

“The Home of Righteousness”

I'll be home for Christmas
You can plan on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams

Back in 1943 Bing Crosby sang this song to build up the morale of U.S. soldiers fighting overseas in World War II. The song served to keep them focused on better things ahead, when they would be back home to celebrate Christmas with their families again. “I’ll be home for Christmas” has become a favorite and a standard song to play during the month of December ever since.

Our sermon lesson for today isn’t quite as famous as the song “I’ll be home for Christmas,” but it is a familiar section to Christians. It is also meant to encourage Christians and to keep us looking forward to when we will truly be home in Heaven.

2 Peter 3:8-14.

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Heaven is our home. As Christians we know that and look forward to that. But it’s taking so long for Jesus to return. It’s been almost 2000 years already since he promised to return. And things seem to be getting worse in the world. Wickedness is increasing. Sin is glorified and accepted as normal. A foundational building block of society: God’s design for marriage and the family is being ignored, attacked, and even re-written by some humans and society is not better off for it. Hopelessness, despair, and self-medicating addictions of all kinds are widespread. World-wide pandemics and other scary natural catastrophes are a regular reality. And the work of the Devil is having success among the ranks of Christians as well. On the one hand the Devil convinces some Christians to doubt God’s love and fall into despair while on the other hand he convinces other Christians to grow careless and worldly in their

thinking which leads to minimizing sin and spiritual laziness. Either way, it leads Christians to be embarrassed or quiet in their Christian witness. And the sad reality is that Christians are giving up the Christian faith at alarming rates! Lord Jesus, come quickly and bring us to our home in Heaven! But he doesn't seem to be coming quickly enough. God comes to us when we feel like this and he says: **"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"** (2 Peter 3:8-9). The reason time has continued on for 2000 years is not because God is forgetful, or lazy, or asleep. It's because he is patient. Not everyone who will see their need for Jesus as they repent of their sins and will be brought to faith in Jesus as Savior and spend eternity in Heaven has been brought to faith yet. So the reason God hasn't come yet is because he is patient. Find comfort in the fact that God will leave no Christian left behind in Hell. Let God's patience inspire you to be patient and let it inspire you not to spiritual laziness or despair, but rather to living and sharing your Christian faith.

Heaven is our home. As Christians we know that and look forward to that, but life on earth also has some things we really enjoy. Even though everything is tainted by sin, and thus the enjoyment of these earthly things isn't as complete as we might like, we still love aspects of our life on earth. Our family and friends, our work and hobbies, our time spent learning and experiencing nature and our time spent enjoying life at home. And there are still things we want to experience and accomplish here. I remember early on in my ministry talking to one of my ministry colleagues at LPS who was 22 years old and looking forward to her wedding the following year. During a dorm staff Bible Study about Jesus returning on the last day I remember her making the comment, "I'm looking forward to Jesus returning, but I don't want him to return until after I have the chance to get married and enjoy married life for a while." The Lord said "yes" to her prayer as she is married to a WELS pastor and has a family and has been enjoying that life for the past 16 years. We can all relate to that same thinking. And none of us has ever been to Heaven. Will it truly be better than life on this earth? We are familiar with our home on this earth. Plus, we don't like change all that much. God comes to us when we feel this way and he says: **"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"** (2 Peter 3:10-13). To sum the Apostle Peter up he is saying, "Don't get too attached to life and the things of this earth. BIG changes are coming." That doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy, in a God pleasing way, the blessings God gives us to enjoy while we live on this earth. We should enjoy them. At the same time, we need reminders to not wrap our fingers too tightly around the blessings God gives to us because then our eyes won't be focused on where God wants them to be – the home of righteousness that awaits us in Heaven. So in love, God gives us that needed Advent reminder through the Apostle Peter that BIG changes are coming to this universe when Jesus returns a second time on Judgment Day. **"The heavens will disappear with a roar"** (2 Peter 3:10a). Heavens here is not referring to the place where God and the souls of dead Christians reside currently. Heavens here is referring to the rest of the universe not earth – the other planets, stars, and galaxies. In their present form they will cease to exist and the process of this happening will be very loud. **"The elements will be destroyed by fire"** (2 Peter 3:10b). The building blocks of all life and matter that seem so unchanging and indestructible, cells and atoms, will literally be "loosed, set free," not holding together in the same way. **"And the earth and everything in it will be laid bare"** (2 Peter 3:10c). Nothing in the universe will be hidden from God. Everything that God created, human and otherwise, will be exposed by him – ready for

judgment. And just like he used water to destroy the earth in the time of Noah (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-6), God will use fire to do his work on Judgment Day.

This sounds terrifying! And it will be for those who don't trust in Christ as Savior and are unprepared for Judgment Day. But in the midst of a scary picture the Apostle Peter says this: **"look forward to the day of God and speed its coming..."**

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:12-13). As Christians we can actually look forward to this happening because we trust God's promise connected to Jesus. Jesus came to this earth the first time to pay the punishment of Hell for all of our sins that will be exposed on Judgment Day. And Jesus gives to sinners like us his righteousness to count as our own, his perfect keeping of God's law, the exact thing we need to be prepared for Judgment Day. Through faith in Jesus we enjoy being righteous in the sight of God right now, unafraid and looking forward to the fires of Judgment Day because we know that out of those fires is going to come a brand new home – the home of righteousness. The words that the Apostle Peter uses in this section of Scripture allow for two Christian views of what God is going to use fire to do on Judgment Day. The first view is that God is going to annihilate the universe with fire and create a brand new one from scratch. The second view is that God is going to purify the universe with fire, removing the taint of sin, and is going to restore it to the way it was before the fall into sin. Whether you are an annihilationist or restorationist know this – whatever God does on Judgment Day is going to feel like home. The same God who created our current home that we enjoy is going to create another home that is even better. In our heavenly home everything is righteous – right, perfect, complete, works like it should, and lasts forever. No more evil; no more pain or suffering of any kind; no more loneliness; no more disappointment; no more lack of fulfillment; no more relationship issues; no more bad or scary weather; no more pandemics; no more health issues or death. Just a home of righteousness where there is a connection between Heaven (where God dwells) and earth (where we dwell) that doesn't exist currently.

Right now, as Bing Crosby said, our righteous home in Heaven is only in our dreams. But it will become reality on God's timetable. Until then, let's be patient and let's avoid spiritual laziness. Instead, out of thankfulness to Jesus for the home of righteousness in Heaven that he purchased for us, let's follow the encouragement of the Apostle Peter: **"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming..."¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him"** (2 Peter 3:11,12,14). Amen.