

July 22, 2018

Citizens of Heaven

Philippians 3:20-21

Christians are in this world on assignment as emissaries of the King. Our citizenship is heaven from which we await our Savior.

LTS: Psalm 87

This week an eight-person team of willing servants plans to pack their bags, haul their luggage to the airport and board a plane for Uganda, Africa. This will be my 4th or 5th time to visit that country and work with S.O.S. Ministries in their service to the small village where they live. And this time I am going with my Son, Wesley, along with Ken Basinger, Brian Snodgrass, Rhonda and Kathryn McKenzie, Helen Verbraska, and Josh Long. On behalf of the whole team, I want to say thank you to everyone who helped make this trip possible. We can't wait to see what the Lord has in store for us there and we relish the opportunity to tell you all about it when we get home.

In the mystery of God's providence, I have found myself on assignment in other countries more than I could have imagined in my early years as a pastor. The first time I ever preached a full sermon was in a grass hut on the top an island mountain off the coast of Haiti. Since then I have had similar opportunities in the Yucatan of Mexico, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Siberia, and a number of Central Asian countries that I shouldn't name publicly.

I have to confess, however, that whenever I find myself in another country it always feels a little uneasy. As much as I enjoy the fellowship with the brothers in those lands and the opportunity to teach and preach in their churches, my heart is always drawn homeward.

What I'm referring to however, isn't merely home-sickness. The fact of the matter is that when I'm over there I really am a foreigner. Moreover, there is tangible, documented proof of that fact in my pocket everywhere I go. I have learned over the years that the single most important thing to take with you on a trip outside the country is your Passport. As I have often heard people say, "A man without a Passport is a man without a country." And whenever I draw that passport out of my pocket and hand it to an official on the border of some foreign land I am reminded that this place is not my home. "I'm just a'passin through."

In the passage before us this morning Paul wants to remind us that as Christians we are living as expatriates in a foreign country. This world is not our home. We really are just passing through. Our true citizenship is in heaven. That truth has implications for how we should live now, and it points us to the hope of God's promise to one day He will bring us home where we belong.

But before we talk about that, let's read the passage together.

Read Phil. 3:17-22

Of course, this passage is written within the context of Paul's appeal to the Philippian believers that they (and we) should engage in the pursuit of holiness (sanctification) like an athlete strains and presses forward for the gold, the prize.

Paul calls such a life (1:27) one that is "worthy of the gospel?" What motivates us to pursue that kind of life? Why Run the race? Why strive for sanctification? At the end of chapter three Paul offers two motivating reasons. You should do it...

I. Because of what you Are: (20)

II. Because of what you will become (21)

I. Because of What You Are (20)

1. Who are you if you are a Christian? You are a citizen of heaven. He says, "But our citizenship is in heaven."

A. The conjunction, "But" is an adversative. Paul is contrasting one thing with another. He's exposing the difference between seeing yourself as a citizen of earth against self-identifying as a citizen of heaven.

B. In the previous two verses he describes some who view themselves merely as earthlings. (Read 18-19)

C. We, however, are NOT to be like them. Rather we should strive to live lives that are worthy of the gospel. We should strive to be like Christ in all holiness to show the world what God is like. We are those who (3:3) should "serve in the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh."

2. What's the motivation for doing that? Paul does not say that it's because we will one day be a citizens of heaven, but that we already ARE citizens of heaven.

A. Dr. Lightfoot renders it, "Our citizenship is even now in heaven. It is already a fact."

B. He's not talking about eschatology here. He's not speaking of what is to come (though he will in the next verse). Rather, he is reminding us of what we already are.

3. When you think about it. Paul is just offering yet another way of reiterating the doctrine of the new birth; the doctrine of regeneration; the doctrine of salvation. By the sovereign grace of God, we have been officially declared by the King of kings, to have full citizenship in His country.

4. Now, the first observation we should make about our citizenship in heaven is that we did nothing to earn it. We are NOT citizens of God's country because we have made application and have paid the fees, No! We are citizens of heaven by the free grace of God through Jesus Christ.

A. It is by the blood of Christ and his righteousness (rather than our own), that we have been made worthy of citizenship in heaven.

B. It is by the New Birth – having been given a new nature – that we have been made citizens. Those who are citizens by birth need no naturalization papers.

5. Consider this: If you had been born in another country and wanted to become a “naturalized” U.S. Citizen, you would have to go through quite a process.

A. First, you have to meet the eligibility requirements. Not everyone is eligible to apply.

1) There is an age requirement (18+)

2) You must first get a “green card” and live in the country for at least 5 years.

3) Demonstrate that you can read, write, and speak basic English

4) You must get a minimal education so you at least know how the government of the U.S. works.

