

February 24, 2013
Lent 2

"Treasure Your Citizenship in Heaven"

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. ^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

It is a great privilege to be a citizen of the United States of America. People all over the world yearn to come to this country and become citizens. I was born on August 29, 1947 at St. Mary's Hospital in Watertown, Wisconsin. I have a copy of my birth certificate. That makes me a citizen of this country. Might I ask some of you, "Where were you born?" Because you were born in this country you are citizens of this country.

When you were born again into the kingdom of God through saving faith in Christ you became a citizen of heaven. You did not earn this citizenship. You did not pay for it. It was given to you as a free gift through Jesus and his righteousness. It was brought to you through the blessing of Baptism and God's Word.

Paul the Apostle is under house arrest in Rome. He is a Roman citizen by birth even though he is Jewish. He is also a citizen of heaven because he was born again by water and the Spirit to a saving faith in Christ. He is concerned that some of his dear brothers and sisters in Christ might give up their citizenship in heaven. He pleads with them to stand firm and treasure their citizenship in heaven. We hear him also pleading with us to treasure our citizenship in heaven.

Earthly dangers

We don't want earthly dangers to take away this citizenship in heaven that is such a precious gift of God's grace. Listen to the warning Paul gives. Let's apply this to our lives. "Join with others in following my example, brothers and take note of those who live according to the pattern we give you." The word for "take note" is the Greek word skopeo from which he get the word "scope." We use a microscope to zoom on things that are very small. We use a telescope to zoom out to things that are far off. Paul calls on us to zoom in around us and look at people who are living the way he is living his life. Paul was like a mighty oak tree with his roots deeply sunk into Christ and his righteousness for sure hope of being a citizen in heaven.

It is certainly worth zooming in this morning and taking a closer look at what Paul's says

earlier in this chapter about his sure hope in Christ instead of in himself. He speaks about the false confidence which was his before he became a true believer. He tells us that he was once "a Hebrew of the Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." Paul once lived under the delusion that he was getting all A pluses when it came to producing the righteousness he need to be a citizen of heaven. But then the Lord opened his eyes to see that all his efforts were not even D's and F's but incompletes. He writes to his dear Christians in Philippi and to us, "I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."

This word rubbish reminds me of something I observed this past week which I hope will help you understand better where you need to put your hope for citizenship in heaven. I went home for lunch and I heard the trash truck pull up to pick up our trash. I watch out the window as the truck stopped. These long mechanical arms majestically took our garbage can and dumped it into the truck leaving us with another empty garbage can for the week. That is what we do with all our failed attempts to measure up to what God expects of us. We get rid of them. We consider them trash. We put our hope as Paul did in a righteousness outside of us found only in Christ. We just sang about this in the hymn: "My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus blood and righteousness."

How sad and heartbroken Paul was that some of his dear fellow saints in Philippi were giving up Christ and going back to trusting in keeping the law to add to what Christ had done for them. "For I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ." Paul is not exaggerating. He is crying as he prays for the believers in Philippi and for those who turned against the gospel of Jesus. He warned the elders in Ephesus, "Keep watch over the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers... Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw disciples after them." I can attest to you this morning that the saddest moments in the ministry come when people who walked closely with Jesus then turn their back on him and become enemies of the cross of Christ.

Paul warns us about the danger of earthly things that draw us away from Christ. "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." Their mind is on earthly things. Their god is their stomach. Paul is not referring to someone who makes food that goes into the stomach their god. He is referring to the religious feelings that rise up inside of us that go contrary to God and his Word. You have heard people say, "I had a gut feeling about that" or I had a "gut check." When it comes to religion and being saved and being citizens of heaven, our sinful nature wants us to go back to think with our natural feelings and emotions. Satan tells us, "You must add something to what Christ has done to be a true believer. Your repentance is not real and genuine unless you add this to what Christ has done for you." I know that French fries and potato chips are not healthy for me, but sometimes I get such a craving for them. Food people tell us it's the fat in the fries and chips that create such unhealthy cravings. Your sinful nature says follow you stomach. Follow your cravings. You can be a real citizen of heaven if you add what you do and how you feel to what Christ has done.

The righteousness and forgiveness and peace with God that you have in Jesus is one hundred percent pure. Why would I want to add something of my own that is sinful to

what Christ has given to me to make me a citizen of heaven? This water bottle is sealed. I trust the water is pure and safe to drink. Why would I pour some of it out and add dirty polluted water to what is already clean? The other day we were in Santa Barbara visiting the grand children. The little guy is getting into everything. He had a cup and was reaching up into the rain barrel to empty out the water with his cup. For one split second I turned around to see what his older brother was doing. He had put the cup to his lips to drink the rain water. I let him play with the water but was so careful not to let him drink from that water.

Take your eyes off your fellow Christians for one split second and suddenly one of them is off on their own adding their own foul smelling righteousness to what Christ has done for them. "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, their glory is the shame, Their mind is on earthly things." It breaks our heart. It causes us to cry. It leads us to pray, "Lord Jesus keep me safe, protect me, help me treasure my citizenship in heaven by trusting only in your righteousness." You know the formula and you know it well. Christ plus anything equals nothing. Christ plus nothing equals everything.

Heavenly joy

Your citizenship is in heaven. "But our citizenship is in heaven." Notice it does not say, "Our citizenship will be in heaven." It says our citizenship is in heaven. It is already our because of Christ. We think of these amazing words in Hebrews 12 where it says, "But you have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands of angels in joyful assembly." It does not say we will come, it says we have come. We do not sing, "Heaven will be my home" we sing "Heaven is my home." I have a birth certificate that proves I am citizen of the United States of America. I have God's Word and my Baptism to assure me I am citizen of heaven through Jesus.

We look forward every day to Jesus coming in glory and taking us to the place he has prepared for us. "And we eagerly await a Savior from there the Lord Jesus Christ." We eagerly wait. 2 Corinthians 4 says, "So we fix our eyes on not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Some would say that if you become too heaven-minded, you will be useless for your earthly calling in this life. The very opposite is true. The more heaven-minded you are the more joy and confidence and love and patience you bring to whatever your earthly calling in life may be. Augustine wrote a book called "City of God" in which he tries to convince the Roman government that the citizens of God's kingdom were a valuable asset to the Roman government because of the way they lived their lives. The more you think about who you are as citizens of heaven, the more strength you will find to reflect this citizenship in how you interact with people in your daily life.

We wait for a Savior to come and take us home and raise us to life again with glorified bodies. With great power Jesus will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious bodies." I have seen people in their last days as their life slips away from their body. Death has an ugly sting to it. We look at the frail body or we think of the body that lies in the ground or has been reduced to ashes. We live with the real hope that Jesus will transform our lowly bodies. He will raise them up on the last day to be like his glorious

body. The words of 1 Corinthians 15 ring in our years, "For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." How dismal is the false hope of reincarnation that sees the soul floating around in the universe and looking for better bodies to inhabit to improve its condition. We bury our loved ones who died in Christ with the hope of a resurrection on the last day. We believe God will wipe away all tears from our eyes and we will be with the Lord forever. I am so thankful I am citizen of the United States of America. I am so much more thankful I am citizen of heaven. May the Lord help you rejoice in this citizenship this week and throughout every day of your lives. Amen.