beyond imagination. Heaven is a glorious place, and you read about it in the Book of Revelations in chapters 4 and 5, and then in chapter 7 toward the end of that chapter, and it's a wonderful, magnificent place. But, the great promise of our Lord's words is *reunion...being together*.

Think about this: What is it that is so nice about going home? Well, it's not the house. The house may have pleasant memories, and you may like the house; it may be a nice, attractive house, but it's not the house...it's the people in the house. An empty house is lonely. It may be a palace; it may be opulent; it may be glorious...but it's lonely if there's no one there to share it with.

The Lord's promise is that, "Where I am, *there* you may be also." (Jn 14:3). Now since the greatest joy of heaven is being with Christ, we will only long for it and truly live for it, to the degree that we *know* Him and *love* Him. So in my opinion, as a preacher,

one of the great goals and responsibilities I have, (maybe the greatest), is to unfold for you the greatness of God, (and I'm learning it, too), but to help you understand we have a great and glorious God, and we have a great and wonderful Savior...and as we do, we should love Him more.

Knowing Christ and *loving* Him should be the saint's chief end. It is a lifelong effort; it takes study. It's a lifelong effort; it takes experience as we see our lives in light of the promises of the Word of God. It's a lifelong effort; but it pleases God, it glorifies God...and ultimately, that's the great end of all things—to glorify Him.

And it leads to a *longing* for heaven. But in that longing for heaven, it doesn't lead to an idle life at all. It's just the opposite, it leads to a life of active service.

It did for Paul. Because he loved Him and *longed* to be with Him in heaven—he determined to live his life in the present, this brief life that he had, fully to Christ's glory. That's what he says in verse 9. "Therefore," that is, 'Because we're going to be at home with the Lord, because we have this great promise before us and we have the Holy Spirit within us to encourage us'; "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." (vs9). That was Paul's consuming ambition. It was the motive behind all that he did—all that he did...to please Christ.

Well, he knew Him well. He knew what he received from Him. He knew his debt to the Lord Jesus Christ, and so that was his goal in life. What a contrast that is to the world that is driven by a desire to satisfy 'self', to glorify 'self'. Paul was driven by the desire to please the Savior, and not please himself. That is the only valid motive in life.

There are good motives in life; I mean, to be a blessing to one another...(and you can go on with good motives)...but the ultimate motive is to live for the glory of God—and live to please our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that doesn't exist, that doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is produced by a knowledge of Christ, and the love that results from that knowledge. Paul 'knew' Him, and understood what Christ had done for him—and was doing for him. In fact, maybe no one in the world has understood the grace of God to the degree that Paul did,

‘the chief of sinners’, (1Tim 1:15), who was ‘snatched as a brand from the burning.’ (Zec 3:2)—and not only that, but given the great privilege of being, ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’, (Rom 11:15), and writing so much of Scripture. No, he knew he was, ‘a debtor to mercy alone.’

Christ has gained heaven for us at the cost of His own precious blood. Us... unworthy sinners—and He's presently guiding us and protecting us at every moment. And He never fails us. He gives us everything we need, and He withholds nothing from us that is for our good. He does withhold things from us, which are not for our good.

He cares for us constantly. Even our afflictions, as Paul has said in chapter 4, verse 17. "Our afflictions are producing in us an eternal weight of glory." So everything is used by Him to our good. Knowing that, Paul was determined to make his life count for Christ, so that whether he was alive at the Lord's return, or went through the experience of death, he would be found faithful.

Gratitude, love for Christ, was Paul's motivation for service. As the old Scot, Thomas Erskine put it, "In the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude." Everything we have: Our faith, our perseverance, our glorious end and entrance into heaven—all of that is of grace, and not through anything we merit. It is all a gift...a constant gift of God.

And so, we are to be obedient. But we're obedient not because it's an obligation. (Now, I think it is an obligation, but that's not the motivation.) The great motivation is in light of that, ‘We love Him because of what He'd done for us and we want to be obedient.’ So I think it is a good, succinct statement that, “In the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude.

But there is another motivation: ‘The Christian day of reckoning.’ I'm not sure that's the right way to put it, but Paul knew he would have to stand before Christ and give an account of his life. So he writes in verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the

body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." And Paul wanted to be able to give a good account of himself before that tribunal of Christ.

