

## **GOD THE HOME-BUILDER**

John 14:1-7

What is it about home that stirs such a universal longing in the human heart? That longing is expressed in art and in poetry and music. Are you familiar with these songs?

How about this one from Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young?

*I'll light the fire,  
And you put the flowers in the vase  
That you bought today ...*

*Our house is a very very very fine house,  
With two cats in the yard,  
Life used to be so hard,  
Now everything is easy 'cause of you ...*

Or this one from Michael Bublé?

*Another aeroplane  
Another sunny place  
I'm lucky, I know  
But I wanna go home  
Mmmm, I've got to go home*

*Let me go home  
I'm just too far from where you are  
I wanna come home*

Or this one from Simon and Garfunkel?

*I'm sitting in the railway station.  
Got a ticket to my destination.  
On a tour of one-night stands my suitcase and guitar in hand.  
And ev'ry stop is neatly planned for a poet and a one-man band.  
Homeward bound,  
I wish I was,  
Homeward bound,  
Home where my thought's escaping,*

*Home where my music's playing,  
Home where my love lies waiting  
Silently for me.*

Or this one from Miranda Lambert?

*I know they say you can't go home again.  
I just had to come back one last time.  
Ma'am I know you don't know me from Adam.  
But these handprints on the front steps are mine.  
And up those stairs, in that little back bedroom  
    is where I did my homework and I learned to play guitar.  
And I bet you didn't know under that live oak  
    my favorite dog is buried in the yard.*

*I thought if I could touch this place or feel it  
    this brokenness inside me might start healing.  
Out here it's like I'm someone else,  
I thought that maybe I could find myself  
    if I could just come in I swear I'll leave.  
Won't take nothing but a memory  
    from the house that built me.*

What is about home that stirs such longings? Why is it every time I'm back in Greenwood I feel the urge to drive by our old house? I do the same thing when I'm in Branson. And the same for the little Fayetteville duplex we lived in right after we were married? And every few trips to Little Rock I feel the urge to drive by the house on Meadowcliff I lived in the first eight years of my life—a house filled with as many bad memories as good. Why is that?

I attended part of conference on bridges out of poverty last week and the speaker said that one reason people in poverty are slow to get work is because any income from a job could cost them their subsidized housing but not create enough income for them to afford a place of their own, and they would risk becoming homeless. We all want a place to live, a place to lay our head, a couple of rooms and a bath. Home. It's a universal longing.

Jesus tapped into that longing in the opening lines of His farewell discourse to His disciples. As we continue our series, *The Summer of Love*, I invite you to open your Bible to **John 14:1-7**. We're concluding our section of

the series in which we think together about the many ways God loves us. Thus far we've met God the Knitter, God the Keeper, God the Savior, God the Wise Parent, and today we see another way God loves us: He is God the Home-Builder. Hear the word of the Lord ... (***read the text***).

## I

**Don't you love that image—"my Father's house"?** The Bible images heaven in several ways. Revelation 21 and 22 image the new heaven and the new earth with pearly gates, streets of gold, and a crystal sea, not to mention the river of life, abundant fruit trees, and lush vegetation. Revelation images heaven as large, secure, and as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day. Such images are impressive and inviting. They stimulate the mind and the imagination. But the "*Father's house*" is an image that touches the heart. It is the image of heaven as home, the image that declares God's love and hugs the heart. Heaven as home.

How inviting is that? I can't tell you how many times I've visited with saints on their deathbed and heard them express this longing: "*I'm just ready to go home.*" In one of my first hospital visits as a young minister, I visited a lady who was quite old and quite sick. As we concluded our visit, I asked her, "*How can I pray for you?*" She responded, "*Pray that I go home.*" So I prayed, "*Lord, bless this woman who knows you and loves you. And in your good time ease her pain and take her home to heaven ....*" She interrupted my prayer, "*Not that home,*" she exclaimed! "*My house. I want to go home to my house.*" Either way, she wanted to go home.

Heaven as home is a great image. It's a great image if you've spent most of your life in a happy home: a warm cozy fireplace, a favorite recliner, the smell of pot roast on the stove or cookies in the oven. Home: needlepoint sayings on the wall, and between pictures of family and friends on the refrigerator, little magnets that spell out homespun slogans: *There's no place like home. Back door guests are best. Welcome, friends. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

Home for many is a warm and inviting place. There are many good homes where family members are respected and loved. Homes where nurture and support are always in place. Homes where hugs and kisses abound, where laughter echoes in the halls, where peace and joy prevail, where loneliness is

rare, where the blessing is freely passed on from parent to child. These are homes where Jesus lives and reigns and where the scent of His presence fills the air like the fragrance of potpourri. These homes are not perfect. No home is. But they are healthy homes, happy homes. And if you've spent much time in one, you know what Jesus is getting at when He calls heaven "*the Father's house*."

But what if your experience of home is not so happy? There *are* homes that trouble the heart, homes that are danger zones, hard hat areas. Homes where alcoholics are a ticking time bomb. Homes where rage-aholics explode over almost any little thing, where control-freaks dictate to everyone else, where children have to raise themselves. These are homes people long to leave. Such homes don't nurture; they neglect. They don't support; they abuse. They don't encourage; they tear down. They are homes from hell. War-zone homes. Wrecking ball homes that sooner or later implode and leave precious persons in tatters and shreds.

