

[Exodus 20:17a:] "You shall not covet your neighbor's house."

[Luther's Explanation to the Ninth Commandment:] We should fear and love God that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house or obtain it by a show of right, but do all we can to help him keep it.

1. "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home." I seldom use hymn verses to start or end sermons, but does this one ever fit! We sing that hymn with gusto. But do we think it when we're *not* singing it? Jesus was always thinking that! {Read verse 51.} The goal of returning to heaven was always there for Jesus. So He turns His face toward Jerusalem and puts one foot in front of the other to go there—to go to the cross, to go to the grave, to go to heaven, to go home.
2. Other things served that purpose. {Read verses 52-56.} This wasn't the time to get distracted and do a little butt-kicking. The disciples needed to think about God's purpose about what was going on, not their own. This is a good lesson for us. Yes, we say, "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home," but we get wrapped up in things here: heaven becomes far from our minds.
3. At the same time, Jesus certainly wasn't so heavenly minded that He was no earthly good (as the saying goes). As He made His way to the cross for our sins of not following the Ninth Commandment, Jesus took the time to teach those who were with Him. As a matter of fact, it is not only for giving us the destination of heaven that Jesus came for us. But also in bringing us into the kingdom of God now, we get to live for the Lord here and now as members of the kingdom of heaven. We reflect God's love to the people around us. The proper balance is being heavenly minded *for* people's earthly good!
4. So, how does this text intersect with the Ninth Commandment as we continue our summer series on how Jesus upholds the Ten Commandments? *Coveting* is a sin of the mind. It's wanting something we should not have. *Desires* in and of themselves are neutral. We can desire good things. We can desire bad things. The former is holy. The latter is the sin of coveting. Houses (and everything to do with them) are a major source of coveting. This is where the saying "keeping up with the Jones's" comes from. It's one of those "jokes" that's not a joke: it's easy to dismiss coveting with the humor that everyone else has what we want; it's not easy to dismiss the discontentment that comes with it. How did Jesus view houses?
5. {Read verses 57-58.} Jesus is the embodiment of Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 6:8, But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Not just tolerant ... content! Jesus, the Creator of the universe had no need to worry about where He would rest His head, not even in the tomb leading up to Easter. The tomb would not be His home, though He was there a short time for all the times we've coveted what others have. Handling keeping up with the Jones's was no joke for Him—He died for when we do it! He would rise to go to heaven so we could follow Him to our home there. That's worth keeping up with! And that was why He was doggedly going to Jerusalem. That was the way to heaven for Him. Something for us to think about as we are tempted to keep up with the Jones's is whether those things get us to our real home in heaven. Perhaps

it's wise to sing, "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home" when looking at the house next door, not just in God's house!

6. Verses 59-60 of our text take a turn before we return to the house theme. So, I'll take them separately here. {Read verses 59-60.} Jesus took the initiative to ask someone to follow Him! The man's answer: "wait, please!" Being part of that kingdom of God is not a sequential concept. What do I mean by that? Being part of that kingdom is our identity, not a task. We don't do some work, do a chore, do something fun, and then *do* the "God-thing." The "God-thing" is *the* thing we both are and do as we set out to do all things! God's kingdom is proclaimed as you simply live as a member of that kingdom in all the things you do: work life, family life, personal life, *whatever* life—it's *all* life in Jesus! As Colossians 3:3-4 tells us, For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. It's not hidden in the sense that others don't see it. As Jesus told the man in verse 60, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. It's hidden in the sense that our lives are now wrapped up in Him. We—the new creation in us that we as Christians identify with—love what God loves. As forgiven children of God, we're going where Jesus went when He died. We're but strangers here; heaven is our home!
7. Speaking of homes, the word *house* does show up at the end of our reading! But it's masked by the word *family* in translation. {Read verses 61-62.} Literally, the man said let me say goodbye to my house(hold). It's not that it's wrong to bid adieu to our families or to enjoy the blessings of our homes. But wanting the things of this world more than the things of God (in Whom our life is now hidden) takes those blessings from God and makes them into covetous desires. We have the old nature that is constantly thinking of this place as home because it's entirely at home in a world of sin and all of the effects of sin. Instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus, we're constantly looking back at the relationships and things of this world. When relationships with people or things of this world become more important than our relationship with God, we covet those things. We join the man in our text to look back first and foremost at the people and things God intended to be blessings instead of looking forward to God first. How odd that we can turn the people God gave us into the very thing that distracts us from God! This is yet another evidence of how completely twisted our sinful nature is.
8. Jesus did not look back. Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He would not be twisted off course. He was going home, going to prepare a place for us—for us who needed Him to show us where our home really is too. What a perspective we gain from Jesus! Look at your homes and the people in them—look at them in Christ: with Christ in front of you. You will show those people greater love and have a greater appreciation for the roof over your head when you remember, "I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home." Amen.