5) You must demonstrate that you have at some level of moral character.

6) You must demonstrate a commitment to the principles and ideals of the U.S. Constitution

7) You will then be subject to a speaking exam, reading exam, writing exam, and a civics exam. If you don't achieve a minimal passing grade, you will have to re-take the exams.

B. When you think about it, there are some similarities between the process of becoming a Naturalized U.S. citizen and the process many people believe

will achieve citizenship in the kingdom of God.

- C. Many religions – even some who claim to be Christian – have developed a whole complicated system with hurdles to jump, hoops to clear, and tests to pass.
- D. In every case those systems are selling a works-righteousness scheme of achieving eligibility for entrance into heaven.
- E. But that's NOT God's way!

6. Citizens of heaven are granted their citizenship by virtue of birth. One must be “born again.” Isn't that what Jesus explained to Nicodemus in the gospel of John? Jesus said to Nicodemus (3:3) “Truly, Truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.”

A. You see, coming into a relationship with God is NOT like becoming a naturalized citizen of another country. No, it is like being born. It is NOT something you achieve for yourself or by yourself. It is something that you receive because of the gracious will of another. The contrast cannot be more stark.

- 1) You must be born again
- 2) You must be born of the Spirit,
- 3) You must be born from above.

B. Going to church does not make you a citizen of heaven. Serving the poor does not make you eligible to become a citizen of heaven. Loving your neighbor doesn't earn you citizenship in heaven. You must be born again.

C. And when a sinner is granted true life in the Spirit (by the grace of God), he immediately becomes a disciple of Christ, a Child of God, and a citizen of heaven. God then treats you as if you had been born in his own house.

D. Very quickly, turn with me to Psa. 87

- 1) Read Psa. 87:1-6
- 2) One commentator writes, “The second section is startling: one expects a reference to those who know me, but the list is composed of Gentile [rather than Jewish] nations. Rahab (a nickname for Egypt), Babylon [think Nebuchadnezzar], Philistia [think birthplace of Goliath], Tyre (a Phoenician city, culturally Canaanite) and Cush (a region south of Egypt), all of which had been, at one time or another, enemies of God's people and the city

of Jerusalem. And yet the Most High himself will establish Zion, in order to allow the peoples to be treated as if they were born in her.

3) In other words, God counts -reckons them - citizens of His kingdom by birth.

7. Oh beloved, “Behold what manner of Love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons [and daughters] of God!

8. Meditating on this divine reality should have an effect on the way we see ourselves and on the way we live.

To borrow a question from the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:11) Since these things are true, “what sort of people ought we to be in lives of holiness and godliness?”

A. We should never be like the men Paul described in v. 19-20

B. We should not even for a moment contemplate living like that because you no longer belong to the same realm.

C. As a believer your life is likened to the angels who appeared to Lot in Sodom before the Lord destroyed that wicked city and its neighbor, Gomorrah. Those angels were in the world but not of the world. They temporarily lived in a country where sin and every form of debauchery reigned, but they were emissaries of God born in the kingdom of heaven.

9. Why should we strive to live lives worthy of the gospel? Because of what we are: We are citizens of heaven. Second, we should strive for sanctification...

II. Because of What we Will Be: (21-22)

Read 21-22

1. As expatriated citizens of heaven, we know our time on earth is short. And we believe, by the divine authority of Scripture, that one day Jesus our Savior will come for us.

2. And when He appears, all who remain and believe in his name will be caught up with him and taken home. Home where we are citizens by birth. Home, where we are forever rescued from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. Home where there will be NO need for spiritual armor to extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy. Home, where there will be no more death, no more pain, no more sorrow.

3. And we will be given new bodies that are perfectly suited for heaven. No more heart disease. No more diabetes. No more Asthma, Alzheimer’s, or Angina. Why?

Because (21) he will transform our lowly body into the likeness of his glorious body. That is, we will receive glorified bodies.

4. How will he do it? By the power that enables Him to subject all things to Himself.” In other words, He will do it by divine fiat.

- A. He who speaks and whole constellations burst into existence;
- B. He who speaks and the dead come to life;
- C. He who speaks and the wind and the sea obey;
- D. He who speaks and demons take to flight.
- E. He who said “All authority has be given unto me in haven and in earth” will simply speak and we will be changed. “We will become like him when we see Him as He is.”

5. When we see Jesus our sanctification will be complete. We will become like Him in a moment. For now, however, living in a foreign country as emissaries of our King, we are called to strive (by the Spirit and the Word) to know him more and more, and become like Him more and more. And as we do we will discover that it was all for His glory and our eternal joy.