So what do people from homes like these do with this image of the "*Father's house*"? They cling to it too. It represents hope. It promises the kind of home their hearts have longed for from their earliest memories. No matter what kind of home you grew up in or live in now, heaven as home is a rich, inviting, appealing image.

## II

**Maybe that's why Jesus prefaced His words about His Father's house with these words: "*Let not your heart be troubled*."** The very promise of such a home can bring peace to the troubled heart while we're still on earth. And when we finally make it home our hearts will never be troubled again.

Jesus knows there is much in this world that can trouble the heart. But His promise of a room in the Father's house can bring peace to the troubled heart once and for all. Think about it. What troubles your heart?

Is it money problems? Have trouble making ends meet? Are you stuck on fixed income that's fixed too low to provide adequate care? Such concerns trouble many hearts. But look around the Father's house. There are no money problems there—no poverty of any kind. There are no homeless shelters because everybody has a room. There are no collection agencies and no banks.

The currency of heaven is the provision of the Father who sees to it that everybody has enough. You may have money problems now; you won't have them forever. *"Let not your heart be troubled."*

And don't let your heart be troubled by relationships either. There are many rooms in the Father's house. And all that find their home in heaven will live in sweet harmony with one another. No one will look down on you. No one will make fun of you or bully you. No one will use you or abuse you or manipulate you in any way. No one will try to possess you or smother you. In the Father's house all relationships are genuine. All relationships are encouraging. And when you see other believing loved ones there, you will relate to them just fine. None of the tensions or imperfections that marred your relationship on earth will affect your relationships in heaven. So if you're worried about relationships in the Father's house, *"Let not your heart be troubled."*

And if sickness or grief troubles your heart, there's good news here too. In this life cancer and sickness and grief can break our hearts and quench our spirits—but not in the Father's house. Look around the Father's house and you'll see no medical clinics, no hospitals, no graveyards. Sickness is put away once and for all, and death is swallowed up in life. Remember who sits on the throne in the Father's house. It is the One who gives us eternal healing, the one who is *"the resurrection and the life."* So if you struggle with sickness and grief on the earth, you will never have to struggle with these again in the Father's house. *"Let not your heart be troubled."*

Our problems are temporary. Our home in the Father's house is forever. Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17:

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

He's talking about life in the Father's house—a house built not with nail and wood, stucco and brick—a house built by the love of God the Home-Builder.

**And it's the house in which Jesus makes His forever home.** That's the best thing about the Father's house: Jesus lives there. The word in v. 2 that the ESV translates *rooms* is the noun form of the verb *abide*. Jesus uses that word a lot in John 15. He tells us to abide in Him, and He will abide in us. The glory of the Father's house is that we will abide in Jesus—perfectly and permanently—forever and ever.

That's not to say that there aren't other important people in the Father's house. There are. All the Bible heroes will be there: Abraham, Moses, and David. Joshua and Rahab, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ruth and Esther too. Peter, Paul, and Mary will be there and maybe even form a band—“*Jerusalem dreaming, on a winter's day*.” You can expect to see Luke and John and Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila. If you've ever wanted to ask any of them a question, if you've ever wanted to rub shoulders with such heroes and heroines of the faith, you'll get your opportunity in the Father's house.

And you know who else will be there? Other heroes of the faith who have influenced our lives and enlarged our faith. In the Father's house you'll get to meet people like Augustine and Luther, Mother Teresa and Billy Graham. And how about Lottie Moon? Every Christmas, for years, you've been giving to a mission offering in her name. Wouldn't you like to meet this incredible missionary in person? You'll get to in the Father's house. And I, for one, look forward to saying thank you to people from across the centuries whose writings or biographies have inspired me to a fuller, deeper Christian life and a greater love for Jesus. I'll look for folks like that.

And I'll look for family and friends too. I've never known a grandfather in my life. By the time I was born they were all dead. I really want to meet my grandfathers and get to know them. I'll do that in the Father's house. I want to see my grandmother too—the grandmother who took in my family when my parents broke up and we were without a place to live. I teased her a lot in life, but I never really said thank you for her sacrifices in our behalf. I'll do that in the Father's house. I look forward to finally getting to know my dad and him finally getting to know me. I want to see my mother again and tell her I'm sorry I wasn't there for her at the end. And I've got a lot of friends up there too. I want to see if Clarence Jordan is still telling the same stories. I want to see some who suffered from such lengthy illnesses and say, “*I know you struggled with your sickness on earth, but it's nothing compared to this, is it?*” And they'll smile and say, “*You got that right!*” And I'm sure going to look for Teresa

Walters—she had muscular dystrophy and was wheelchair bound on earth. You know what I want to see? I want to see her walk. It's a real comfort, you know, when standing beside the grave of a loved one to know that since both the deceased and I are heading for the Father's house, we will see each other again.

