

MEMORIAL MESSAGE FOR CHERYL STOVER

“LONGING FOR HOME” -- Hebrews 11: 13-16

Rock Springs Evangelical Free Church, January 29, 2022, 11 AM

Pastor Richard P. Carlson

It's hard to actually wrap our minds and hearts around both Cheryl and Dean Stover being Home with Jesus. But it's real today for both of them. They are with Jesus, and if all of us knew what Jesus knew about Cheryl, since the day Dean went Home to the Lord, I wonder if we would know that for nearly eight months as she walked day after day, and got in her disciplined steps, was she not “Longing for Home?” Cheryl knew the best home of all was not 1735 New Mexico Street in Green River, Wyoming or her winter home in Yuma, Arizona. A house is not a home unless we are there, and it is not the home it needs to be unless Jesus is there, in the center of our lives, in the center of our home. James Banks told a story I read recently about poking his head inside the cabinet of the old grandfather clock that they inherited from his parents after they died. His wife asked him, “James, what are you doing?” James replied, “This clock smells just like my parent's house. I guess you could say I was going home for a moment.” His wife said, “We moved this clock to our house twenty years ago.” But James replied, “The aroma of the wood inside this cabinet still takes me back, back to my childhood.”

The passage of scripture God has placed on my heart to share with us this morning for a few moments is from Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews wrote about people who lived on earth, who yet were longing for Home in Heaven. Instead of looking backward, they were looking forward by faith to their coming new Home in Heaven. Even though on earth, they were hoping for something that sometimes seemed a long way off, they trusted that God was faithful to keep His promise to bring them to a place where they could be with Him forever. Let me read you four short verses from Hebrews 11: 13-16. We read, “These all **died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are **seeking a homeland.** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, **they would have had opportunity to return.** But as it is, they **desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.** Therefore, **God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.**”

This phrase, “they desire a better country,” is translated by thirteen Bible translations as “they longed, or they had a longing for, a better country. It reads, “**Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.** Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. I have no doubt that Cheryl Stover is in God's updated “Hall of Faith,” and that she has literally been walking in Green River, Wyoming and Yuma, Arizona, all the while

longing for the City of God, longing for a better country, a world not dominated by sin and shame, a new world where Dean has been since May 10, 2021, a new world she has been in since January 2, 2022. The apostle Paul reminds every one of us as believers in Philippians 3: 20 that “our citizenship is in heaven,” and we are to “eagerly await a Savior” from there, our Lord Jesus Christ. Looking forward to seeing Jesus and receiving everything God has promised us through Him helps us keep on focus. That was the secret to Cheryl’s life. The past or the present can never compare with what’s ahead for us who know Jesus.

The whole book of Hebrews is about Jesus being better. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies in scripture and the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. He is better than the angels, better than Moses, Joshua, Aaron, or any of the high priests. He offers to every sinner like you and me a better covenant, a better promise, based on His only sufficient sacrifice by dying on the cross for our sins. This 11th chapter of Hebrews is about men and women like Cheryl who walked by faith, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Rahab, and many others—but the whole book of Hebrews is about us being sojourners as pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land. All true believers like Cheryl are on the same journey she and Dean were on. But the journey all through the book is pointing to Heaven, the better country, all believers like Cheryl are longing for. I want to share three small thoughts that were true of Cheryl as God calls us all to be on the journey they were on. These three certainties about Cheryl beg the question for us—are we on the same journey; will we reach her destination that she and Dean reached—the better country in heaven? What are these 3 certainties?

ALL BELIEVERS DIE IN FAITH LIKE CHERYL DID. WILL YOU? (I.)

