

Going Home

Sermon by Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

If we look in the Word we find so many places where someone is longing for home or has been displaced from home. In this song particularly the Children of Israel had been taken captive to Babylon, and they were away from their home, strangers in a strange land, and how the Psalmist cries out for his God. He remembers what it was like back in his homeland, how he used to go to the temple for feasts with all his people and praise God in the simple life. He remembers the beautiful flowing Jordan river, the waterfalls and the sounds they made, and we can imagine the feelings of home that must have been coming back to that psalmist at that time, and how people around him--the Babylonians--came to him, "Where is your God now? Where is He?" And how his soul was melted like wax within him as he longed for a homeland.

This is not only true in many of the Psalms, but also think about the children of Israel, how after they had Egypt, wandering through that wilderness, looking for a home. They had no home but their own tents and where they stopped that night. For forty years they wandered in that wilderness searching for a home. And even after that, when they came in to the promised land they had to fight to make something their home.

Think about David who wrote many of the Psalms. He was kicked out of his own land. If you remember, Saul was after him to kill him. David had to hide in caves and in mountains. David had to run from Saul all the time, and how often David longed to go home, to be able to return back to where he was born. But even in that time he had to go and hide among his enemies, pretend he was insane so that they would not kill him, take him prisoner, because he couldn't go home. He had been displaced.

And even the Lord Himself when He was in this world, walking to all the different villages to speak to people, many of the time the crowd pressed on Him so much He had to go into the wilderness to be able to breathe, and how He said to His disciples, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay His head." And even on the final temptation on the Cross how homeless He must have felt at that time when He looked up and said "My God, my God, why have you forgotten me?" quoting the twenty-

second Psalm of David. And then coming back to that realization of who He was and where He was going, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

If we can all relate to many of these feelings of being displaced, being homeless and searching for a home, how many of us have moved away from home. When I was in California we were talking about many people in California are moving all the time. And we were talking about home and what is home. Someone said, "I've been to so many different places the only thing I think of home any more is my immediate family. That's home wherever I go, my husband and my children."

Another person said, "So many people are moving around us, we make friends and then they move and new people come in, it's hard to feel that there's anything that I can call home with my friends."

I was talking to someone this week who was saying they moved so many times in their life that she used to think of her grandmother's house as home because her grandmother was always there. In the same house there was a place where she could fix her mind and think, this is home, here at my grandmother's.

Home, we all long for a home in our lives. How often have we looked at a photograph- perhaps an old photograph of something--home, maybe when we were little children, and it brought back so many memories to us, a longing that we had within us comes out. How often have we heard maybe some kind of noise, or maybe smelled something that brought back memories when we were children and the beautiful peace we had then, a place called home. Perhaps you've heard a song that brings back these memories and we long for home.

The reason that we feel this way, and in the Word so many times homelessness is brought out is because in one way spiritually we all are homeless. We've all left a home behind and we're searching and longing for a new home in the Lord. You think about it, the Lord said in the beginning of Genesis, "A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife." Leaving our father and mother, this does not just apply to males, but to females as well, if you look at the spiritual sense of that. To leave our father and mother means to leave those hereditary inclinations that we have within to do wrong, to leave those behind and to seek after a new will, a new life, a marriage with a new kind of life, a new way of life in our own hearts and in our own lives.

That's why the Lord said in the New Testament, "He who does not hate his mother, his father, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, is not worthy of me." I can't imagine a Fundamentalist saying that is literally true; you should hate your mother, your father, your wife and your children. Of course not. There the Lord is pointing out to us that there are things within us we've been comfortable with that we've grown up with, that have been hurting us in our lives, pet habits that we have, loves of self that we have within, loves of the world that we have within, that have hurt us very much, and that we've got to leave those things behind.

I think we can all see that there's this longing for home. The idea that we should leave our mother and father, our brothers and sisters behind, in the sense of the spiritual brother, sister, mother and father. Many of us have these feelings within us that we've grown up with, these pet evils, these pet selfishnesses that we've had that have given us a certain delight in our life and how much we do look at them as being sort of blood relatives. They mean a lot to us, the things that we're following in our lives, but how the Lord calls us out of our selfishness, out of our old ways and tells us to seek out after Him, to look for a new home with the Lord.

But when we do that, what happens? I think we've all felt that in our lives. When we leave that comfortable life behind, that old shack of a house that we used to have and begin to follow the Lord, sometimes we can feel so empty inside. We can feel so alone. We feel like the Lord is not with us any more. We are strangers in a strange land and we don't know where we're going any more. We really cry out for the Lord, and we long for Him. Where is our home in life?

The Psalmist said, "I pant for the Lord just like a deer pants for waters." Spiritually we know that water represents truth. Panting for new truth in our life, new ideas. We've had so many old ideas that we used to use that just don't work any more in our lives: that we'll find love in sexual immorality. We took that route; many of us did. And how that just didn't work. That we'll find some kind of peace in our lives by fantasy, that we'll find peace in our lives by escapism. That doesn't just mean drugs and alcohol, but we all have our ways of escaping. Escape into work. Escape into have more people like us in life. Escape into little pet fantasies that we have of who we are and what we are about. But we realize that they don't work in our lives. They just don't work.

How many of us have taken that route of feeling maybe we'll find self-worth in our lives if we go and immerse ourselves into our work. In the 80's it's the Worth ethic, you know, work, work, and how we can lose our own souls trying to gain the whole world.

