

Theme: God Guarantees You a Home

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened-- not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (ESV)

One of the joys I've experienced as a parent is getting to read kids' books that I never read as a child. I'm thinking primarily of books that have been around for a long time, at least since when I was a kid, but ones that I never came into contact with. One of those books is *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss. When I was a kid I was familiar with many of Dr. Seuss' books, as I'm sure you were. But, until we rented it from the public library, I had never heard of *The Sneetches* before. Perhaps this book is new to you as well.

If you've never read the story, it's a quick read, but I won't delve into the details here. Essentially, it's a story about differences on the outside are not all that important. What matters is who we really are on the inside. The sneetches had their petty differences based on how they looked, and those jealousies allowed them to be manipulated. A con-artist took advantage of them by playing both sides of their disagreement and ended up swindling them out of all their money. He catered to their desires and guaranteed that he could make them better than the others, only to turn to the other side with the very same promise.

In the end, the sneetches learned from the mess and ended their rivalry, but only after they had lost all their money to this supposed guarantee. When all was said and done, the only guarantee was that they would lose their money. The con-artist's tricks never changed anything, only the sneetches could make the changes that were needed.

What the sneetches really wanted was a home. Those who were outcasts wanted to be accepted. Today in our text, God guarantees you a home with Him, something we all desperately long for. This is a home that can unite us despite our differences. But, is this promise simply superficial, nothing more than a great hoax and con? Of course not, and it's the resurrection of God's own Son that proves the point. Through that resurrection, the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of a home in heaven.

Having a home is absolutely a blessing from the Lord. But, the attraction can become a bit romanticized in our society. Our culture is full of clichés about home:

- Home is where the heart is
- Home sweet home
- There's no place like home

The kid's story of the sneetches is treasured because it plays off our desire for home and community. We saw this connection to Church a couple of weeks ago when we considered the blessing of being

part of the “apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).” We belong to Him and that includes a sense of community.

The words of our text, although magnificent in their own right, are not fanciful. We are also confronted with harsh realities:

- Our lives are like a tent, fragile and temporary.
- We groan earnestly for something better.
- Life has its burdens, the heaviest being our own mortality.

These are not images from a children’s book; more like a horror movie. These phrases capture the vivid nature of a life of sin. Sin is not only foolish, it is dangerous. James described it by saying, **James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.**

We face a much more critical issue than the sneetches did. We are up against sin. But, like them, we long for certainty and hope. **Who will be our guarantee?** Verse 5 tells us that God gives us the Holy Spirit. But the bigger question is, how trustworthy is the Spirit as our guarantee? The difficulty we now have is that we *know* what God has promised us, but we don’t quite have it yet. We are asked by God to trust, to have faith. We really have to commit all things to God. As much as we do know about truth and salvation, we don’t know it all, not even close. The Spirit’s trustworthiness is brought out in other portions of the Word.

Earlier in 2 Corinthians Paul wrote, **For all the promises of God in Him (Christ) are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**

God wants us to see possibility through His Son. He phrases that as the answer “Yes” to our deepest unknowns. Life, salvation, eternity, and the like, are all possible through Jesus, even though we don’t always fully understand how that could be the case. And that’s why God says, The Holy Spirit is your guarantee. God knows how hard it is to trust by faith and so He helps you with that struggle by giving you a sure guarantee. The Holy Spirit is our confidence until we get to heaven and fully realize God’s promises. The answer is “Yes” today through Jesus but God also keeps us strong while we wait.

A similar thing was written to the Ephesians, **In Him (Jesus) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13-14).**

These verses really help us understand the Biblical meaning of a guarantee. In a way, a guarantee is the counterpart to redemption. To redeem something is to make the purchase for it. We know, dearly, that Jesus is our Redeemer, having purchased life for us at the cross, by His blood. The guarantee is the down payment made on the purchase. Let’s understand this appropriately, because God writes about these things from our perspective. We should absolutely trust that Christ’s payment for sin was fully paid on the cross. But, again, the difficulty for the waiting Christian is that we still wrestle with sin today, and furthermore we are waiting for God’s final promise of coming again to come true. In the midst of that struggle, God says that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes the down payment on our redemption. He doesn’t do this because something still needs to be paid. That’s not the point.

He does it because the Spirit stands in for the promise of Christ while we wait for Christ to return. The Holy Spirit's work is God's proof that He keeps His Word, that we are definitely forgiven in Christ. He literally becomes our down payment on redemption; a debt that has already been paid in full, but something we are likely to doubt as we live in a sin-filled world.

This is a great comfort. As Paul writes, we take great courage at this fact. But, there are two things that make it difficult to keep this trust and courage alive.

1) God operates by faith – this means that some (or most) of the things God does defy our understanding. Our relationship with Him cannot exist if we can't trust these unknowns. As the writer to the Hebrews defines, **Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.** When something is defined like that, it will naturally be difficult for Christians to follow and accept.

2) What we experience in life seems contrary to what God promises – We talked about this already in the difference of what God says about redemption and how we perceive it in life. God says we are fully forgiven, but life seems to operate as if we are continually helpless against sin and temptation. Paul gets even more serious about this matter when he talks about the difference between death and immortality. To the believer, we are not overcome by the prospect of death because that means we can be present with the Lord. This doesn't make any sense according to our experiences in life. None of us have tasted perfection or eternity yet. We are continually tempted to disown this promise in Christ. God asks us to wait for something that we have never experienced before and that seems impossible according to what we're used to.

And yet Paul says, in the face of this struggle between promise and perception, we take courage. This is summarized in the famous phrase, **"we walk by faith, not by sight."** This is the simple, yet reason-defying (unbelievable, profound) truth that separates believers and unbelievers.

It's kind of like the Sneetches. A simple children's story, but a lesson with deep implications for all people. And, like that story, it's ultimately about finding a home. Our home is in heaven with God. We may be comfortable to some degree here on earth, but even the greatest joys we have here cannot compare with the plan God has had for us from eternity. We once ruined that dream by our sins. It was dead, defeated, and destroyed. God's plan for His creation was de-railed.

But hope was sealed, guaranteed, in the smallest of promises. That promise was kept alive through the harsh ages of history, across time and nations, wars and peace, morality and wickedness. God preserved it at all costs – the down payment guarantee was hard at work. And that promise was delivered in the smallest of gifts, a new-born Child. Today, we remember when that glorified Child, God's own Son, Jesus, returned home to heaven. He ascended to rule on our behalf, to intercede as our perfect substitute. He is forevermore our "Yes" when we ask ourselves if God wants us in heaven.

So continue your walk this day and always, by faith and not by sight. Believe me, God knows how hard it is. He knows what you go through, the struggles you face, and the even the evil you commit. He knew you would have these problems and so He gave you a guarantee – Himself, His won Spirit to assure you along the way. His voice today is through His Word, and by that Word you will make it home. It's guaranteed. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Preached at Redemption, 5-28-17