Notice Hebrews 11: 13. “These believers in the Hall of Faith all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.” In other words, all believers live by faith, but that is not the point of the writer. He says, “These all died in faith.” The writer isn’t focusing on how they lived, but on how they died—“in faith.” When it came to their life, they were trusting in the Lord. When it came to their death, they were trusting in the Lord. All these believers left behind a world that calls us to its pleasures, its addictions, its idols, its riches, and yet, they stepped out from being citizens of this world primarily, to become citizens of heaven. Dean and Cheryl loved to camp, and fish, and go to Yuma in the winter. Cheryl loved to sew and walk and eat out. Yet, if you really knew her, Cheryl had one primary allegiance. She was a believer in Jesus, seeking a better country whose builder and maker is God. She had received Jesus and made a choice to not make this world her lasting hope. We all must die. This world is not our ultimate home. Is your hope a new pickup, a new boat, a new house, or a retirement to travel 24-7 around the world? Earthly hopes are as fleeting as fog on White Mountain. Cheryl was in fine shape. She could power walk with the best at 74, but Cheryl knew something better was ahead, and on January 2, just after the New Year came in, Cheryl was there, with Jesus, with Dean and so many more strangers and pilgrims who knew Jesus that she had known down here. I ask you, “Are you prepared to die in faith? Will you?”

ALL BELIEVERS LIVE IN HOPE LIKE CHERYL LIVED. DO YOU? (II.)

We read in Hebrews 11: 13 that these believers like Cheryl, in the Hall of Faith, acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on this earth. Cheryl loved to sing, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue, The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.” Oh, yes, Dean and Cheryl had property in Green River, Yuma, Arizona, and they had a Google Map site called “Stover Camp Site.” But their main treasures were laid up in Heaven. No one but God alone knows all the time they both put into Church work, Sunday School, Choir, Singing, Vacation Bible School, Christmas programs, Gideons International and building church buildings and parsonages. Their major investment has always been seeking for the day they would reach the heavenly city where they are together now. Why didn’t they get over all that and return to making their main hope the American dream of retirement? They knew the lie the world tells us all that everyone dies and goes to heaven. They knew their Bible. They knew only the redeemed, those who repent, believe, and receive Jesus go someday to live in God’s heavenly City. They knew there is a Heaven to gain and a hell to shun. Why did Dean and Cheryl pass out Bibles by the tens of thousands? Because their everlasting hope in life was that people like you today, who have set your hopes on temporal things on earth, would repent, believe, and receive Jesus and set your hopes with them on things eternal where they are now. If your hope is in God and in heaven, you will make earthly decisions that are consistent with your hope. Are you living in certain hope of eternal life with Jesus? Are you, honestly?

ALL BELIEVERS ARE SECURE IN JESUS AS CHERYL WAS. ARE

YOU? (III.) Most of life is insecure. Investments fail, crash, burn, and go down the drain. Houses burn down. Riches and goods are stolen. Friends and relatives die, and those that live often turn on us. Kingdoms fall. Relationships are broken. There is very little we can count on down here. Most people agree—down here, all we have for sure is death and taxes. But Cheryl and Dean both lived in security with God through faith in Jesus. Hebrews 11: 16 says, “But as it is, they long for a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.” Today, I am telling you about Cheryl’s God, and Cheryl’s God promises security forever. In John 10: 28-30, Jesus said to those who repent of sin, believe, and receive Jesus, He said, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” Are you secure in Christ as Cheryl is? Picture Judgment Day for you, and Cheryl. Will it be the same? For Dean and Cheryl, when they stand before God’s throne, they both know they are guilty for their sins. But they also know they received Jesus into their lives by faith, and He forgave them and justified them. Should there be any question, be sure, Jesus will say, “I know Cheryl. I know Dean. They received Me. They weren’t ashamed of Me. They professed their faith in Me to others who needed Me. I have forgiven them. Come on into the City of God.” If your death was today, on Cheryl’s birthday, would Jesus say the same about you. Let’s bow.