These things don't work any more and we realize it, but now we long for new truth in our lives. Where do we go now? We've left those things behind in our lives, and we pant for the Lord, we pant for new truth in our life.

Not only that, but at the same time, when we are thinking about this, we can look around at times when we become frustrated, and see people who are leading lives the way we used to lead, and how we can see them in certain disorders in their lives that we've left behind, and we wonder to ourselves, why can they do this? How can they continue on but we can't. And even if we've taken that path before, even if we've been there before and now we're out of it, something tells us that perhaps we can go back to that, that perhaps it wasn't so bad. We forget about the idea that we recognize that we can't live that kind of life any more, and we want to go back to that way of life.

When that happens to us we can imagine at the same time things coming up within us, the doubts that come up within us at that time. The Psalmist said that "The people stood around and they said to me. 'Where is your God? Where is your God now?'" Have you ever had that happen to your life? You have those doubts and those voices come up within saying to you, "Where is your God now?" You've taken that route. You've followed that way and you really start to wonder again, where is my God? He's left me.

We look back at those states that we used to be like. We want to go back to those things, and something inside says that that's the right thing to do, to go back to the way you used to be in life. We feel alone.

The Writings of the New Church tell us that these voices that say, "Where is your God?", that persecution that goes on is from hell. And they personify it. They say it's the evil spirits that are around us. "Speak to us. Try to get us to give up. Try to get us to go back to the way we used to be, to the way we used to be miserable." Persecute us within. If you want to think of it in those terms, evil spirits, just think about it as the different voices that come up within you.

How many times when we're alone and when we're doubting our path to follow, we have those voices of fear come up within us. Where am I going in my life? How can I live without my old habits that I used to have? We become so afraid we don't know where we're going. We feel alone.

How often those voices, the cynic, comes up within us. "Oh, it's hopeless. You shouldn't try that. It's all hopeless." We have an argument in our marriage and it comes up, "We've always had a bad marriage. It's just a terrible thing." You've been working on this trying to get rid of this habit and it comes up and gets you, and the cynic comes up and says, "You're never going to get out of that. Why are you even trying?" We all have that cynic within us too.

And then, the more we listen to these voices within us that come up and tell us that it's hopeless, that there is no home for us, that maybe we should go back, then resentment comes in, resentment about the Lord, why has He led us out here? Perhaps even a denial of the Lord and the resentment of our neighbors. It's everybody else's fault for how we feel. How those voices grow, and how the more we listen to those voices within, the more we listen to them, the more we sink into ourselves and really do feel hopeless, as if there is no home for us in our lives.

Then we have a call that comes within us that says to go back. Go back to the way we used to be. I'm sure you've felt that. Go back to the way you used to live in sexual immorality. You're going to find some peace there. Go back to drugs and alcohol. Go back to the fantasies you used to have about yourself. Go back to the workaholicism. Remember you felt pretty good. At least you didn't have to face yourself any more, did you? Go back to those things.

But can we really go back? And it's really interesting, would the Lord allow us to go back? The Writings say He does everything possible to make it so we don't go back because if go back we'll be torn apart. Imagine that. Imagine the children of Israel going back to Egypt, to Pharaoh and his people. They wouldn't have welcomed them back. "Oh, here are your old homes." They would have killed them.

Imagine David who was hiding from Saul finally saying, "I want to go back to the war. I want to go back to my own bed. I want to go back to my own people. So he just goes back. Saul would have killed him.

In the same way we can look back at those old friends we had, those pet loves that we had within and go back and think that we can go and embrace them again, but it is in all reality, an embrace of death. We can't go back to those things. And even if we could go back (and how many of us try to a degree to go back to them) we find out that maybe life would be the same on the exterior, but we've changed. We've changed inside. We're not the same people. We know better now, and once you go back knowing better, it just doesn't work any more.

A very external example of this is Alcoholics Anonymous ruins your drinking because you know, you know better, so when you go back to it, it just doesn't bring you the delight any more. And how true of that is that in all things though, once you know that there's a different way and you've even felt a little bit of that peace, when you go back the same delights are not there. It's not home any more. It's not home. We can't go back.

So here we are in the wilderness and we cry out for our God. We feel like the Lord in some ways has abandoned us and what do we do now? The Psalmist has a few things to tell us in this regard. The Psalmist says to his own soul, "Hope in the Lord." He says, "I will remember you by the Jordan." Hope in the Lord.

In those times in our lives, the hardest thing isn't that we're all hooked into our evils and we're being such prisoners by our own desires that we can't escape, that's not it. Evil has no power in it. The power of evil comes in falsity, in fantasy. It comes in us not trusting the Lord, to let go, to hope in Him, to say, "Yes, I do believe there's a home for me out there somewhere, and I'm going to find that home in my life," and put our hope in the Lord, to let go and to let Him lead us.

The idea of remembering the Lord by the Jordan. The Writings tell us that the Jordan river representing those waters again, the first truths, representing our initiation into the church. Remember the children of Israel had to cross the Jordan to come upon this land. That represents in our lives that we have to come to the Lord and recognize those simple basic truths in our lives, and it's at those times in our lives to remember those things, that the Lord calls up those remains within us, those good affections that we have from childhood, that if we remember the good times, the good things, that we will find some peace and comfort in our lives.