So heaven will be filled with a lot of folks I want to see, but you know who I want to see the most? I want to see Him so badly that even if my family and friends and the great heroes of the faith were standing there to greet me, I would run right past them all. *"Can't talk to you now," I'd say, "Where's Jesus? I want to see Jesus. I want to see the One who died for me—the One who took my sin on Himself and endured my hell so I could have heaven. I want to see the One who knocked on the door of my child-like heart and asked if He could come in and make a home in me. I want to see the One who held me in His strong arms and listened to me cry my heart out when as a child in a broken home I felt so afraid and alone. I want to see the One who even after my sin receives me into His presence with forgiveness and mercy and love. I want to see the One who listens to my rants and raves in prayer when He does things I don't much like in my life and in the lives of some of you. I want to see the One who has come to me a thousand times in my discouragement and lifted me out of the pit saying, 'Cheer up, I am with you always.' I want to see Jesus."*

And that is the greatest thing about the Father's house. Jesus is there. He's getting it ready for us so that where He is, there we may be also. He loves us so much He wouldn't dream of spending eternity without us. And we'll get to see Him with our own eyes. We've followed Him so long. We've prayed to Him. We've read His word. We've tried to listen to His voice amid the noise of our world. We've tried to do what He wants us to do as best we could. And yet we've never set eyes on him—never. But in the Father's house we'll finally get to see Him face to face. Is that not the greatest gift of love from God the Home-Builder? It's not just a portrait of Jesus that hangs in the Father's house; Jesus himself lives there in person. No wonder Vance Havner was fond of saying: *"I'm homesick for heaven. It's only the hope of dying that has kept me alive this long."*

*"In my Father's house are many rooms," said Jesus. "I go and prepare a place for you ... so that where I am there you may be also."*

#### IV

**And there's only one way to get there.** Thomas listened to all this talk about the Father's house and Jesus going there to prepare rooms for us and he said, "*Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?*" To which Jesus replied, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Jesus, who identifies himself with God the Home-Builder, is the way—the *only* way to get to the Father's house.

Some people think that what Jesus told Thomas is hatefully arrogant and exclusive. On the contrary: it is abundantly loving and crystal clear. If you are in a burning house and looking for a way of escape, who is more loving—the person who says, "*There are many ways to escape this house and it's up to you to figure it out,*" or the person who says, "*There's only one way out. Follow me, I will show you the way?*" Jesus is that second person. He knows the way. He *is* the way. And He tells us the only way to get to the Father's house is through Him.

Do you have a longing to go home to the Father's house? That longing can only be satisfied in Jesus.

## V

**Bob McCallister was a volunteer for Prison Fellowship.** He wrote about his experience with an inmate named Rusty Woomer who was on South Carolina's death row. Woomer was a convicted killer. He was only 35 years old, but he was on death row for murdering four people in one of South Carolina's most notorious murder sprees. I don't know Woomer's life story, but I suspect it's pretty predictable. Probably had a lousy childhood. Maybe bounced around from house to house. Likely had seen things in his life that people ought not to have to see. And then like so many others, in his search for belonging and acceptance, he fell into the wrong crowd, made some bad choices, and one night all the rage he carried inside erupted in violence that left four people dead. He was tried, rightly convicted, and sentenced to die.

But oddly enough, through the work of Prison Fellowship volunteer, Bob McCallister, Woomer found life right there on death row. He trusted in Jesus Christ as His Savior and Lord. And Jesus, who can forgive even the worst of sinners, forgave Rusty Woomer, brought him into the Father's family, and made him a place in the Father's house. And it's the last words of Woomer



that show what hope we have in Christ and just how broad and deep and wide is God's love for us. And he spoke these words less than twenty minutes before he was executed in the electric chair. Listen as Bob McCallister writes the story:

The condemned man sat on the edge of a bed, his freshly shaven head and right leg glistening with a thin coat of conducting gel to aid the transmission of 2,000 volts of electricity through his body. *"Bob,"* he told me, *"the only thing I ever wanted was a home. Now I'm about to get one."*<sup>1</sup>

Wow! *"The only thing I ever wanted was a home. Now I'm about to get one."* Is that hope or what? Let not your hearts be troubled indeed. Of course, I don't know exactly what happened when that electricity surged through Woomer's body and stopped his beating heart, but I suspect it was something like this: Rusty Woomer fell asleep in that electric chair and woke up in glory. And as he made his way through the gates of the Father's house and turned to walk up Grace Avenue, he saw Jesus at the head of a crowd. The whole group were probably smiling and waving. And as Rusty stood there mouth wide open, astonished and amazed, Jesus threw His arms around Rusty and said, *"Welcome Home, Rusty. Welcome Home."* Then taking his arm, Jesus said, *"Come with me, Rusty, let me show you to your room."*

And friend, if you know Christ, one day He will take you by the arm and show you to the room He's prepared for you—a room constructed by the love of God the Home-Builder.

Preached: June 15, 2014  
First Baptist Church, Hot Springs, AR  
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<sup>1</sup>Bob McCallister, "Countdown to Paradise," *Jubilee* (July, 1990), 2.