EULOGY FOR CHERYL STOVER

January 29, 2022 -- Presented by Pastor Richard P. Carlson

It was exceedingly precious for me, this past Tuesday, in late afternoon, to meet with Dean and Cheryl's family and friends to prepare to bring you this eulogy. Gathered for this hour of sharing, were Dean and Cheryl's two sons, Duane, and Steven, with his wife, Heidi, two daughters, Brandy and Tori, and their son, Kyle. Brandy's daughters were also there, Abigail and Lilly. Also, Bob and Lois Woodward were there, lifelong friends. Lois and Cheryl were daily walkers all over Green River. Curt and Barb Barker were there, close church friends with Dean and Cheryl for many years. Sharon Danks was there. Sharon was Cheryl's friend for over 50 years. Jan Sposit was there too. She was Cheryl's dear friend, who ate breakfast with Cheryl every morning at the Hitching Post, Mondays through Fridays. Cheryl went home to Jesus on January 2, 2022, eight days short of 8 full months after her husband Dean was called Home to Jesus on May 10, 2021.

Cheryl's confidence was in the Lord and also in her husband, Dean. We all could see Cheryl's faithful walk with the Lord. Dean and Cheryl's mutual devotion to God and to each other has long been a strong force for God in Sweetwater County. They both shared their faith well. Cheryl spoke for the Auxiliary Members of Gideons International at Gideon banquets, and their lives together spoke volumes in their manner of living for Jesus. All four of the Barkers and the Stovers were involved greatly in Gideon's International at both the local and the state level. Everyone knew, the color, purple, was often wherever Dean was. There was Cheryl beside him, in purple, beside the precious man she loved and respected.

Cheryl and Dean were married on June 8, 1968, and after returning from Viet-Nam, Dean's brother, Rodney and Cheryl's sister, Sally were married on January 1, 1969. Cheryl's dad told her that he gained two sons when his daughters married the Stover men. Imagine it! Two brothers from Riverton, Wyoming, married two sisters from Bassett, Nebraska. Cheryl said the same thing happened in prior generations, with her dad's grandparents. Dean and Cheryl were both so happy, two friends God brought together for His Glory. Cheryl and Sally after marriage, still did much together. As Sally and Rodney were living close by in Riverton, Sally and Cheryl were either on the phone together weekly, or whenever either family needed each other. If Sally needed a haircut, or there was a camping trip, or there was any other kind of family gathering, Rodney and Sally would come down to Green River, or Dean and Cheryl would go up to Riverton.

Bob and Lois Woodward met Dean and Cheryl many years ago in a video store in Green River. After talking a while, Cheryl said, "Let's go home and play cards. Do you know how to play pinochle?" Bob and Lois learned to play that card game hundreds of times with Dean and Cheryl. Those two couples became dearest friends since that God-ordained day back in 1990. Lois spoke of the early days of going out to eat together on Friday nights, when it was Cheryl cooking one Friday, and her cooking the next. Lois added, "when we started going out to eat, we were

done with cooking for each other ever since.” Lois said, “Cheryl could cook well, but she liked going out to eat much better than cooking.” Cheryl and Lois became lifelong walking partners. Bob said, “For the last twenty years, if all the steps my wife Lois and Cheryl walked together were added up, it would be as far as from Green River to New York.” When the Stovers and the Woodwards went out to eat on Friday nights, it was usually a supper in Rock Springs, out to the Outlaw Inn, which was Cheryl’s favorite café. Yet, when Cheryl was asked where to go for their supper, she would never say. She was stubborn about that. Duane said he got his stubbornness from his mom. If people would push Cheryl to pick the restaurant to go to, she would just say, “Go ahead and take me home.” Cheryl was stuck in her ways, which everyone else said they were not. This made all of us laugh.