He and the Corinthians had a visual picture of that in their mind's eye. In fact they didn't have to think very hard about it; they could go see *the judgment seat* itself. The Greek word for *judgment seat*, is '*béma*'. It means, '*a step*'. And it was a large, raised platform on which the Roman judge would sit and administer justice. Paul stood before that *béma* seat in Corinth when the pagan judge, Gallio, heard a case that was brought against him by the Jews—and he dismissed it as unworthy of his attention. Luke gave the account of that in Acts, chapter 18, (vs12-17).

That very judgment seat is still there, in the ruins of the ancient marketplace in Corinth. You can go to it. I've been there; I've stood on it; and it's a large, rectangular stone structure. On it has the sign in Greek and then transliterated into English, '*béma*'. And I'm sure the Corinthians thoughts were full of that image when Paul wrote of 'the *béma* seat of Christ', and it must have given them pause...and also stirred up some very sober reflections, (for a Roman judgment seat was an awesome place...and not a place people wanted to be standing).

But, "the judgment seat of Christ", (vs10), is exceedingly more awesome than a Roman tribunal; and Paul wrote, 'we must all appear before it.' So this is a sobering thought, but not one that should make us cringe in fear and dread, because Christians will not appear before Christ for condemnation, but for commendation...for God's *approval*. We stand justified. "...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.", Romans chapter 8, verse 1. And we will stand before Christ, confidently, with "good courage", as Paul says in verse 6. We are fully accepted by God, and clothed in Christ's righteousness; (and Paul will develop that very point later at the end of this chapter.) But it is because we have been 'justified', ('*declared righteous*'), that our lives are to display a behavior and a morality that is consistent with our legal position with God.

So while we are not judged as sinners, we will be judged as servants. The Judge will be fair; He will be righteous. In fact, I would say, He will be gracious in all of this. And He will look upon us with eyes that are filled with infinite love for us. There will be no scorn, or anything of that nature. He loves us, and His face and His eyes will be filled with that. But those eyes will also examine us thoroughly. Paul wrote, 'We must appear', or '...be made manifest before Christ.' That means, 'be laid bare before Him'..."Striped...", as Philip Hughes writes, "...of every outward facade of respectability."

He will see us as we really are. Nothing but our full, true character will be revealed. No show, just the real self. That's how Christ will see us and judge us, with divine discernment. And the Lord will examine us carefully—what we've done in the body in this earthly life, inwardly and outwardly, whether good or bad. It will be an assessment of worth—the worth of those deeds that we have done.

And rewards will be given according to *faithfulness*. I say that to make the point, 'Not according to results'. We can't produce the results—God does that. But we are to be faithful, and He will look at us in that light.

The Corinthians were already aware of this. Paul had told them about the judgment seat back in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, where he described the 'tribunal of Christ' as a 'trial by fire'. He pictures us as builders, and told them to be careful how they, (and how we), build our lives. Some of what we build will go up in smoke, because people build their lives of temporal things, like 'wood, hay, and straw'. (1Cor 3:12). It can't survive the test.

Others build of permanent things, like 'gold, silver, precious stones', (ibid.), and they live for eternity. They live for the future, not for the present. And the deeds they did are of spiritual value, and survive the divine examination. Those people, "will receive a reward", Paul says. (1Cor 3:14).

Others whose life was invested in self-promotion, or ease and comfort, will suffer loss. They will **be saved**, "yet so as through fire." (ibid. vs15). Well, there's a great deal to be thankful for in that, "be saved"; but they'll get little as a result of a life that was lived for self.

Well, we're all going to go through the 'test' that Paul speaks of here. So the exhortation that Paul gave the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:10 was to, 'live like a wise builder...build well'; and that's the point here. The warning of 'suffering loss', the encouragement of 'gaining reward' is incentive to live a life of purity, a life of sacrifice and service. I don't have to go out and look for ways to sacrifice—but to be faithful at every moment. And if that calls for sacrifice, we sacrifice whatever it is, knowing God's in control and He will reward us for that. He'll take care of us, in the present, and in the future.

This is not a self-serving thing. Only a fool doesn't care about gains and losses. But the greatest motivation for service and sacrifice is not the reward that you may receive—it is love for Christ. Paul wanted to be able to give a good account of himself before the judgment seat of Christ, *out of a desire to please Him*. Again, love for Christ is the greatest incentive for a well-lived life. The desire to please Him, who loved us and gave Himself up for us, and gained all that we have, gained heaven for us.