Curt Barker pointed out, “Here we are, family again.” And this whole group are truly, family. Cheryl served with Barb Barker on the Gideon’s Auxiliary, and Cheryl was the Sunday School teacher for the teens at the Rock Springs Nazarene Church. Barb said Cheryl was not just her five daughters’ Sunday School teacher, but she was a big part of their lives, their friend. Dean and Cheryl were instrumental in opening the Green River Nazarene Church. The Barkers, and the Stovers were involved in the Green River Nazarene Church, full tilt, despite facing many difficulties. This meant there were often long board meetings at the church. For all five of Curt and Barb’s daughters, they made these long board meeting nights at the church their “hot tub” nights with Cheryl at her home a few blocks from the church on 300 Elm Street in Green River. Cheryl made a big thing of birthdays, including Barb’s five daughter’s birthdays.

Cheryl was a substitute teacher in the middle schools and the high school in Green River. Cheryl was a whiz in math, so the math teachers needing a substitute, were thrilled when they got Cheryl to cover for them. Steven said, “I was Mom’s worst student. She wanted me to call her Mrs. Stover, but I persisted in calling her “Mom.” Duane told of attending a class with his mom at Western Wyoming College. The class was at 8 AM, and Duane slept through the class, while Cheryl kept on elbowing him to wake him up. At mid-terms, Duane aced the mid-term test, so Cheryl said to Duane, “I’m done waking you up from now on.”

Bob mentioned that Cheryl was a licensed hairdresser. She worked out of her home on 300 Elm Street, and later she worked out of her home on 1735 New Mexico Street in Green River. She also went to people’s homes and cut and styled their hair. Duane said, “Mom cut my hair for 51 years!” This past Wednesday Duane needed a haircut, so he went to Hair Rages, a hair salon in Green River. The lady asked if she had cut Duane’s hair before, and he said, “No, my mom always did that, but she passed away.” Finding out who Duane’s Mom was, this lady told Duane that Cheryl was one of the friendliest people she had ever met. She knew her from Curves. When the haircut was finished, Duane took out a one-hundred-dollar bill to pay. The lady had no change, so she said, “It’s on me this time.” Duane said, “No, I’ll be back with change.” When he returned to pay, the lady was humbled and moved to tears. This is just one illustration of the mighty impact both

Cheryl and Dean had on so many people who knew and loved them. Cheryl went to Denver and secured her cosmetology degree and license. She promised her dad she would always keep up her license and renew it annually, which she did again in November of last year. He wanted her to always have a means of being able to take care of herself. Lois said their walking for the last 20 years, was to keep weight off. They went to Weight Watchers together as well as to Curves. Cheryl started taking Tori and Brandy walking with her. Jan said, “When we went out to breakfast, Cheryl walked all the way down to Hitching Post Mondays through Fridays. Then after eating, Cheryl had Jan drive her home.

Sharon Danks spoke of them going out for lunch on the Birthday of the month many times. Sharon spoke of how she and Cheryl sewed, cross stitched and crocheted together, and she remembered them buying swimsuit material and sewing their own swimsuits. Anything crafty, Cheryl did it, and you could almost always find a ball of yarn and Cheryl at work in her living room recliner. She almost always crocheted a baby blanket for each new grandchild. Cheryl cross-stitched and crocheted sweaters, dish cloths, baby booties, and she even sewed in the summer at their camp site, a site on Soda Lake on Google Maps that is officially named “Stover Camp Site.” Steven said his mom left behind piles and binders full of patterns. Cheryl was always ready to sew up Duane’s pants, he said. Do you need patterns? Call on Duane or Steven. There are patterns galore.

On yearly 4-5 week camping trips, Cheryl sewed, fished, floated tubes, 4-wheeled, and Tori had a memory she never forgets. They were out with their 4-wheelers to the Sand Dunes. The bearings on the 4-wheeler trailer went out. Tori and Cheryl drove their 4-wheelers all the way home from the sand-dunes—a 40+ mile trip. Tori said her arms were numb from holding on to the handlebars. When Cheryl baked, she did it all, and had huge amounts to eat. When Tori left home, Cheryl sent her on her way with a huge box of treats she made. She baked cookies she sent to Brandy in Okinawa. When Brandy and Tori were living in Caldwell, Idaho, Cheryl would never miss going to Idaho to be with her granddaughters. There she would take them out to her favorite restaurant—the Red Lobster. Just one time, Dean and Cheryl took off in bad weather and couldn’t get past Snowville, Utah, in route to Boise and Caldwell. She put her grandchildren first, even above Gideons. All Cheryl’s passwords had something to do with her grandchildren.