Knowing that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ is a sobering thought, and should lead us to evaluate our lives.

How are we spending our time? Are we deepening our knowledge of Him through a reading and study of Scripture? Are we taking opportunities to serve Him and His people in His church? How do we represent Him in public? Those are proper questions to ask.

But remember, this passage is not threatening...this passage is encouraging. This passage is to be understood that way; it's to be understood about our hope. We're going home, and that should thrill us. There are rewards for the servant, like a laurel wreath for the Olympic champion, and a triumphant return home! That's our hope—that should be our desire.

Imagine those men marooned on Elephant Island, and the encouragement they had from the hope of leaving that cold, inhospitable place, and returning to their families and warm houses. That hope kept them living, kept them persevering during those dark days. It kept Shackleton and the five sailors in that small open lifeboat rowing across a risky sea toward their destination—they had that hope.

Well, our hope is far greater; for our hope is certain. Our hope is a home beyond anything we've ever seen, or experienced, or imagined in this world. The fact that Paul doesn't have words to describe it, the fact that the Book of Revelations is full of metaphors and similes to describe what can't be described, tells us how great and glorious it will be. And it's certain. Christ has prepared a place for us, and we will be there soon. I don't care how long you live, '70 years', as Moses wrote in Psalm 90, verse 10, "...or if due to strength, 80 years or more." It's still brief. We're a vapor; we're just a "sigh", he says. (ibid. vs9).

So we'll be entering it; but what Paul is saying, we want to enter it victoriously. And really, I think we all will. But what a blessing that God's going to reward us, reward us for works that He Himself ultimately produced in us. That'll be a glorious day.

Paul and Barnabas, I think, give a picture of our going home in Acts 14, when they returned to Antioch from their missionary journeys. They had preached the Gospel throughout southern Asia Minor. It had been hard, you know; you've read through the Book of Acts, and read of that first missionary journey...so hard that John Mark abandoned the mission right at the very beginning after a few, evidently very difficult, things. And Paul and Barnabas continued on. Paul was stoned in Lystra and left for dead. They had suffered much. But when they had finished, Luke wrote in verse 26, 'They sailed away to Antioch from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.'

What a pleasant departure that must have been. They had fulfilled the mission. They knew it was complete; they left behind churches all over the region of southern Asia Minor, with many disciples, and they were going home. I thought, 'That's a picture of the believer's death. Some day we will sail away from this world of toil and struggle and setbacks and discouragements, and we will go to a land of light—and reunion, and reward, and rest— to begin chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before. That's our future.'

And if we fulfilled our work, it will be a joyful departure and triumphant homecoming. We will be glad to appear before the bēma seat of Christ; and that can be true for each and every one of us. —Every one of us can have that experience.

But there is another judgment seat, the “great white throne”, (Rev 20:11), where all unbelievers will someday stand. Their lives will also be examined. John writes that, “the books were opened”. (ibid.vs12). And those books contain all the deeds and the works of everyone; and they'll be examined according to that...and they will be judged, and they will all be condemned. No one there will stand with good courage; all will be doomed.

But there is a way of escape, and it's through faith in Christ. It is by believing in Him as God's Son and our Savior—understanding that He took our place in judgment; He bore all of the punishment due to our sins—from every single one of them. They're taken care of. —The debt is paid in full!

He died for sinners so that all who believe in Him would be saved. If you're without Christ, if you've never believed in Him, we encourage you to look to Him, trust in Him, believe in Him—and enter into a glorious future. May God help you to do that.

(Closing prayer) Father, what a glorious hope we have. We someday will be truly home, as we've just sung. And what a place it will be; what a reunion it will be with loved ones—but most of all with Your Son.

And then we will really understand how much we owe Him, and how little we understood that great truth. And we'll spend all eternity enjoying that and understanding it more and more fully.

But we thank You, LORD, for the sacrifice that You've made for us through Your Son. We thank You for the hope that we have; and we thank You for the present blessing that we have—that You're our Father, not our judge, and that through Christ we have a safe life. And You're taking care of us day by day, leading us moment by moment. We thank You and praise You for that.

Now, as Aaron prayed so many years ago:

The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace. (Shalom.)

Thank You, Father;
We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)