Duane said Cheryl always came to his baseball games and her voice was the loudest on the sidelines. He said at the swim meets, he could hear his mom yelling support in the pool underwater. He said his mom gave him his gift of music and singing, and said, “She always was the loudest singer in church.” Steven said, “Mom came to everyone of my concerts, no matter how bad we sounded, to every ball game, to every church function, and she loved cantatas.” In Yuma, when Cheryl was there, she saw a lady with a purple golf cart; she too was well known as the Purple Lady, so they did purple together. It was said at Trona Valley Bank in Green River, that Cheryl was one of the friendliest people in Green River.

When Lois and Cheryl walked together, when a snake, a spider, or something else spooked Cheryl, she would run and stand behind Lois. At home, Cheryl's dog once brought home a dead mouse, and Cheryl was instantly on top of the bed. Sharon Danks, whose husband Paul passed away last year, told of how she and her husband were part of the Stover's lives. Jan Sposit told of her daughter Susie, saying Cheryl and Dean were together in building the Green River Nazarene church as well as the parsonage. She spoke of Cheryl singing in musical groups, and she said Cheryl's cousin came to town in a large group to sing in their church. Cheryl headed up Vacation Bible School every year. She headed up all the Christmas programs. She was Missions President. Imagine all the rewards God will one day give to Cheryl Stover and to her husband Dean, as they are Home in Glory together. Jan's daughter, Susie, when she heard Cheryl had passed away, said, "Mom, she's with Jesus and Dean; we should be happy; who could ask for more?"

We all watched Cheryl come right back to church after Dean went Home to Jesus. Cheryl went back to her discipline and joy of walking many steps. Our church family swamped her with love and tears and hugs. She seemed to us all to be in the best of health, and the most unlikely candidate for God to call Home soon. She was strong, and she lived a consistent and disciplined life. But God had a different plan for Cheryl. She now is with her beloved husband, in the presence of the Lord.

Steven and Duane both remarked about God's goodness in getting them to Yuma, driving in bad weather on treacherous roads. They found out their mom had been on a three mile walk the day before her heart attack. Steven had begged his mom before going to Arizona this last time, "Don't go out alone into the desert, mom." Cheryl then always took other friends out in the desert walking with her. One lady, half Cheryl's age, told Steven and Duane, "She out power-walked me." Cheryl never had any heart problems before. Not yet making it to age 75, Cheryl, as she was cleaning the trailer, became sweaty and felt sick. She called her cousin, and soon she was in the best of care at the hospital. On the night Cheryl passed away, her heartbeat was erratic. She would take eleven breaths and then stop breathing for almost fifteen seconds. It was the same erratic pattern for a while.

Duane closed our time of sharing by saying, "Pastor, when you called and asked to pray with Mom, we held the phone up to her ear, and we put it on speaker. You quoted scripture to her, quoted the 23rd Psalm, prayed the Lord's prayer, and sang the song, "I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto Me and rest." It was late. As soon as you finished singing and praying, Mom's breathing stabilized within minutes. The monitor showed she was stable. The reassurance of the Word of God in her ear was what she needed. Moments later, at 10 PM, Mom was Home with Dad in heaven." Cheryl went to sleep in Jesus. She is alert, alive, and well today in Christ's presence, absent from the body here, but eternally present with the Lord, awaiting her new body like unto Christ's resurrection body when Jesus returns. "Thank you, Lord, for bringing this precious woman of God to our church to walk with us in our Rock Springs Evangelical Free Church in 2017. The fragrance of her walk with You, Lord, will stay with us all our lives, for as long as we live. Amen."